



Global Health  
Development

► GHD : EMPHNET: working  
together for better health



**EMPHNET**  
The Eastern Mediterranean  
Public Health Network

# THE YEAR OF COVID-19: Combating the Pandemic in the Eastern Mediterranean



Annual Report  
2019-2020

Annual Report  
2019-2020

# Acronyms and Abbreviations

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AMR	Anti-Microbial Resistance
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CHW	Community Health Workers
EMPHNET	Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network
EMR	Eastern Mediterranean Region
FETP	Field Epidemiology Training Program
GHD	Global Health Development
GOARN	Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network
IPC	Infection Prevention and Control
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoHP	Ministry of Health and Population
MoPH	Ministry of Public Health
NCDs	Non-Communicable Diseases
PHEMC	Public Health Emergency Management Center
PoE	Point of Entry
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
RCCE	Risk Communication and Community Engagement
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SoPs	Standard Operating Procedures
ToT	Training of Trainers

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# Executive Message

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## Executive Message

In its first year, COVID-19 took its toll on the region and added to its persisting, complex health challenges. We joined several countries in the EMR in their response to the pandemic and to these mounting challenges, building on investments we made over the past decade in empowering field epidemiology, strengthening public health programs, promoting research, and expanding knowledge exchange and networking opportunities.

Here, we give a special recognition to the region's FETPs for risking their lives at the frontlines during the most acute conditions of the pandemic. FETP residents and graduates, with their science and their compassion, saved the lives of many. We also acknowledge the work of our team of experts, many of whom worked in the field away from their families and many others worked virtually around the clock, to contribute to strengthening response to the pandemic.

Over the past year, GHD|EMPHNET worked with its

partners to strengthen COVID-19 response regionally. GHD|EMPHNET worked with EMR countries to support frontline responders, expand response efforts to a considerable number of communities, ensure the protection of refugees and vulnerable populations against the pandemic, and expand knowledge sharing to facilitate the exchange of experiences and research through more tools. Joining the global COVAX initiative, GHD|EMPHNET also undertook an important role in supporting the deployment of the COVID-19 vaccines at the regional level. While COVID-19 response was its priority, GHD|EMPHNET remained committed to supporting countries in maintaining essential health services, especially immunization services.

In the face a life-threatening virus, GHD|EMPHNET worked with and in the EMR to protect the health and save the lives of people. In the pages that follow, we share with you details of a year-long journey in combatting an unforeseen pandemic.

**Dr. Mohannad Al Nsour**  
Executive Director

**COVID-19  
Unmasking EMR's  
Health Challenges**

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# COVID-19 Unmasking EMR's Health Challenges

The onset of the COVID-19 has considerably impacted our EMR countries, disrupting health systems in a region that is already dealing with a range of pre-existing challenges. Not only does the EMR suffer from the double burden of disease, but it is also facing a diverse range of social, economic, humanitarian, and political issues. In this situation, the region's populations became vulnerable in the face of the pandemic.

## Data on COVID-19

COVID-19 Situation Updates for Week 40 (27 September – 3 October 2020)	
Global	EMR
34,495,176 cases	2,465,894 cases (7.2% of global count)
1,025,729 deaths	63,150 deaths
Case Fatality Rate (CFR) 3%	CFR 2.6%

Source: WHO

**Maximizing  
Our Capacity  
During COVID-19**

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# Maximizing Our Capacity During COVID-19

## Bolstering Coordination with Partners

GHD|EMPHNET COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan was built around key pillars; one underscores the importance of rapidly establishing international partner coordination and operational support. GHD|EMPHNET has thus worked fiercely at supporting national response by collaborating with regional and global partners and stakeholders.

Through its Public Health Emergency Management Center (PHEMC), established in 2017 to act as the coordinating hub to bolster emergency preparedness

and engagement efforts, GHD|EMPHNET maintained contact with partners as part of the organization's engagement in coordinated response efforts at the global level. The PHEMC conducted regular meetings with partners: the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Training Programs in Epidemiology and Public Health Interventions Network (TEPHINET), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), among others.

To implement activities based on GHD|EMPHNET's COVID-19 Response Strategy, the PHEMC also strengthened its involvement and engagement with partners working at the regional level, from ministries of health, FETP networks, the Africa CDC, the WHO-EMRO, as well as others representing related sectors. The PHEMC coordinated with the countries to support rapid response activities, RCCE, information exchange and documentation, and field activities, such as contact tracing, field investigation and event-based surveillance, as well as guidelines and materials distribution.



# Maximizing Our Capacity During COVID-19

## Empowering Frontline Responders

### Supporting Front-liners' Activities

Through its PHEMC and with the involvement of FETPs from the region, GHD|EMPHNET supported several countries in the EMR in their response to the pandemic with focus on RCCE; IPC; data collection, analysis, and reporting; information exchange and documentation; field activities such as contact tracing and field investigation; and logistics in PPE and testing kits.

Technical	<b>Regional</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Customizing the three-month Public Health Empowerment Program- Basic Field Epidemiology to address COVID-19</li><li>• Developing COVID-19 case studies</li><li>• Including sessions on COVID-19 pandemic and IPC in non-COVID-19 focused training workshops</li></ul>
	<b>Country</b>
	<b>Afghanistan</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Preparation of National COVID-19 Emergency Plan</li></ul>
	<b>Egypt</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conducting a risk assessment, development of a risk mitigation plan for the EPI and development of EPI COVID-19 SoPs</li></ul>
	<b>Jordan</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Outbreak investigation, contact tracing, development of instructions for sample collection, preservation, and transportation, and development of COVID-19 IPC curriculum</li></ul>
	<b>Sudan</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Design, development and printing of health promotional materials</li></ul>

# Maximizing Our Capacity During COVID-19

## Logistic

### Regional

- Deployment of CHWs to the field in Egypt, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan, and Tunisia.

### Country

#### Jordan

- Dissemination of promotional materials
- Provision of testing kits and PPEs

#### Sudan

- Dissemination of promotional materials

## Technological

### Regional

- Development and design of different data collection forms and questionnaires for Kobo Toolbox and Go Data platforms
- Development and design of GHD|EMPHNET's COVID-19 Dashboard

# Maximizing Our Capacity During COVID-19

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## Supporting Rapid Responders



GHD|EMPHNET has long relied on its RRT initiative which it had launched almost a decade ago and through which over 700 RRT members were trained from the EMR and later were successfully mobilized to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Working with ministries of health, GHD|EMPHNET contributed to the development of training materials focused on enhancing the detection and management of suspected and confirmed COVID-19 cases. Using this training material, GHD|EMPHNET supported refresher training sessions for previously trained RRTs and frontline health staff across the EMR. Training was followed with an in-country deployment of the trained RRTs in priority areas to contribute to country alertness and response.

*GHD|EMPHNET customized Rapid Response Training Curriculum to COVID-19 context and shared with several EMR countries for implementation*

# Maximizing Our Capacity During COVID-19



## Supporting Country-Specific Rapid Response Training

Iraq	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Training on Surveillance and Contact Tracing for FETPs and RRTs</li></ul>
Jordan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Multiple Training Workshops on Outbreak Investigation and Contact Tracing</li></ul>
Libya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Training on RCCE, Contact Tracing, and COVID-19-Focused WASH for National CDC Staff and Relevant Partners</li></ul>
Sudan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Refresher COVID-19 Specific Training for Rapid Responders</li><li>• Sample Management at northern borders</li><li>• Multi-sectoral Workshop to Enhance Coordination Mechanisms and SoPs on Case Investigation</li></ul>

# Maximizing Our Capacity During COVID-19

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## Contributing to FETPs' Response



GHD|EMPHNET contributed ,technically and operationally, to FETPs across its EMR network in their efforts to combat COVID-19. In addition to supporting FETPs in capacity building, research, logistics, as well as networking and exchange activities, GHD|EMPHNET focused on training FETP residents and graduates in preparedness and response topics and on developing of training modalities tailored to the pandemic.



# Maximizing Our Capacity During COVID-19

## Major FETP Contributions to COVID-19 Response

<b>Afghanistan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supported in surveillance, training, risk communication, and information sharing.</li> <li>Created the Science, Epidemiology and Research Committee which developed 20 policy briefs and from which several recommendations were implemented</li> </ul>
<b>Egypt</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supported in surveillance, outbreak investigation, contact tracing, IPC, health promotion, and training</li> </ul>
<b>Iraq</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducted various evaluations and assessments</li> <li>Supported PoEs, the Central Public Health Laboratory, and the National CDC</li> <li>Issued the weekly epidemiological situation report</li> <li>Trained on IPC and active surveillance</li> </ul>
<b>Jordan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trained national and sub-national health workers on IPC</li> <li>Supported surveillance at border crossings</li> <li>Contributed to awareness activities</li> <li>Conducted a population age-stratified, sero-epidemiological investigation</li> </ul>
<b>Morocco</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aided in needed measures across the country.</li> </ul>
<b>Pakistan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducted a survey to gauge emergency preparedness and response</li> <li>Supported case-based reporting, dissemination of case definition, contact tracing, case investigation, rapid response, and surveillance</li> <li>Conducted a population-based, sero-epidemiological survey in Islamabad</li> <li>Conducted a ToT on contact tracing for 300 professionals from all provinces who later trained 25,000 contact tracers nationwide</li> </ul>
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Helped decrease response time from 48 to less than 8 hours</li> <li>Led COVID-19 investigations, including for Hajj pilgrims</li> <li>Provided strong surveillance support for quarantined confirmed cases of travelers</li> </ul>
<b>Sudan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supported surveillance systems, outbreak investigation, and rapid response</li> </ul>
<b>Tunisia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activated and adapted the preparedness and response plan</li> <li>Conducted a population-based, sero-epidemiological survey for Grand Tunis, Djerba, and Kebili</li> <li>Supported surveillance, case investigation, and contact tracing at central and regional levels, and PoEs</li> <li>Supported in RCCE, health education, IPC, case management, training, and emergency help lines</li> </ul>
<b>Yemen</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Served on of the COVID-19 National Higher Committee</li> <li>Developed the COVID-19 National Plan for Preparedness</li> <li>Led National Capacities Review</li> <li>Developed and trained on the Guidelines on Clinical Care and Surveillance at national and subnational levels</li> </ul>

# Maximizing Our Capacity During COVID-19

## Engaging Communities in the Response

GHD|EMPHNET collaborated with the Africa CDC and AFENET in the identification, orientation, and deployment of CHWs in Egypt, Morocco, Somalia, and Sudan through the Partnership to Accelerate COVID-19 Testing (PACT) initiative. GHD|EMPHNET coordinated with representatives from the ministries of health in these countries to conduct ToT workshops to selected health staff who later trained CHWs that will assist in contact tracing, detection of COVID-19 cases, engagement with communities through psychosocial support, and provision of support for people quarantined at home. These CHWs will also conduct awareness-raising campaigns by sharing information on COVID-19, its symptoms, mode of transmission, and prevention methods, and further relaying the importance of vaccines.



**Launched in August 2020, PACT seeks to achieve the following targets by May 2021**

Targets		
1,000	203M	35,000
CHWs to be trained under the PACT initiative	Populations in Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, Morocco, and Tunisia	Households to be targeted by CHWs

# Maximizing Our Capacity During COVID-19

## Supporting Response for Vulnerable Communities

During the pandemic, GHD|EMPHNET focused on assisting in the response inside the Syrian refugee camps of Azraq and Zaatari in Mafraq, Jordan, with two RRTs established in each camp to assist the Mafraq Health Directorate in a range of response activities, including case definition, contact tracing, and transport of samples. GHD|EMPHNET also supported the training of MoH staff and other health workers inside the camp in collecting PCR Samples, contact tracing, and IPC. Working with the Ministry, the UNHCR, and other partners, GHD|EMPHNET also participated in raising the awareness of volunteers, community leaders, and the public on COVID-19 prevention.



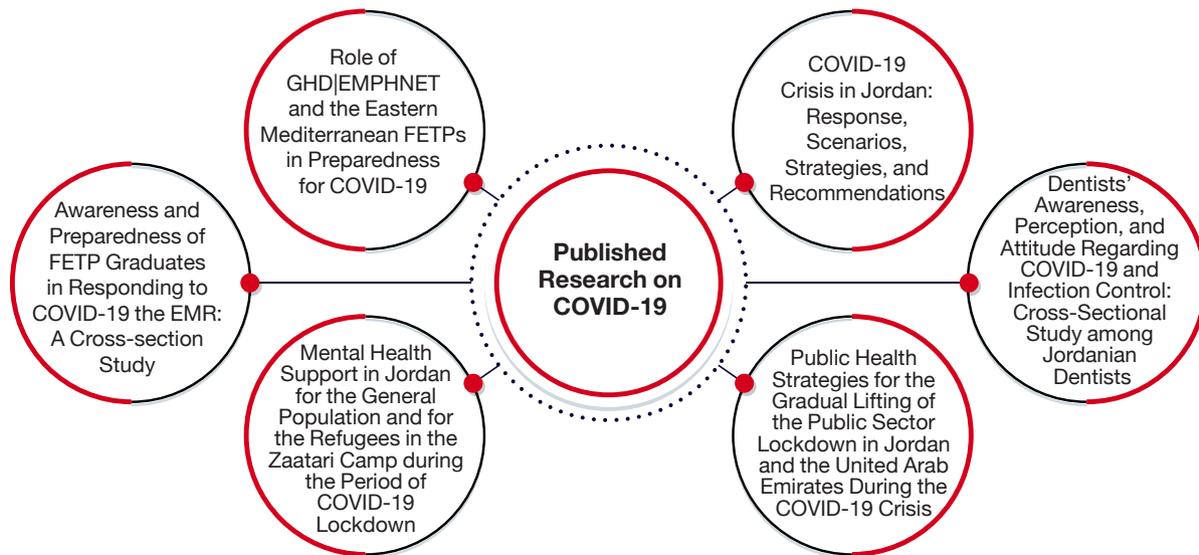
# Maximizing Our Capacity During COVID-19

## Sharing Experience and Exchanging Knowledge on COVID-19

In response to the increasing need for scientific and expert information on the pandemic, GHD|EMPHNET expanded its knowledge sharing tools to facilitate exchange experiences and research to ultimately support COVID-19 response.

### Research on COVID-19

In 2020, GHD|EMPHNET established a Regional COVID-19 Research Group to identify research priorities, as well as support, and oversee or guide research activities in the region. Members of this group include six EMR countries: Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, Pakistan, Sudan, and Yemen. All member countries worked together to collect and analyze data, and write manuscripts, while participating in several meetings and coordinating work between countries. Ultimately, each country contributed to sharing, documenting, and publishing their individual experiences on national and regional levels.



# Maximizing Our Capacity During COVID-19

## Initiating the WEBi Series

GHD|EMPHNET launched its webinar initiative, “EMPHNET WEBi Series,” which serves to engage a wide-ranging audience in a virtual discussion space. EMPHNET WEBi Series enables public health experts and members of agencies, non-governmental organizations, governmental and ministerial departments to discuss various health issues, practices, and challenges. It also offers an opportunity for coordination and networking between stakeholders, health professionals, and the community.

### Topics



Equitable Health Systems



Vaccine Hesitancy



Laboratories and Testing



Role of FETPs and Rapid Responders in Facing the Pandemic



NCDs during the Pandemic



### Number of Attendees

Over a two hundred attendees per webinar

### Speakers come from

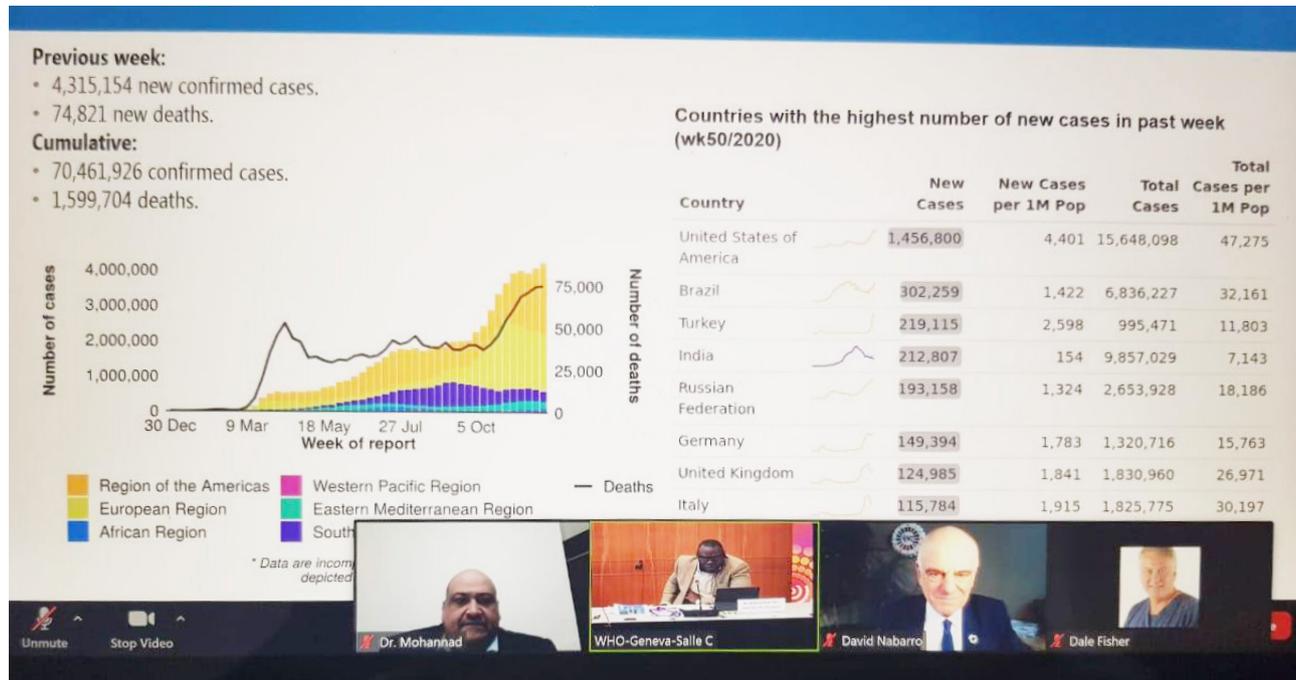
- Ministries of Health
- Private Sector
- NGOs
- Academia
- Government

# Maximizing Our Capacity During COVID-19

## Joining Global and Regional Stakeholders in Virtual Meetings and Webinars

Since the start of the pandemic, GHD|EMPHNET has been regularly engaging in virtual meetings and webinars with its stakeholders, including global and regional partners: GOARN, the WHO-EMRO, the Africa CDC Task Force for Novel Coronavirus (AfCOR), the Global Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Cluster, UNICEF, and others to promote coordinated response.

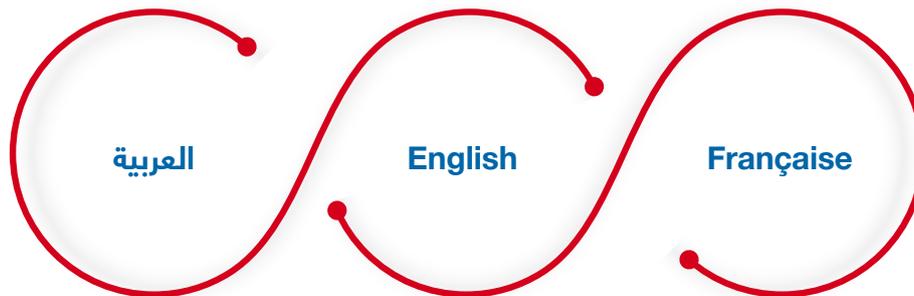
The purpose of these meetings was to exchange knowledge and country and regional experience on the main pillars of the outbreak response, including disease surveillance, contact tracing, interpersonal communication, and risk communication. In these meetings, partners also contributed input on treatment opportunities, research around vaccines as well as public health safety measures following the easing of lockdowns.



# Maximizing Our Capacity During COVID-19

## Maximizing Knowledge Sharing Through Our Translation Services

GHD|EMPHNET established a professional Translation and Localization Unit (TLU) to accommodate rising demand for such specialized services. With COVID-19, knowledge transfer became more critical to the protection of public health. The TLU translates public health literature, including scientific articles and research papers, and digital content into different languages. The TLU also provides multilingual training materials and resources, and offers a specialized translation service to international and national partners and collaborators including ministries of health, universities, international organizations, and the private sector.



# Maximizing Our Capacity During COVID-19

## Facing the Infodemic

Across the globe, we are not only facing the COVID-19 pandemic but also an infodemic, an epidemic of mis- and disinformation that threatens public health by increasing stigmatization, jeopardizing previous health gains, and leading to poor observance of public health measures. In line with international guidance, GHD|EMPHNET made an active effort to prevent and combat the COVID-19 infodemic across the EMR, using the knowledge of its team of experts across various media outlets.



Appearing in more than 75 TV interviews and 120 press material

## Topics



Virus Symptoms



Social Stigma



Safety Measures



Mental Health



Domestic Violence



Easing Lockdown Measures



Vaccine Research, Development, and Equity

# Maximizing Our Capacity During COVID-19

## Assisting in Maintaining Immunity Against Vaccine Preventable Diseases

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 and the resultant emergency pandemic response, immunization services have been significantly disrupted. Vaccinators and communities feared contracting COVID-19 during immunization sessions, and this contributed to the decline in demand for such services. Nevertheless, GHD|EMPHNET supported ministries of health in the continuation of immunization services.

### Afghanistan



To promote public awareness about vaccinations and overcome the threat of deficient immunization services, GHD|EMPHNET, in collaboration with the MoPH, trained vaccine providers and CHWs to effectively communicate the benefits of vaccines to the public. During July and August 2020, six training workshops on interpersonal communication practices were conducted in the low-performance provinces of Kunar and Nangarhar for over 70 vaccinators and 70 CHWs.

# Maximizing Our Capacity During COVID-19

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## Egypt



GHD|EMPHNET is supporting the MoHP in utilizing polio program assets to support reaching targets for measles/rubella elimination in Qalubia and Sharkia governorates. These highly populous governorates are at high risk for polio transmission due to their demographic makeup of hard-to-reach groups living in slums or as mobile communities of nomads. During June and July 2020, GHD|EMPHNET assisted the MoHP in conducting a series of training workshops on Polio program assets' utilization in these governorates. The workshops targeted EPI staff at both governorate and district levels.

# Maximizing Our Capacity During COVID-19

## Iraq

To address the need for the resumption of vaccination services, GHD|EMPHNET partnered with the MoH to improve the immunization services in high-risk areas with high numbers of unimmunized children and high drop rates. For example, GHD|EMPHNET is supporting the MoH in utilizing Polio program assets to reach targets for measles/rubella elimination within the governorates of Anbar, Baghdad Al-Kerkh, Baghdad Rasafa, and Ninewa. A series of training workshops for EPI, Acute Flaccid Paralysis (AFP) and Vaccine Preventable Diseases (VPDs) focal points, were also conducted for health workers in the aforementioned governorates during the first quarter of 2020. The sessions focused on empowering the participants' skills and knowledge in utilizing Polio assets for strengthening routine immunization.

To ensure the delivery of immunization services to hard-to-reach areas, GHD|EMPHNET also supported the Iraq MoH in reviewing, operationalizing, and implementing routine immunization microplans in two high-risk provinces: Diwaneya and Diyala. GHD|EMPHNET further contributed to intensifying immunization activities in these areas by providing logistics support for the implementation of outreach immunization sessions to reach and vaccinate unimmunized and dropout children.



# Maximizing Our Capacity During COVID-19

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## Promoting Equity of COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution

GHD|EMPHNET joined the global community of governmental and international agencies in their efforts to effectively deploy and fairly distribute the COVID-19 vaccines across the globe, particularly in low-income countries, through its membership in the Regional Working Group (RWG) of COVAX, one of the vaccine pillars of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT). The RWG offers technical assistance to countries to create demand for COVID-19 vaccines and to develop national COVID-19 vaccine deployment plans, policies, and guidelines for the successful deployment and implementation of COVID-19 vaccination.

## Contributing to Health Systems' Resilience

Since its founding, GHD|EMPHNET has been working to build the capacities in public health emergency preparedness to contribute to health security at national, regional, and global levels. GHD|EMPHNET will continue to support countries in the EMR to strengthen their preparedness and response to the COVID-19 pandemic in different areas.

Conduct rapid response refresher training with focus on COVID-19 in Afghanistan and Yemen

Support capacity building activities for PoE staff in emergency planning and response in Morocco

Support Libya in strengthening the national integrated event-based surveillance system

Work with Public Health England to support multi-sector coordination operationalization and its contribution to the response to COVID-19 in the region

Work with FETPs on initiatives to enhance their role nationally and regionally

Participate in a regional survey EMR COVID-19 Vaccine Uptake and Demand Assessment

# Maximizing Our Capacity During COVID-19

## Adjusting Our Work Environment

When lockdowns were first imposed, GHD|EMPHNET's employees began to conduct their work remotely under flexible working hours. While away from their offices in extraordinary circumstances, employees showed a high level of commitment and adjusted quickly to a non-traditional way of working. Once restrictions eased across the region, GHD|EMPHNET employees were back in the field to resume regular activities whether in technical or logistic support, strictly adhering to safety measures.

As a first step, GHD|EMPHNET produced a safety manual to guide the protection of the health of employees, interns, contractors and their families as well as that of our partner organizations. The manual clarifies the proper work protocol at the office, based on best practices, to ensure safest instructions for a gradual return to various work activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

GHD|EMPHNET also developed and shared health awareness material with the entire team.



## Voices from the Field

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Since the earliest stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, FETP residents and graduates were alongside other frontline responders, saving lives while risking their own. Residents and graduates from Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan spoke about their experience by writing for the “Voices from the Field” contest which GHD|EMPHNET launched to enable them to share their stories in their own words. We thank them for showing us a side of their heroism. Below, we share excerpts from the winners’ stories.



## 1st Place Winner

*Dr. Bisma Memon, FELTP Pakistan Graduate and Technical Lead for COVID-19 Pandemic Response*

### **The COVID-19 Outbreak Response, A Time When I Became Fearless**

On March 22, 2020, a 60-year-old man was admitted to the hospital because he had a fever and a dry cough. He was tested positive for COVID-19. I investigated the case, prepared a contacts list, and it was then that we found out that the patient also had a history of meeting with pilgrims at Tableeghi Jamaa annual mass gathering being held at the Noor Mosque. We immediately informed the COVID-19 focal persons to intervene at that mosque, where 226 persons, including 71 foreigners were present. To us, that was a huge number and a challenge to handle due to our limited resources.

I started by stopping all activities at the mosque and declared it a quarantined area with closed doors to unnecessary movement. On the next day, the FELTP team and I were on the ground where we conducted registrations. People were line-listed, but we did not have viral transmission mediums (VTMs) to conduct all tests. On March 27, 2020, VTMs were available and two quarantine centers with 71 and 98 rooms respectively were prepared in addition to existing facilities. On March 28, 2020, 224 lab tests for the remaining mass gathering attendees were conducted. After sampling, all of those people were moved to quarantine centers in line with SOPs.

The following day, shocking results were received, 84 out of 224 had tested positive, who were then shifted to isolation centers. We then followed up on all positive and negative cases and on the 14th day, 226 persons were retested, and all were recovered except one, who died. I am glad my timely intervention stopped 84 COVID-19 positive persons from going back to their homes, which means I contributed to stopping 84 families and their contacts from further spreading the virus.”



# Voices from the Field

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## 2nd Place Winner

*Dr. Mohammad Alhawarat, FETP Jordan*

### Behind the Hidden Enemy Lines

It was a scary moment when the isolation floor doors closed behind me for the first time at Prince Hamza Hospital. It was then that I realized that I will be dealing with my first COVID-19 patient. I entered his room to collect identifying, demographic, clinical information, and the information of the people he was in contact with. It was very important for me to identify and clarify the natural history of this unknown disease and to control and stop the infection cycle in our country and to protect our people. Finishing my task at Prince Hamza Hospital was not the hardest part. I had to keep my family safe. I had to keep myself away from my loved ones. It was a real challenge to keep my little daughter away from my hugs, her tears broke my heart because she did not understand my changed distant behavior.

Despite all difficulties faced by me and my family, I am still very proud that I did my best every day and to protect our people, even in this high-risk task. My lovely family, my best friends, my workmates, and my whole country waits for us to defeat this ugly virus and keep all of you safe.”



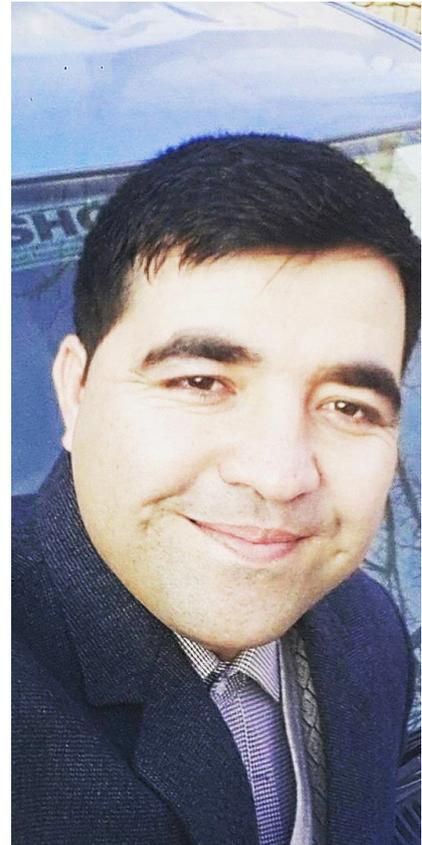
### 3rd Place Winner

*Dr. Abdul Shokour Karimi, FETP Afghanistan*

### The Story of One FETP Afghanistan Graduate in Controlling the COVID-19 Pandemic

Using the skills that I gained from my recent training with the FETP, I provided solutions for the Sarepol provincial health team, in my own province. My work included establishing COVID-19 surveillance and creating an enabling environment that facilitates better community cooperation to prevent and fight this pandemic. I was assigned as a community surveillance and communication officer for COVID-19 in my province, so I collected relevant information on all volunteers that participated in polio campaigns and who possessed sufficient information on the community's characteristics. I called and informed them of the epidemic which began to spread in our country and province and requested them to report on all suspected cases. My team and I responded to more than 100 calls from the community and received reports of suspected cases returned from Iran with fever, cough, and other signs and symptoms of COVID-19.

Our community showed a good level of cooperation, there were still misperceptions in the community: sometimes positive cases escaped from hospitals. At some point, most people believed that whoever got this virus and is hospitalized, will die and will be burned by the health department. To resolve such misperceptions, we convened various meetings with community elders and provided them with information about this virus and described the details of what we would do as soon as the patient was hospitalized. Now, suspected cases are mostly referred by the community or patients directly go to the hospitals themselves. The COVID-19 pandemic taught us how to work together as one community and how to cooperate towards one goal and that is to beat the virus.



# Significant Milestones

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# Significant Milestones

## Expanding Geographically



### Somalia

GHD|EMPHNET supported Africa CDC in community contract tracing and raising community awareness through the training and deployment of CHWs in Somalia in addition to other northern African countries.

### Bangladesh

Bangladesh FETP for Veterinarians was launched in partnership with GHD|EMPHNET, the Chittagong Veterinary and Animal Sciences University and the Department of Livestock Services to enhance the veterinary workforce's epidemiological capacities.

### Southeast Asia

GHD|EMPHNET will be providing technical assistance to the Partnership for AMR Surveillance Excellence by supporting the development of common protocols and SoPs for AMR surveillance through mapping, gap analysis and capacity assessment in Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal, and Pakistan.

# Significant Milestones

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## Celebrating FETP Graduations

Despite the implications of COVID-19 on countries in the region, FETP programs still managed to make progress. More than 55 residents completed their program requirements in 2020 from Afghanistan, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, and Yemen. To satisfy their graduation requirements, these residents attended workshops, participated in fieldwork, contributed to conferences, and reported on the health situation in their respective countries, while also supporting their countries in COVID-19 response.

Country	Cohort	FETP Modality	Graduates
Afghanistan	1st	Intermediate	30
Egypt	20th	Advanced	16
Jordan	16th	Advanced	6
Sudan	1st	Advanced	14
Yemen	4th	Advanced	11
Tunisia	2nd	Intermediate	14

## Releasing New Publications

### **Biological Risk Management (BRM) Handbook**

GHD|EMPHNET collaborated with the Iraq Ministry of Higher Education and the MoH to develop this handbook to promote the implementation of basic concepts in biological safety and to establish national codes of practice for the safe handling of pathogenic microorganisms in laboratories and as a resource for all personnel working at biological laboratories and who actively handle or manage biological agents, toxins, and other valuable laboratory materials.

### **Organizational Strategy**

In early 2020, GHD|EMPHNET launched its three-year strategy for 2021-2024 under the title “Creating Opportunities for Change,” to which Directors of FETPs in the EMR, stakeholders, and its team of technical experts contributed. The purpose of this strategy is to reshape GHD|EMPHNET’s key directions with a focus on supporting countries in progressing towards meeting SDG3 targets, in addition to collaborating with key partners and stakeholders to make sustainable progress in public health action in the EMR. GHD|EMPHNET’s strategy focuses on four goals:

1. Lead and advanced applied epidemiology in the EMR
2. Strengthen public health programs and response to public health needs in the EMR
3. Promote knowledge transformation, information exchange, and networking
4. Strengthen organizational development, sustainability, and performance

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## Signing Partnerships

### **UNHCR**

A Memorandum of Understanding with the UNHCR to strengthen collaboration in supporting refugee camps in Jordan, particularly in response to COVID-19.

### **Electronic Health Solutions**

A cooperation agreement with Electronic Health Solutions , a private technology-driven non-profit company to develop an integrated reproductive health registry system in Mafraq, Jordan that provides adequate information on personal care for women during pregnancy and childbirth.

### **The CDC Cooperative Agreement for COVID-19**

A cooperative agreement with the CDC to expand its scope of work to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in EMR countries building on the five-year cooperative agreement signed with the CDC in 2015 to eradicate polio and strengthen routine immunization in priority countries in the region.

### **Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

GHD|EMPHNET partnered with the Africa CDC to support the identification, orientation, and deployment of CHWs who can assist in contact tracing and promoting awareness in their communities in Egypt, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan, and Tunisia.

## Launching the Jordan Public Health Forum

The Jordan Public Health Forum (JPHF) is a national non-profit initiative designed as a platform to promote dialogue, partnership, and collaboration between multiple stakeholders, actors, and players across Jordan. The JPHF facilitates open discussions and debates on public health issues, challenges, concerns, and priorities to create a space where experts can identify actionable health solutions, advance progress, contribute to SDG3, and ultimately raise the public health status in Jordan.

### Launching EMPHNET's Institutional Review Board

Following the approval of the Jordan Food and Drug Administration, GHD|EMPHNET launched the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in July 2020 to protect the rights, privacy, safety, and well-being of all human subjects under research. The IRB pays special attention to vulnerable subjects by evaluating new research proposals to ensure no harm against human subjects during the information gathering phase of research studies.

The IRB membership covers diversity of experiences and backgrounds: health research, including public health, laboratory, veterinary medicine, clinical studies, and community studies. Chaired by the Senior Advisor at GHD|EMPHNET, the IRB incorporates a representative from community, and a legal associate in addition to members with technical expertise.

The IRB caters to three types of IRB reviews, including: **1)** applications for full review, **2)** applications for exempt review (e.g., secondary analysis of existing data), and **3)** applications for expedited review.

## Way Forward

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*The road to a COVID-19-free world is still way ahead, but GHD|EMPHNET is committed to supporting EMR countries and its global partners to end the pandemic.*

The world is moving into the second year of the pandemic. Meanwhile, GHD|EMPHNET is strategically directed towards further strengthening health systems response and resilience: continue to empower and expand FETPs, support additional training and deployment of RRTs in more vulnerable countries, and extend technical and logistic support for national COVID-19 response. GHD|EMPHNET will be giving special attention to strengthening the EMR's EPIs to reach regional vaccine preventable diseases control, elimination and eradication targets and address emerging public health threats, including those brought about by COVID-19. GHD|EMPHNET will be maximizing knowledge generation, exchange, and dissemination in combatting the pandemic, offering free online training in multiple languages through its Learning Management System, providing a reliable source of information through a new website, complementing FETP modules with digital counterparts, and accelerating the generation of research on COVID-19 and other issues.

In the coming year, GHD|EMPHNET's support to the response will only be made possible through collaborations with ministries of health and partnerships with national, regional, and global stakeholders: collaborations and partnerships that GHD|EMPHNET will work to strengthen and expand.

### GHD|EMPHNET: Working Together for Better Health

Global Health Development (GHD) is a regional initiative created to support countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) and to strengthen their health systems to respond to public health challenges and threats. GHD was initiated to advance the work of the Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network (EMPHNET) by building coordinating mechanisms with Ministries of Health, International Organizations and other institutions to improve population health outcomes. As an implementing arm to EMPHNET, GHD aligns its strategies with national policies and directions. Serving as a collaborative platform, GHD|EMPHNET is dedicated to serve the region by supporting national efforts to promote public health policies, strategic planning, sustainable financing, resource mobilization, public health programs, and other related services.