



Eastern Mediterranean Region

MAXIMIZING IMPACT

The work of WHO in Bahrain
Annual report 2024





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CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Foreword | v |
| Acknowledgements | vi |
| Acronyms and abbreviations | vii |
| Executive summary | viii |
| Key highlights from 2024 | ix |
| | |
| STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: ACHIEVING UHC | 1 |
| Supporting health workforce development | 2 |
| Improving the efficiency and quality of medical products, vaccines and technologies | 4 |
| Ensuring quality and patient safety and transforming hospitals | 5 |
| Engaging the private sector | 6 |
| Addressing major communicable diseases | 6 |
| Enhancing the immunization programme | 8 |
| Scaling up action on antimicrobial resistance | 9 |
| Tackling the burden of noncommunicable diseases and supporting mental health | 12 |
| Strengthening national health information system | 15 |
| | |
| STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: ADDRESSING HEALTH EMERGENCIES | 17 |
| Preventing and controlling seasonal and pandemic influenza | 18 |
| Strengthening national emergency preparedness | 20 |
| Enhancing public health intelligence | 21 |
| Safeguarding measles and rubella elimination | 23 |
| Sustaining gains of polio eradication | 23 |

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: PROMOTING HEALTHIER POPULATIONS **25**

| | |
|--|----|
| Galvanizing action to tackle NCDs risk factors | 26 |
| Combating tobacco use | 26 |
| Improving diets and nutrition | 28 |
| Addressing physical inactivity | 30 |
| Supporting ear and hearing care | 32 |
| Promoting disability inclusion | 33 |
| Engaging communities to promote health | 34 |
| Accelerating action on climate change and other environmental health risks | 35 |
| Advancing health in urban settings | 37 |

MAXIMIZING WHO'S IMPACT ON THE GROUND **41**

| | |
|---|----|
| Delivering as One | 42 |
| Launching a new cooperation framework for 2025–2029 | 42 |
| Engaging in the United Nations Gender Theme Group | 43 |
| Supporting the work of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Task Force | 43 |
| Championing roundtable discussion on health research and medical education | 44 |
| Delivering SDG consultation to enhance health monitoring | 45 |
| Meeting with the United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs | 46 |
| Celebrating United Nations Day with partners and national officials | 46 |
| Strengthening WHO's presence on the ground | 47 |
| Communicating for impact | 49 |
| Boosting engagement in WHO governance | 50 |
| Leveraging partnerships for health | 52 |
| Promoting staff well-being and investing in the WHO Country Office's capacities | 53 |

FOREWORD

I am pleased to present the 2024 annual report of the World Health Organization (WHO) Country Office in Bahrain.

Looking back on 2024, this report outlines the key activities undertaken by the country office to accelerate progress towards the three strategic priorities of WHO's Thirteenth General Programme of Work: achieving universal health coverage (UHC), addressing health emergencies and promoting healthier populations. It also serves as a transitional document, attesting to the dedication and tenacity of my revered predecessor, Dr Tasnim Atatrah, who concluded her tenure as the WHO Representative in Bahrain in February 2025.

Underpinning all of our efforts is the quest for UHC through a primary health care (PHC) approach, drawing inspiration from the political foundation set by the Declaration of Astana. In 2024, we ramped up our support for Bahrain to accelerate the delivery of integrated, people-centred health services to create conditions where the right to health is ensured, upheld and respected for everyone. This encompassed achievements across multiple fronts, such as promoting investment in health and care workers, enhancing patient safety and quality of care, tackling the evolving challenges posed by noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and antimicrobial resistance (AMR), and supporting the implementation of the World Health Survey Plus to leverage data for evidence-informed decision-making.

Simultaneously, we have exerted extensive efforts to enhance the health system's capacity and agility in preparing for, preventing, detecting, and responding to disease outbreaks and other health emergencies. Over the past year, significant strides were made to strengthen the health emergency architecture and incorporate existing guidance and best practices into emergency preparedness efforts. A key achievement was providing technical support to Bahrain in completing its second joint external evaluation (JEE) of the International Health Regulations (IHR 2005) to facilitate the identification of the most urgent needs and opportunities for enhanced emergency preparedness and response. Moreover, the WHO Country Office coordinated a rapid mini-evaluation of the seasonal influenza vaccination programme to support national efforts in enhancing preparedness for respiratory pathogen pandemics.

There is also much to be proud of in our work in 2024 to promote health across the life course. We have kept our work centred on expanding health promotion campaigns and advancing innovative community engagement approaches to combat tobacco use, address unhealthy diets, and promote physical activity.

In addition, we worked to improve health in urban settings by supporting the implementation of the Healthy Cities and Health-Promoting Universities initiatives, ushering in a countrywide movement towards more inclusive and sustainable environments. One key highlight was guiding the successful awarding of the Capital and Northern governorates as healthy governorates and the American University of Bahrain as health-promoting university, documenting lessons learned in our efforts to guide other countries in the Region and beyond.

Seventy-seven years ago, in 1948, countries of the world came together and founded WHO to ensure that everyone, everywhere, can attain the highest level of health and well-being. Building on this longstanding, powerful collaboration, we now look towards the next chapter of building future-ready health systems that can "provide" universal access to quality care, "protect" against health emergencies, and "promote" healthy communities. This vision of providing, protecting, and promoting is the cornerstone of *WHO's Fourteenth General Programme of Work 2025-2028*, adopted at the World Health Assembly in 2024. It has also served as a strong precursor to the Regional Strategic Operational Plan 2025-2028 and the Regional Director's three flagship initiatives approved by Member States during the 71st session of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean. And just as we collectively shaped this vision, so too must we work together to make it a reality for everyone.

In concluding this message, I would like to thank the Government of Bahrain and all partners for their strenuous efforts and trust in WHO to improve the health and well-being of people everywhere and deliver measurable impact on the ground. The WHO Country Office in Bahrain counts on your continued partnership as we look to the future, working closer together towards achieving health for all.



Dr Assad Hafeez
Acting WHO Representative in Bahrain

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The World Health Organization gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the technical staff and consultants who contributed to the development of this report.

The report was written by Nada Mohamed, Health Policy and Planning Consultant, who also steered the overall technical coordination of the report.

Valuable insights and reviews were also provided by the WHO Country Office staff: Deena Alkhamis, Public Health Officer; Shanine Mohebat, Health Promotion Officer; Rayan Butaita, Public Health Associate Officer; and Eunsu Kang, Communication Assistant.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| AMR | antimicrobial resistance |
| GCC | Gulf Cooperation Council |
| IHR | International Health Regulations (2005) |
| JEE | joint external evaluation |
| NCDs | noncommunicable diseases |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |
| UHC | universal health coverage |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| UNSDCF | United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework |
| WHO | World Health Organization |
| WHO FCTC | WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This annual report provides a snapshot of the key activities and initiatives implemented by the WHO Country Office in Bahrain in 2024. It provides numerous examples of how the country office integrated data-driven delivery approaches, applied ready-to-scale-up innovations, incentivized partnerships and multisectoral collaboration and enhanced community engagement to accelerate progress towards the health-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the three strategic priorities of WHO's Thirteenth General Programme of Work: achieving universal health coverage (UHC), addressing health emergencies and promoting healthier populations.

In 2024, the WHO Country Office undertook various activities to promote a comprehensive and coherent approach to health, focusing on driving public health impact towards health coverage for all. This included improving every aspect of the health system, from ensuring a well-supported health workforce to delivering quality care throughout the life course and generating adequate data for evidence-informed policies and plans. Work on health system strengthening was complemented by sustained efforts to enhance health programmes, including noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), mental health and antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

Extensive work was also undertaken to boost core health emergency preparedness and response capacities to ensure that the health system is resilient and ready for future health challenges, from severe weather events to outbreaks and pandemics. Efforts in this regard included providing technical support to the Ministry of Health on completing the self-evaluation phase of the joint external evaluation (JEE) of the International Health Regulations (2005) to identify the most urgent needs within the health security system and prioritize opportunities for enhanced preparedness, response and action.

In addition, much work was done to promote better health and well-being across the life course. Tackling the major risk factors of NCDs, including tobacco use, unhealthy diets and physical inactivity, was a high priority for the country office and received much attention in 2024. The WHO Country Office also made substantial efforts over the previous year to promote health through the Healthy Cities and Health-Promoting Universities initiatives and to implement, strengthen and sustain regular and meaningful community participation to achieve health for all.

At the same time, the country office worked towards maximizing WHO's impact on the ground and ensuring effective coordination and synergy in health and health-related work across the country through strengthening engagement with United Nations agencies. This included joint achievements on many fronts, such as launching a new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), 2025–2029, to tackle the multifaceted challenges of sustainable development in Bahrain and drive coordinated action on social protection, health care, economic growth and environmental stewardship.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2024

In 2024, the WHO Country Office in Bahrain accelerated efforts towards UHC, health emergency preparedness and response and healthier populations. The facts and figures over the following pages illustrate how we did this by changing the way we work, manage and deliver.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1:

ACHIEVING UHC



Conducted a seminar, in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, to highlight the significance of accurate and timely diagnosis in ensuring patient safety and enhancing health outcomes in celebration of World Patient Safety Day.

Led the development of robust and sustainable national expertise by facilitating the capacity-building of more than 75 experts from the Ministry of Health and other health-related sectors, covering the full spectrum of UHC.



Guided Bahrain in completing the eighth round of the Tracking AMR Country Self-Assessment Survey 2024 and enrolling in the antimicrobial usage module of the WHO Global Antimicrobial Resistance and Use Surveillance System for improved detection, reporting and monitoring of emerging resistance.

Organized an advocacy event, in partnership with the University of Bahrain, to educate the public about breast cancer, including early detection and the signs and symptoms associated with the disease, to mark Breast Cancer Awareness Month.



Supported the Ministry of Health and the Information and e-Government Authority in implementing the World Health Survey Plus in Bahrain to track progress on population health targets and health-related SDGs.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2:

ADDRESSING HEALTH EMERGENCIES



Led a joint country mission of WHO and the Partnership for International Vaccine Initiatives to assess the performance of the seasonal influenza vaccination programme and provide context-specific strategies for enhancing preparedness for respiratory pathogen pandemics.

Guided the completion of the self-evaluation phase of the JEE of the IHR to facilitate the identification of the most urgent needs and opportunities for enhanced emergency preparedness and response efforts.



Organized a three-day refresher training workshop on Epidemic Intelligence from Open Sources, in partnership with the Ministry of Health, to build a community of well-trained public health intelligence professionals and improve health threat detection and response at the national level.

Provided an innovative and extensive array of capacity-building opportunities for more than 45 experts from the Ministry of Health and other health-related sectors to strengthen global health security and build a safer future for all.



Hosted a WHO regional training on the use and rollout of the Web Information for Action platform to leverage laboratory and field data for poliovirus eradication and enhance polio surveillance.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3:

PROMOTING HEALTHIER POPULATIONS



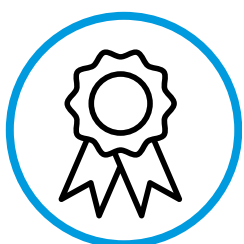
Conducted a five-day introductory training workshop on the WHO/United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Government Hospitals, to create a pool of national trainers qualified to provide practical training on breastfeeding protection, promotion and support.

Launched a social media campaign on the occasion of Bahrain Sports Day, featuring para-athlete and WHO75 champion Ms Ruba Al Omari, to promote physical activity and inspire communities and individuals to discover their motivation for keeping active.



Fostered dialogue with the Arabian Gulf University and the Ministry of Youth Affairs on the role of young people as active participants in achieving UHC to amplify youth's voices in health advocacy and strengthen their contributions to building strong, resilient and equitable health systems that meet everyone's needs.

Published an impact story on the country office's collaboration with the Government, United Nations agencies and the wider community to enhance disability inclusion as part of WHO's end-of-biennium results report for 2022–2023.



Guided the successful awarding of two governorates as healthy governorates and one university as a health-promoting university.

MAXIMIZING WHO'S IMPACT ON THE GROUND



Launched, together with other United Nations agencies, a new UNSDCF for 2025–2029 to guide the planning and implementation of United Nations development activities at the country level.

Convened a virtual technical consultation on monitoring the health-related SDGs as part of the support provided by the United Nations Country Team to the Ministry of Sustainable Development towards enhancing national statistical capacities and streamlining the collection, monitoring and reporting of SDG data.



Championed a roundtable discussion coordinated by the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office at the Royal University for Women to explore the challenges and opportunities in enhancing health research and medical education in Bahrain.

Organized a consensus-building workshop on the Country Cooperation Strategy for WHO and Bahrain, 2024–2026, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, to foster a participatory dialogue on WHO's technical cooperation with Bahrain in mutually agreed-upon priority areas, guided by national health priorities and the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030.



Boosted strategic health communications by sharing 600+ posts over different social media channels, launching 10 social media campaigns to mark international health days and disseminating two biannual newsletters to showcase country results.



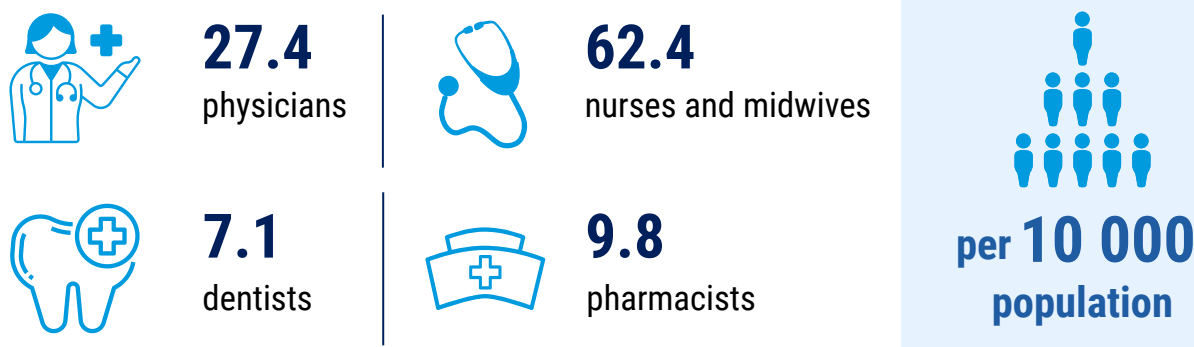
STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1

ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE

This section outlines the WHO Country Office's technical leadership in 2024 to reach the goal of universal health coverage (UHC), focusing on the support provided to strengthen health system components – including the health workforce, medicines and technologies, service delivery and health information systems – in a concerted effort to consolidate progress on health system strengthening.

SUPPORTING HEALTH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

A skilled health workforce is the backbone of every effective health system and a prerequisite for achieving UHC and the health-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Based on the latest available data, Bahrain has on average 27.4 physicians, 62.4 nurses and midwives, 7.1 dentists, and 9.8 pharmacists per 10 000 population¹. Throughout 2024, WHO provided technical support for a sustainable health workforce by facilitating policy dialogue on investing in and protecting health and care workers, enhancing capacities to meet evolving health needs and promoting the health workforce's contributions to building more resilient communities.



As part of its work to increase and sustain investments in the health workforce, WHO participated in the scientific forum on the role of nursing and midwifery in building the health sector in Bahrain. Organized by the Bahrain Nursing and Midwifery Society and the Royal University for Women on 18 December, this event sought to foster dialogue on the contributions of nursing and midwifery to medical research, clinical practice and public health initiatives. Through the forum, WHO imparted insights into its high value-added interventions to strengthen human resources for health, including the Regional Director's flagship initiative to build a resilient, fit-for-purpose and sustainable health workforce across the Region.



Dr Ali Fakhro, Dr Jameela Mukhaimer, Professor Riyad Hamzah, Dr Deena Alkhamis (WHO Bahrain), and Dr Amelia Latu Afuhaamango Tuipulotu (WHO headquarters) participate in the "Scientific forum on the role of nursing and midwifery in building the health sector in Bahrain." ©WHO/Bahrain.

¹ Monitoring health and health system performance in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: Core indicators and indicators on the health-related Sustainable Development Goals 2023. Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; 2024 (<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/377287>, accessed 11 May 2025).

“ Marking International Nurses Day is essential in recognising and valuing the efforts made by nurses around the world. Nurses are the backbone of healthcare, and ... we ensure our future nurses are ready upon graduation to work in a dynamic and diverse healthcare environment and meet the nursing workforce needs of Bahrain. ”



Professor Kathryn Strachan
Head of School of Nursing and Midwifery
RCSI Medical University of Bahrain

WHO also actively promoted health and care workers as pioneers, advocates and innovators. A key highlight was launching a social media campaign in partnership with the WHO Collaborating Centre for Nursing Development at the University of Bahrain and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland – Medical University of Bahrain, to celebrate the International Day of the Midwife and International Nurses Day, observed annually on 5 and 12 May, respectively. The campaign featured video testimonials from nursing and midwifery students at the University of Bahrain, discussing their motivations for pursuing careers in health care and their perspectives on what constitutes a successful nurse or midwife. It also included quotes from the academic staff at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland – Medical University of Bahrain, emphasizing the crucial role of nurses and midwives in ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all.

Moreover, WHO played a pivotal role in enhancing the qualifications and capacities of health workers and facilitating the exchange of experiences to build a fit-for-the-future health workforce. Over 20 experts from the Ministry of Health, Primary Health Care Centres, Government Hospitals, the Supreme Council of Health, the WHO Collaborating Centre for Nursing Development and the WHO Collaborating Centre for Health Professionals' Educational Development were actively engaged in the following meetings:

- Tenth global partners meeting for nursing and midwifery. This meeting was held in May to assess the progress of implementing the Global Strategic Directions for Nursing and Midwifery, 2021–2025, and explore the data needed for the State of the World's Nursing report 2025.
- Regional consultation on the flagship initiative on health workforce in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. This virtual meeting took place in September to review and provide feedback on the WHO Regional Director's flagship initiative on building a resilient health workforce prior to its presentation at the 71st session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean.
- Brainstorming session on developing a capacity-building programme on the governance and leadership of health professional education institutions. This session was held in December to engage experts from the Region in developing a training curriculum to enhance the leadership, management and governance of health professional education institutions.

IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCY AND QUALITY OF MEDICAL PRODUCTS, VACCINES AND TECHNOLOGIES

Safe, efficient, high-quality and affordable essential medicines, vaccines and technologies are critical for effective health care. Over the course of 2024, WHO coordinated action to improve access to medicines, vaccines and health technologies through enhancing country procurement and supply systems, strengthening regulatory frameworks and leveraging innovative technologies to impact public health.

The country office's efforts to ensure universal access to quality medical products were given added impetus through organizing a virtual orientation session on 31 October to introduce the collaborative registration procedure. This is a WHO mechanism that promotes cooperation and information-sharing among regulators to facilitate and accelerate the assessment and registration of medical products in participating countries. The session engaged three experts from the National Health Regulatory Authority, offering valuable insights into the different streams and tools of the registration procedure and the requisite steps for Bahrain to participate in it.

In addition, WHO coordinated the participation of two experts from the Ministry of Health and the National Health Regulatory Authority in the following WHO-related regional meetings:

- Consultation on establishing and implementing a regional pooled procurement for medical products. This consultation took place in September to inform the establishment of a regional pooled procurement mechanism for medical products to improve availability, reduce costs and ensure equitable distribution to vulnerable populations. The pooled procurement mechanism is a key component of the WHO Regional Director's flagship initiative on expanding equitable access to medical products.
- Regional meeting of focal points for WHO Global Surveillance and Monitoring System for substandard/falsified medical products in the Eastern Mediterranean. This meeting was held in December to strengthen national capacities to respond to incidents of substandard and falsified medical products and improve the utilization of the Global Surveillance and Monitoring System portal for reporting such products to WHO.



Regional meeting of focal points for WHO Global Surveillance and Monitoring System for substandard/falsified medical products in the Eastern Mediterranean. ©WHO

ENSURING QUALITY AND PATIENT SAFETY AND TRANSFORMING HOSPITALS

Patient safety is one of the most ancient and fundamental principles of medicine and an essential part of every country's journey towards UHC. In 2024, the country office focused on driving improvements in key strategic areas on the patient safety agenda by facilitating information-sharing on WHO technical recommendations and tools, raising awareness of the scale of avoidable harm in health care and strengthening collaboration with all stakeholders and partners to embed a safety culture within the health system.

During the year under review, WHO worked to strengthen national blood systems to ensure timely access to safe and sufficient supplies of blood and blood products. This included a field visit to the Central Blood Bank at Salmaniya Medical Complex in preparation for World Blood Donor Day, celebrated annually on 14 June. During this visit, WHO was briefed on the blood transfusion services and provided information on normative guidelines and standards for maintaining safe and effective procedures for collecting, testing, storing and using donated blood.

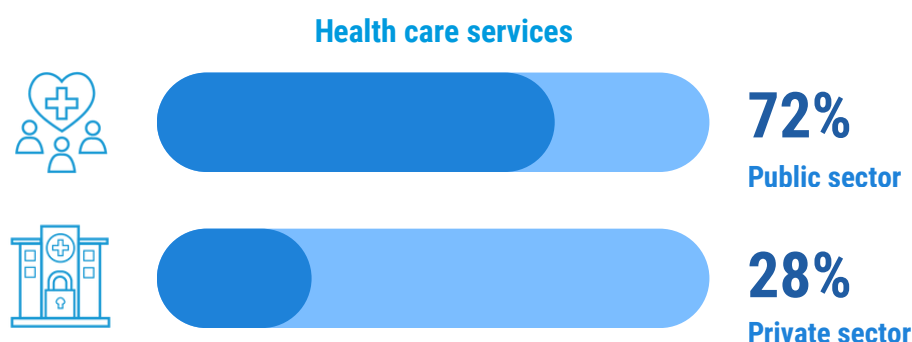
Furthermore, WHO organized a seminar, in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, to mark World Patient Safety Day, observed every year on 17 September. The seminar aimed to draw attention to the critical importance of accurate and timely diagnosis in ensuring patient safety and improving health outcomes, in line with this year's theme of improving diagnosis for patient safety. Bringing together around 20 health professionals, the seminar featured an interactive lecture on the various roles that policy-makers, health care managers and providers, and the general public play in fostering an environment where safe care is the norm. The lecture also underscored WHO's ongoing initiatives to ensure that patients receive the safe, dignified and compassionate care they deserve.



Central Blood Bank at Salmaniya Medical Complex in anticipation of World Blood Donor Day 2024. ©WHO/Bahrain

ENGAGING THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The private sector's involvement in health systems is expanding globally and in Bahrain. This involvement spans various areas, including the provision of health services, workforce development, health financing and information technology. Approximately 72% of health care services in Bahrain are provided by the public sector, while the private sector accounts for the remaining 28%². Throughout 2024, WHO proactively supported national efforts to enhance private sector engagement by providing technical guidance and facilitating the exchange of interregional and country experiences.



One landmark step was supporting the engagement of a senior management official from Primary Health Care Centres in the first interregional meeting on advancing private sector engagement for UHC and health security, organized from 15 to 17 July by WHO headquarters and the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean. The meeting sought to gather experts from all five WHO regions to discuss ways to support the private sector engagement agenda in working towards UHC and health security and explore strategies and lessons learned from engaging the private sector. Following the meeting, a joint statement was released on behalf of the participants, reinforcing the importance of creating a conducive and enabling policy and regulatory environment for effective engagement with private health actors to achieve national UHC and health security goals.

ADDRESSING MAJOR COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

Communicable diseases are among the key causes of mortality and morbidity and pose major barriers to people's social and economic well-being. During the year under review, the WHO Country Office provided normative guidance, strengthened country capacity and enhanced strategic coordination and collaboration with all stakeholders to protect communities across Bahrain from infectious disease threats.

² National Health Plan 2016–2025. Kingdom of Bahrain and the Supreme Council of Health (<https://www.sch.org.bh/images/documents/publications/National%20Health%20Plan%202016-2025.pdf>, accessed 21 May 2025).

In efforts to prevent and control the transmission of communicable diseases, WHO joined two mosquito control campaigns launched by the Northern governorate and the Ministry of Health in June and November. These campaigns were part of the Northern governorate's efforts to organize community action for health development towards achieving the healthy governorate designation. They included visits to mosquito breeding sites and various awareness-raising activities to enhance community participation in vector control. A wide range of state and non-state actors engaged in the campaigns, including the Supreme Council for Environment, the Ministry of Municipalities Affairs and Agriculture, the private sector, civic groups and grass-roots organizations.

In addition, WHO provided technical leadership in building national capacities and skills on a wide range of topics related to preventing, controlling, and treating communicable diseases, including strengthening laboratory capacity and enhancing surveillance for infectious diseases. In 2024, the country office coordinated the engagement of six experts from the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Municipalities Affairs and Agriculture, the Supreme Council for Environment, and the Arabian Gulf University in the following regional workshops and meetings:

- Regional workshop on global laboratory leadership programme. This workshop was organized in July to introduce the global laboratory leadership programme designed to develop the leadership competencies of laboratory professionals, as well as explore opportunities for its implementation at the national level.



Ali Al Asfoor, Governor of the Northern governorate, leads the mosquito control campaign with the participation of Dr Tasnim Atatrah, WHO Representative. ©WHO/Bahrain

- Regional validation committee meeting for hepatitis control/elimination, and country orientation meeting on the standard process of validation and use of tools for documenting evidence for validation of hepatitis B control. These back-to-back meetings were held in December to orient country teams on the process and tools of hepatitis B control validation and accelerate the provision of WHO technical support based on countries' identified needs.

ENHANCING THE IMMUNIZATION PROGRAMME

Immunization is one of the most cost-effective, life-saving health interventions and a key contributor to people's fundamental right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable physical and mental health. It is also an investment in the future, creating a healthier, safer, more prosperous world for all. The Essential Programme on Immunization in Bahrain maintains high immunization rates, with vaccination coverage against polio, diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and pneumococcal bacteria estimated well above 96% in 2022³. Building on these achievements, WHO supported the country's efforts in 2024 to realize the full benefits of immunization by fostering policy dialogue, strengthening vaccine communication and building national capacities.

To strengthen routine immunization systems, the country office supported the participation of two experts from the Ministry of Health in back-to-back meetings organized in July by the WHO Regional Office for the managers of the National Expanded Immunization Programme and the Regional Immunization Technical Advisory Group. These meetings were held to obtain feedback on the draft regional framework for *Immunization Agenda 2030: A Global Strategy to Leave No One Behind* and technically prepare for the meeting of the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization in September. Following these meetings, the Regional Office hosted a celebration to mark the 50th anniversary of the Expanded Programme on Immunization. A key highlight from the celebration was the award which Bahrain received in recognition of its recent introduction of the human papillomavirus vaccine in 2023.



³ Annual health statistics report 2021–2022. Manama: Ministry of Health of Bahrain (https://www.moh.gov.bh/Content/Upload/File/638728900890233427-Annual-Health-Statistic-2021-2022-Report_en.pdf, accessed 21 May 2025).



World Immunization Week 2024, recognizing 50 years of the success of the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI).
©WHO/Bahrain

WHO also contributed to building national capacities and strengthening the monitoring of vaccination coverage to address immunization gaps and ensure that everyone fully benefits from vaccines for good health and well-being. Seven experts from the Ministry of Health were actively engaged in WHO-related meetings, such as the following:

- Webinar on the national immunization strategy as a roadmap towards immunization strengthening. This online meeting was organized in February to sensitize immunization stakeholders on the importance of having national immunization strategies and address the need of countries in the Region to develop or update existing strategies.
- Refresher orientation webinar on WHO/United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) electronic Joint Reporting Form on Immunization – 2023 data. This virtual meeting was held in March to facilitate the national reporting process of immunization and vaccine-preventable disease data through the WHO/UNICEF electronic Joint Reporting Form.

SCALING UP ACTION ON ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE

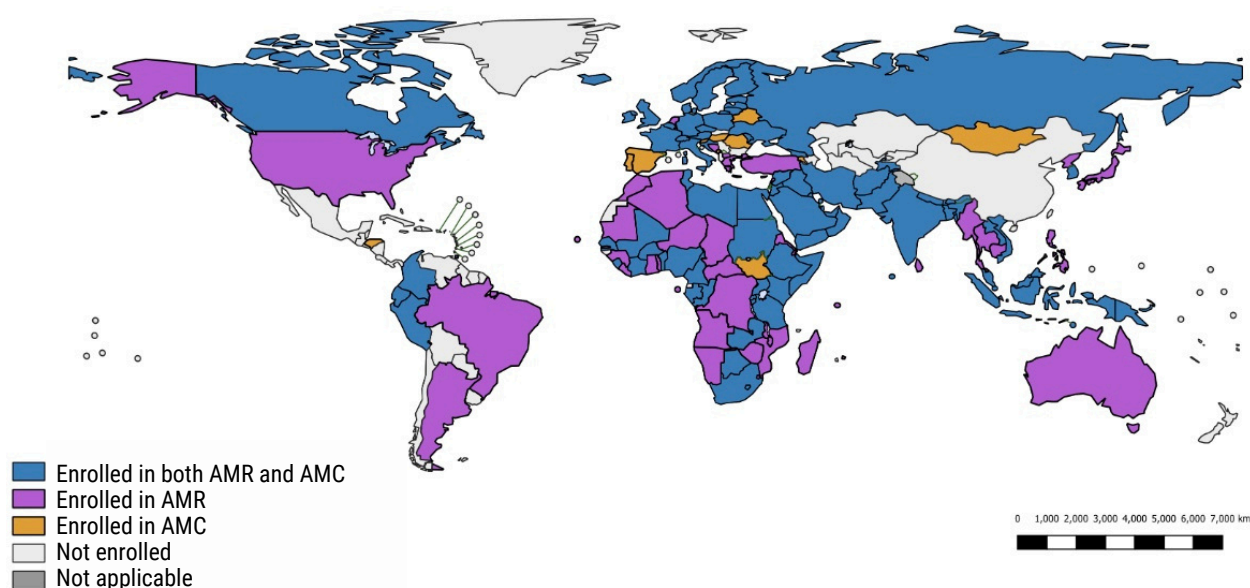
Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is one of the 10 global public health threats to humanity, posing catastrophic risks to progress towards UHC, sustainable development and a century of medical advancements. Throughout 2024, WHO provided strategic leadership and support to tackle the growing problem of resistance to antimicrobials through supporting country-level monitoring and evaluation of the AMR national action plan, strengthening surveillance systems and adopting innovative community engagement approaches to promote behavioural change.

During the year under review, the country office guided the active engagement of the Ministry of Health in completing the eighth round of the Tracking AMR Country Self-Assessment Survey 2024 to analyse progress on the implementation of the AMR national action plan and identify major achievements and persistent gaps across human, animal, plant, food and environment sectors.

This survey is a component of the global monitoring and evaluation framework of the *Global action plan on antimicrobial resistance* endorsed by the World Health Assembly in May 2015 to tackle the growing problem of resistance to antibiotics and other antimicrobial medicines. The self-assessment survey is jointly administrated by the Quadripartite Joint Secretariat, comprising representatives from WHO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Organisation for Animal Health and the United Nations Environment Programme.

Moreover, WHO continued to strengthen AMR surveillance to inform antimicrobial stewardship programmes and policies. One landmark step was facilitating Bahrain's enrolment in the antimicrobial usage module of the WHO Global Antimicrobial Resistance and Use Surveillance System. This surveillance system is an international collaboration dedicated to collecting, integrating and presenting AMR data from the national surveillance systems of participating countries. The system consists of two routine AMR-related surveillance modules: the first tracks data to estimate the burden of AMR and detect emerging resistance, while the second reports on national patterns of antimicrobial usage to inform policies governing the use of antimicrobials. With its participation in the antimicrobial usage module in 2024 and the AMR module in 2016, Bahrain is now among the 84 countries enrolled in both modules worldwide (Fig.1).

Enhancing engagement with young health professionals to capitalize on their pivotal role as AMR champions has also been a key area of focus in 2024. WHO actively engaged with the student winners of the AMR competition launched by the WHO Regional Office to mark the 2023 World AMR Awareness Week. This competition invited students and young health professionals to submit a video or a campaign proposal to promote the WHO AWaRe (Access, Watch, Reserve) antibiotic book – an evidence-based guideline for health workers on the appropriate prescribing and dispensing of antibiotics. Two student teams from the University of Bahrain achieved notable success in the competition. The nursing team was one of four winners chosen for their awareness-raising videos, and the pharmacists' team was among eight winners acknowledged for their campaign proposals.



Note: 140 countries are enrolled in GLASS
<https://www.who.int/initiatives/glass/country-participation>

Fig. 1. Number of countries enrolled in GLASS



Dr Fuad Al-Ansari, President of the University of Bahrain, and Dr Leena Khonji, Dean of the College of Health and Sport Sciences, together with Dr Tasnim Atarah, WHO Representative, attend the awarding ceremony for the University of Bahrain's winning students in the WHO regional competition on tackling antibiotic misuse. ©WHO/Bahrain

Key efforts in this regard included inviting the student winners to the country office to leverage their ideas and perspectives in addressing the AMR challenge. WHO also organized award ceremonies, in collaboration with the University of Bahrain, to recognize the student winners' contributions and inspire their peers.

Additional examples of WHO's active engagement with the student winners of the AMR regional competition include the support provided to the pharmacists' team for the implementation of its campaign proposal to promote the WHO AWaRe antibiotic book. A key highlight was guiding the winning team in organizing a youth-led workshop at the University of Bahrain in September, which enhanced the knowledge of approximately 100 recently employed health care professionals on the optimal use of antibiotics for the most common clinical infections. During the same month, WHO also co-organized an awareness-raising booth with the student winners at the second Bahrain international conference of antimicrobial resistance and infectious diseases, held by the Bahrain Medical Society's Infectious Diseases and Microbiology Association. Visitors of all ages accessed information about the WHO AWaRe antibiotic book through the booth and interacted with games and audiovisual materials featuring testimonials from survivors of drug-resistant infections.



Participants learn about the AWaRe antibiotic book at a conference. ©WHO/Bahrain

In addition, the country office recognized and celebrated with the community the milestones of Bahrain's distinguished AMR champions to enhance public awareness and promote collective action on resistance to antimicrobials. For instance, WHO capitalized on the second Bahrain international conference of antimicrobial resistance and infectious diseases to acknowledge the significant contributions of Shura Council member Dr Jameela Alsalman in the fight against AMR. Dr Tasnim Atatrah, WHO Representative during the year under review, presented Dr Alsalman with an achievement award in honour of her recent appointment as Chair of the WHO Strategic and Technical Advisory Group on Antimicrobial Resistance, the principal advisory group to WHO on AMR.

TACKLING THE BURDEN OF NONCOMMUNICABLE DISEASES AND SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH

Reducing the burden of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and promoting mental health and well-being constitute an integral part of achieving UHC. NCDs, such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory disease, account for 75% of all deaths in Bahrain, with nearly one in five adults dying from an NCD before the age of 70⁴.

In 2024, the country office pivoted to innovative ways of working to strengthen the prevention, control and management of NCDs and improve mental health, including supporting national research priorities, enhancing community awareness and advocacy, and fostering meaningful engagement with key stakeholders and actors. To promote NCD research and innovation, WHO took part in the Bahrain diabetes and obesity conference, held on 20–21 November under the patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa, Consort of His Majesty the King and President of the Supreme Council for Women. The conference aimed to promote scientific research in Bahrain and facilitate the exchange of experiences on the latest developments in diabetes and obesity care. Dr Hanan Balkhy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, delivered a keynote address at the conference opening.



75%

**of deaths in Bahrain are caused by NCDs like
heart disease, cancer, diabetes and
respiratory illness**



1 in 5

**adults in Bahrain die from an NCD before
the age of 70**

⁴ Prevention and control of non-communicable diseases in Bahrain: the case for investment. Geneva: UNDP, WHO, UNIATF, GHC; 2020 (<https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/Bahrain-NCD-IC-eng.pdf?ua=1>, accessed 11 May 2025).



Dr Hanan Balkhy

Dr Hanan Balkhy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, delivers a keynote video message at the Bahrain Diabetes and Obesity Conference, held under the patronage of HRH Princess Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa and H.E. Lt. Gen. Dr Shaikh Mohamed bin Abdullah Al Khalifa. ©WHO/EMRO

In her recorded video message, she highlighted Bahrain's initiatives and progress in diabetes prevention and control, including the launch of a book on hyperglycaemia during pregnancy in Arabic to educate women and health care providers across the Middle East and North Africa. Bringing together more than 500 regional and international experts, the conference featured lectures by WHO and other field professionals, as well as panel discussions on the social determinants of health, diabetes and women, obesity, and mental health.

Work in this area also took a major step forward with forging strategic partnerships to improve the prevention and control of NCDs. WHO actively participated in health events held by the Northern and Southern governorates to mark World Diabetes Day, celebrated every year on 14 November. These health events aimed to raise awareness about diabetes as a critical global public health issue and promote collective action to improve its prevention, diagnosis and management. The events brought together government officials, WHO regional and country experts, health advocates and the community. Event activities included lectures, exhibitions on self-care behaviours, free medical examinations and walkathons.



Ali Al Asfoor, Governor of the Northern governorate, leads World Diabetes Day 2024 walkathon, with participation of Dr Tasnim Atarah, WHO Representative. ©WHO/Bahrain



Promoting breast cancer awareness

9

interactive advocacy booths

100+

educational materials distributed

Dr Leena Khonji, Dean of the College of Health and Sports Sciences, and Dr Tasnim Atatrah, WHO Representative, inaugurate the Breast Cancer Awareness event organized by the University of Bahrain. ©WHO/Bahrain

Furthermore, WHO continued to amplify the conversation on breast cancer and increase awareness around its early detection, timely diagnosis and comprehensive treatment. One key highlight was organizing an advocacy event in Seef Mall, in collaboration with the University of Bahrain, to commemorate Breast Cancer Awareness Month, celebrated every October. The event featured nine interactive booths to educate the public about breast cancer, including early identification and the signs and symptoms associated with the disease. The booths also instructed visitors on breast self-examination techniques and offered educational materials to over 100 community members. In keeping with this year's theme, no one should face breast cancer alone, visitors were encouraged to write inspirational messages for the women and men diagnosed with breast cancer on a banner to express their support and solidarity.

The WHO Country Office's initiatives also included improving awareness and understanding of mental health issues and mobilizing efforts to enhance mental well-being. To commemorate World Mental Health Day, observed annually on 10 October, WHO delivered a lecture on the principles and drivers of mental health at the British School of Bahrain. The lecture brought together around 20 students and utilized interactive techniques to increase awareness of mental health issues and promote practical strategies for maintaining good mental health in both everyday life and school environments. WHO also organized an awareness-raising event, in collaboration with the Arabian Gulf University, to promote healthy workplaces, in keeping with the theme of 2024 World Mental Health Day, It's time to prioritize Mental Health in the Workplace. The event featured a series of lectures and an interactive booth where over 30 students practised mindfulness techniques, such as cultivating gratitude, deep breathing and journaling.



World Mental Health Day 2024 guest lecture delivered by WHO at the British School of Bahrain for senior students. ©WHO/Bahrain

In addition, WHO contributed to building national capacities and driving strategic policy dialogue towards forging a common agenda for preventing and controlling NCDs and promoting mental health. Five experts from the Ministry of Health and the Arabian Gulf University were involved in the following WHO-related workshops and training:

- Global high-level technical meeting on NCDs in humanitarian settings: building resilient health systems, leaving no one behind. This meeting was organized in February to raise global awareness of the need to consider NCDs as part of emergency preparedness and response planning ahead of the Fourth High-level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases and the Promotion of Mental Health and Well-being in 2025.
- On the road to 2025: WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region multi-stakeholder consultation in preparation for the fourth high-level meeting on NCDs. This virtual meeting was held in August as part of the global consultative process to enable Member States, United Nations agencies, non-state actors and individuals with lived experience of health conditions to provide inputs into the preparation for the fourth high-level meeting.
- Meeting on the progress of the WHO-UNICEF joint programme on mental health and psychosocial well-being and development of children and adolescents. This meeting was organized in August to assess and track country achievements in promoting optimal development and mental health, reducing suffering and enhancing psychosocial well-being and quality of life in children and adolescents.

STRENGTHENING THE NATIONAL HEALTH INFORMATION SYSTEM

Achieving UHC requires modern, fit-for-purpose health information systems that provide timely and reliable data to inform policy design. Bahrain's national health information system is highly developed. Notably, Bahrain is one of five countries in the Region that report universal vital event registration and cause of death certification. Furthermore, it is among three countries in the Region with high-quality cause of death registration, with fewer than 20% of causes of death being ill-defined or unknown⁵. Throughout 2024, WHO acted as a technical assistance partner, working with the Ministry of Health and other key partners to support a more integrated and robust health information system by implementing data collection and analysis tools and building national capacity for compiling, managing and analysing health data.

⁵ Progress report on the regional strategy for the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems 2014–2019. Sixty-sixth session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean (EM/RC66/INF.DOC.3). Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean 2019 (<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/369915>, accessed 11 May 2025).

1 in 5

**countries in the Region report universal
vital event registration and cause of
death certification**

<20%

**of causes of death are ill-defined or
unknown**

WHO's support to national efforts to generate valid, reliable, comparable and timely health information included guiding the Ministry of Health and the Information and e-Government Authority in implementing the World Health Survey Plus in Bahrain. This survey is WHO's flagship data collection system for countries to monitor their progress towards population health targets and the health-related targets of the SDGs. The scope of WHO support included providing technical guidance to adapt the survey's standard questionnaires to align with the data requirements of the country's national health planning and monitor key priority indicators. It also involved assisting with translating the modified questionnaires into Arabic for easier administration.

Moreover, WHO worked to enhance national capacities to carry out, manage, share and apply research by coordinating the participation of 10 experts from the Supreme Council of Health, the Ministry of Health, Primary Health Care Centres, Government Hospitals, the National Health Regulatory Authority and the private sector in the following WHO-related meetings:

- Regional consultation on strengthening country health information systems and capacities. This consultation was held in July to review and provide feedback on the revised SCORE (Survey, Count, Optimize, Review, Enable) for the health data technical package, as well as explore opportunities for establishing a digitalized health information system in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region.
- Country meeting on rapid advice tool for country action towards evidence-informed policy-building. This online meeting, which took place in August, introduced the rapid advice tool developed by the WHO Regional Office to support countries in identifying and prioritizing actions to institutionalize the use of evidence in health policy-making.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2

ADDRESSING HEALTH EMERGENCIES

This section describes the WHO Country Office's efforts in 2024 to strengthen capacities to rapidly detect, respond to and recover from any public health threat through supporting national implementation of the IHR (2005), increasing access to learning and training, fostering impactful innovation, and leveraging strategic partnerships.

PREVENTING AND CONTROLLING SEASONAL AND PANDEMIC INFLUENZA

Influenza is a viral respiratory disease of global importance, resulting in an estimated 290 000 to 650 000 respiratory deaths annually. Given the nature of influenza viruses, countries need to enhance pandemic preparedness to combat the ongoing seasonal, zoonotic and pandemic influenza threats to populations and individuals. Throughout 2024, WHO provided strategic guidance and technical support to strengthen national influenza response capacities, including diagnostics, disease surveillance and outbreak response.

One key highlight was organizing a joint country mission of WHO and the Partnership for International Vaccine Initiatives to pilot a rapid mini-evaluation of Bahrain's seasonal influenza vaccination programme. The mission was arranged from 23 to 24 January as part of WHO technical support to countries to strengthen their national pandemic preparedness in line with the Immunization Agenda 2030. Over the course of the two days, mission members met with the technical focal points from the Essential Programme on Immunization, members of the National Immunization Technical Advisory Group, and non-clinical staff to assess the performance of the influenza programme and explore issues such as vaccine supply, training needs and service delivery mechanisms. The evaluation process was complemented by a field visit to the Shaikh Abdulla bin Khalid Al Khalifa Health Centre, which allowed for a closer observation of the operations, infrastructure and resources available at the primary health care level. The mission concluded by making several recommendations, including creating detailed plans for influenza vaccination campaigns with identified target groups, increasing health workforce awareness about the importance of providing vaccine recommendations to target groups, and expanding advocacy and social mobilization efforts to improve community vaccination uptake.



Dr Samya Bahram and members of the NITAG participate in the rapid mini influenza vaccine post-introduction evaluation conducted by WHO, the Task Force for Global Health and the Ministry of Health. ©WHO/Bahrain

The country office also facilitated the participation of about 15 experts from the Ministry of Health and the National Immunization Technical Advisory Group in WHO-related workshops and training, such as the following:

- Subregional workshop with National Immunization Technical Advisory Group chairs, the Expanded Programme on Immunization managers and the influenza focal points on influenza vaccination programme, policy and evidence review. This workshop was organized in February to share relevant country experiences in integrating seasonal influenza vaccination within the Expanded Programme on Immunization and identify enablers to enhance influenza vaccine uptake.
- Workshop on data quality, analysis and translation in policy and practice for influenza and respiratory pathogens with epidemic and pandemic potential. This workshop was held in May to build capacities on systematic approaches for interpreting and visualizing influenza data for improved decision-making.
- Workshop on introducing Mediterranean Flu Network (EMFLU 2.0.) and rolling out: sentinel data reporting and capacity-building on data management. This workshop was organized in September to build capacities on the upgraded version of the Eastern Mediterranean Flu platform, which is a regional tool for sharing epidemiological and virological data on influenza and respiratory viruses.
- International Reagent Resource webinar. This online meeting, held in December, explored the updates to the International Reagent Resource website and provided helpful tips for ordering reagents.



Workshop on “Introducing EMFLU 2.0. and rolling out: sentinel data reporting and capacity-building on data management,” organized by the WHO Regional Office and attended by the officials from Ministry of Health. ©WHO/EMRO

STRENGTHENING NATIONAL EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Outbreaks and health emergencies can happen anywhere and at any time. This means all countries must prioritize and prepare for all types of health threats. In 2024, WHO continued to support Bahrain in meeting its commitments under the IHR (2005) to build capacity for all public health events and strengthen national readiness and resilience. Emergency preparedness support spanned technical guidance, information-sharing and health workforce training.

Over the course of the year, WHO provided technical leadership to guide the completion of the second round of self-evaluation phase of the JEE of the IHR. The Ministry of Health had initiated this second round of JEE in September 2023 with support from WHO. The JEE is a voluntary two-stage process comprising a self-evaluation by the host country followed by an external evaluation led by WHO subject matter experts to assess national capacities to prevent, detect and rapidly respond to public health risks. Key efforts in this regard included organizing a five-day mission from 11 to 15 February, involving experts from the WHO Regional Office and country office, to support the Ministry of Health in finalizing the self-evaluation report of the JEE. During the mission, technical support was provided to the Public Health Directorate, the designated IHR national focal point for Bahrain, on the JEE country evaluation tool and process to capture the country's health security baseline across 19 core preparedness and response capabilities.



Dr Samya Bahram, Assistant Undersecretary for Public Health, meets with WHO staff during the technical guidance mission supporting Bahrain's self-evaluation phase of the joint external evaluation. ©WHO/Bahrain

Furthermore, WHO prioritized learning and training as it worked to meet the ambitious target of ensuring one billion people are better protected from health emergencies. Six experts from the Ministry of Health and Government Hospitals were actively engaged in the following regional training and meetings:

- Emergency medical teams coordination cell training course. This training was held in March to familiarize participants with the emergency medical team coordination methodology and create a regional roster of experts ready for deployment during emergencies to support the emergency medical teams coordination cell.
- The fourth meeting of the Standing Committee on Health Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response. This meeting was organized in April to guide the WHO Executive Board on issues related to health emergency prevention, preparedness and response and the immediate capacities of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme.
- The Public Health Emergency Operations Centre Network 2024 global meeting. This meeting was held in April to provide a platform to connect and share best practices for effective public health emergency responses by Public Health Emergency Operations Centres and strengthen partnerships.

ENHANCING PUBLIC HEALTH INTELLIGENCE

Public health intelligence plays an important role in the prevention and control of health emergencies. It encompasses the identification, evaluation and dissemination of information on acute public health threats to guide the decision-making process. Over the course of 2024, WHO further strengthened public health intelligence capacities to detect and mitigate the impacts of public health risks through providing strategic support, introducing innovative public health intelligence initiatives and conducting regular training.

To build a community of well-trained public health intelligence professionals in Bahrain, WHO organized a refresher training workshop on Epidemic Intelligence from Open Sources (EIOS) initiative from 21 to 23 July. This initiative is a WHO-led partnership that aims to create a unified, all-hazards One Health approach to early detection, verification, assessment and communication of public health threats using publicly available information. Delivered by WHO staff members from the Regional Office, the workshop built the public health intelligence competencies and skills of 10 participants

Three-day training workshop on Epidemic Intelligence from Open Sources organized by WHO for Ministry of Health staff. ©WHO/Bahrain





Three-day training workshop on Epidemic Intelligence from Open Sources (EIOS) organized by WHO for Ministry of Health staff.
©WHO/Bahrain

from the Ministry of Health to support and improve health threat detection and response at the national level. A key component of the training workshop was a field visit to the Public Health Directorate, where the participants examined the existing integrated disease surveillance system and brainstormed strategies to strengthen all surveillance system components, including event-based surveillance. This workshop followed an in-person pilot training conducted by WHO in Bahrain in September 2022 and a virtual orientation session organized in January 2024.

In addition, WHO promoted continuous learning and the optimal use of innovations and digital technology to strengthen public health intelligence. Seven experts from the Ministry of Health were involved in the following training and meetings:

- Induction for the pilot of the initial risk assessment algorithm in Member States. Two training sessions were held in March as part of this induction to introduce an initial risk assessment algorithm tool developed by WHO and prompt its piloting in Bahrain.
- The second regional meeting for strengthening the notification and information-sharing of acute public health events. This meeting was organized in June to share country progress on notification and information-sharing of acute public health events and identify existing bottlenecks for improved communication between IHR national focal points and WHO.
- Live testing of Member States' rapid risk assessment tool. This meeting was organized in July to test and collect user feedback on the applicability and usefulness of the Member States Rapid Risk Assessment tool, which supports a more in-depth risk assessment of public health events.

SAFEGUARDING MEASLES AND RUBELLA ELIMINATION

Bahrain is among the four countries in the Eastern Mediterranean that have achieved the elimination of measles and rubella. The country office therefore worked with the Ministry of Health throughout 2024 to sustain the gains made in the control and elimination of these diseases. For example, WHO provided hands-on strategic guidance to Bahrain's National Verification Committee in submitting the annual progress report to the Regional Verification Commission for Measles and Rubella to maintain the elimination status.

SUSTAINING GAINS OF POLIO ERADICATION

Poliomyelitis (polio) is a highly infectious viral disease primarily affecting children under-five years of age. Bahrain has been free of wild poliovirus since 1993. To sustain this status and keep the population protected, WHO supported national efforts in 2024 to maintain robust surveillance, enhance the quality of immunization campaigns and strengthen preparedness for and response to polio outbreaks.

As part of its efforts to strengthen epidemiological surveillance, the country office hosted a regional training in Bahrain from 18 to 22 February on the use and rollout of the Web Information for Action. This is a web-based information and data management platform for polio surveillance that links laboratory and field data in one location. Delivered by WHO staff members from the Regional Office, the training was instrumental in introducing polio/EPI data managers from nine countries – Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia – to new polio surveillance strategies, tools and standards in line with the *Global Polio Surveillance Action Plan, 2022–2024*.



Global Polio Surveillance Action Plan, 2022–2024

It also facilitated the exchange of good country practices on moving to electronic data collection towards increasing efficiency in collecting, managing and using polio data for decision-making and priority-setting.



Web information for action (WEB-IFA) roll out and use of dashboard training, organized by the WHO Regional Office and hosted in Bahrain. ©WHO/Bahrain

Moreover, WHO successfully built the knowledge and skills of five experts from the Ministry of Health by coordinating their participation in the following meetings:

- The 38th meeting of the WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Regional Commission for Certification of Poliomyelitis Eradication. This meeting was organized in May to review annual updates submitted by polio-free countries and examine progress towards polio eradication in polio-endemic countries.
- Poliovirus surveillance intercountry meeting of member countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). This meeting was held in November to discuss the status and new developments in poliovirus surveillance in the GCC countries.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3 PROMOTING HEALTHIER POPULATIONS

This section offers insights into the strategic support provided by the WHO Country Office to achieve the goal of ensuring health throughout the life course, including fostering multisectoral coordination and collaboration on the determinants of ill health, promoting healthy settings, accelerating action on the health impacts of climate change and expanding opportunities for community engagement and disability inclusion.

GALVANIZING ACTION TO TACKLE NCD RISK FACTORS

One of the most important ways of reducing deaths from NCDs is to control the risk factors that lead to their development. The WHO Country Office provided leadership, coordination and guidance in 2024 to accelerate progress on reducing major risk factors for NCDs – including tobacco use, physical inactivity and unhealthy diets – enabling the people in Bahrain to increase control over and improve their health.

COMBATING TOBACCO USE

Tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of death, killing over 8 million people a year around the world. In Bahrain, despite decades of health promotion and tobacco control legislation, tobacco use is still prevalent among adults and teenagers. In 2024, WHO provided strategic support to advance the tobacco control agenda and strengthen the on-the-ground implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) by accelerating multisectoral efforts, advancing community engagement strategies and building national capacity for tobacco control.

During the year under review, WHO actively engaged with both health and non-health sectors to promote coordinated whole-of-government approaches to tobacco control. For instance, WHO and the Ministry of Interior commemorated World No Tobacco Day, observed annually on 31 May, with a lecture on the WHO FCTC. The lecture, attended by 30 staff members from various directorates of the Ministry of Interior, focused on introducing tobacco control measures, including tobacco taxes, smoking and advertising bans and health warning labels. Other events which WHO actively took part in to mark World No Tobacco Day included a celebratory event hosted by the Ministry of Interior on 30 May and an awareness-raising exhibition organized by the Ministry of Health on 13 June.



World No Tobacco Day 2024 event organized by the Ministry of Interior with the participation of Dr Tasnim Atatrah, WHO Representative. ©WHO/Bahrain

Tobacco use is the most preventable cause of death



killing **8 million** people every year

Similarly, given the rising prevalence of tobacco use among youth and the recent trends towards electronic cigarettes, the country office focused on involving and empowering youth as catalysts of change and leaders in tobacco control within their communities. A key achievement was organizing a tobacco-free youth workshop on 18 May, in collaboration with the Royal Humanitarian Foundation, to mark World No Tobacco Day. Bringing together around 10 young people aged 13–17 years, the workshop included interactive lectures designed to highlight the harmful effects of tobacco use and the tactics employed by the tobacco industry to promote the uptake of its products. Additionally, WHO hosted a celebratory event on 11 June to recognize the school students who won the art competition organized by the WHO Regional Office in observance of World No Tobacco Day. The students received certificates of merit and in-kind prizes for their achievements.



Winning school students art work commemorating World No Tobacco Day 2024. ©WHO/Bahrain

Further strengthening community engagement and mobilization for tobacco control, WHO presented Mr Husain Alrayes, Health Inspection Supervisor at the Ministry of Health, with the 2024 World No Tobacco Day award as a tribute to his achievements in this field. Mr Alrayes is one of 31 tobacco-free champions globally and one of five in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region to receive the 2024 honours. The National Committee to Control Smoking and All Types and Products of Tobacco in Bahrain previously received this award in 2022.



Mr Husain Alrayes receives the 2024 World No Tobacco Day award. ©WHO/Bahrain

The Country Office's support also included enhancing the national tobacco cessation system to alleviate the burden of tobacco-related diseases. WHO conducted field visits to the smoking cessation clinics at the Ministry of Interior's health facilities and the Shaikh Abdulla bin Khalid Al Khalifa Health Centre on 26 May and 9 July, respectively. During these visits, WHO examined the specialized outpatient treatment services offered by the clinics and built national capacities on recommended interventions for tobacco cessation in adults, including behavioural support provided by health care providers, digital cessation interventions and pharmacological treatments.

In addition, WHO managed to build the knowledge and capacities of five experts from the Ministry of Health, Primary Health Care Centres and the Anti-smoking Society by coordinating their participation in WHO-led regional meetings, including the following:

- Intercountry meeting on strengthening Parties' capacity for implementing Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC. This virtual meeting was organized in February, in collaboration with the Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control, to share experiences and discuss opportunities and challenges in implementing Article 5.3, which aims to shield public health policies from industry influence.
- Intercountry meeting on restricting digital marketing for tobacco and nicotine products in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: comprehensive approach to restricting digital marketing. This online meeting was held in July to strengthen national capacities to combat the digital marketing of tobacco and nicotine products and advance tobacco control measures in the Region.

IMPROVING DIETS AND NUTRITION

Nutrition is critical to health and development. Better nutrition is related to improved infant, child and maternal health, stronger immune systems, safer pregnancy and childbirth and lower risk of NCDs. Throughout 2024, WHO acted as a technical assistance partner, working with the Ministry of Health and other key partners to strengthen the implementation of nutrition strategies and practices and promote food and nutrition education through public awareness and training.

One key milestone was organizing a five-day introductory training workshop on the WHO/UNICEF Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative from 24 to 28 November. The workshop was conducted in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Government Hospitals to serve as a practical starting point to create a pool of national trainers qualified to provide practical training on breastfeeding protection, promotion and support. It built the knowledge, skills and competencies of over 40 medical professionals, enabling them to implement safe, evidence-based maternity care practices in their facilities and promote continuous breastfeeding-related care within their communities. They included physicians, midwives and nurses from the Ministry of Health, Primary Health Care Centres and public and private hospitals.



WHO/UNICEF Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) training workshop co-organized by WHO, the Ministry of Health, and Government Hospitals.
©WHO/Bahrain



H.E. Dr Jaleela bint AlSayed Jawad Hasan, Minister of Health, inaugurates the food-based dietary guidelines exhibition at the Ministry of Health building. ©WHO/Bahrain

Work in this area also took a significant step forward with scaling up outreach and nutrition education efforts to encourage healthy eating habits and nutrition awareness. WHO participated in a series of healthy eating sessions organized by the Ministry of Health, in conjunction with the food-based dietary guidelines sustainable exhibition, which was held from February to June. Bahraini public figures and health champions facilitated the sessions, engaging with community members of various ages, including school students, on a range of food and nutrition-related subjects. The exhibition was first held in December 2023 at Seef Mall in Manama by WHO and the Ministry of Health and then moved to the Ministry of Health, where it remained until June 2024.

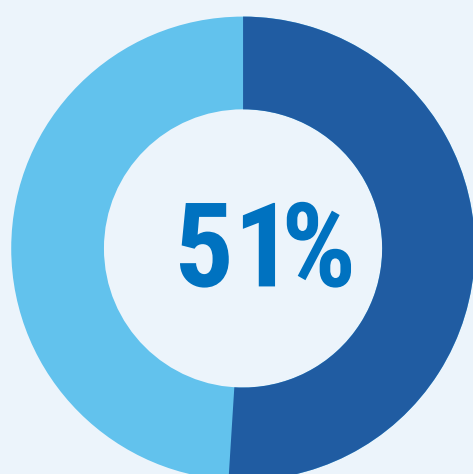
Moreover, WHO provided technical leadership in building national capacities and skills on a wide range of topics related to nutrition and food safety. During the year under review, WHO coordinated the engagement of four experts from the Ministry of Health in the following regional workshops and meetings:

- Intercountry meeting for nutrition focal points. This meeting was organized in July to exchange best practices in addressing major drivers of malnutrition and track progress in achieving globally agreed nutrition targets and indicators.
- Regional expert meeting of healthy food policies in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. This meeting was held in October to facilitate knowledge-sharing on Saudi Arabia's experience in implementing healthy diet policies and foster regional collaboration on improving diets and nutrition.

- WHO acceleration plan to stop obesity: regulatory workshop on promoting, protecting and supporting breastfeeding. This meeting was organized in December to support countries in developing and implementing policies and interventions for promoting, protecting and supporting breastfeeding.
- Intercountry capacity-building workshop for Member States in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region on nutrition labelling and restricting marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages. This meeting was held in December to build national skills and capacities in developing and enforcing legal instruments related to the marketing of unhealthy foods and strengthening nutrition labelling requirements.

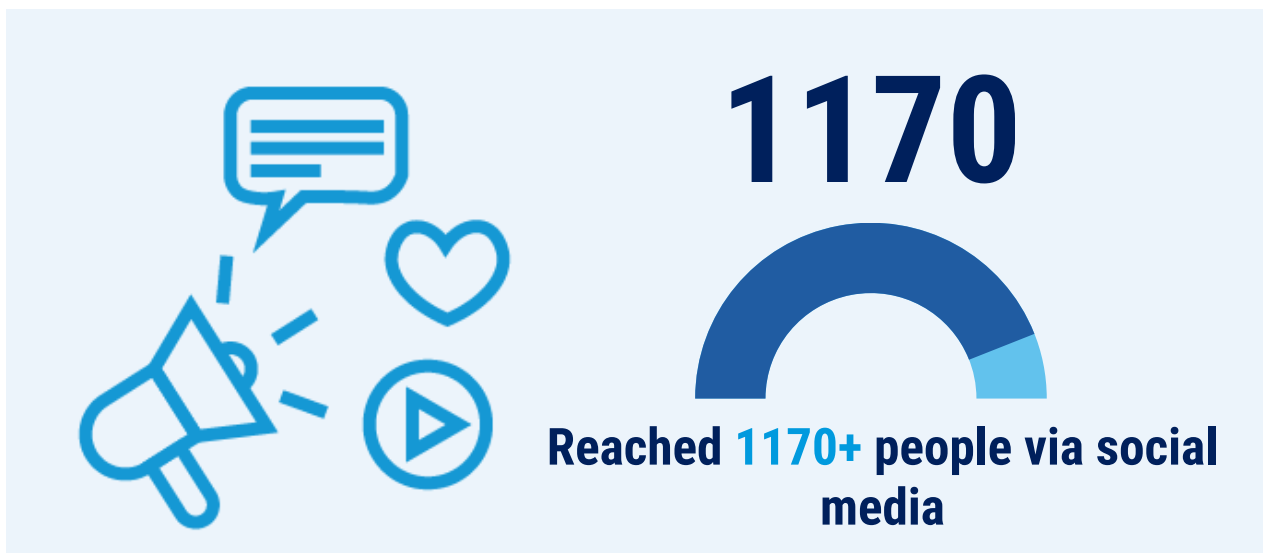
ADDRESSING PHYSICAL INACTIVITY

Regular physical activity is proven to help prevent and manage NCDs, such as heart disease, hypertension, stroke, diabetes and several cancers. It also helps maintain a healthy body weight and can improve mental health, quality of life and well-being. Despite its many benefits, Bahrain is experiencing a decline in physical activity, with 51% of individuals aged 18 and older not performing sufficient levels of physical activity⁶. During the year under review, the country office leveraged its technical expertise to promote active environments and mobilize physical activity advocacy towards delivering tangible public health impact on the ground.



**of adults in Bahrain do not
perform sufficient levels
of physical activity**

⁶ Monitoring health and health system performance in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: Core indicators and indicators on the health-related Sustainable Development Goals 2023. Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; 2024 (<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/377287>, accessed 11 May 2025).



As part of its health advocacy work to advance the physical activity agenda, the country office also took part in a series of events to mark Bahrain Sports Day, including the Let's Walk initiative launched by the Ministry of Health, the sports event held by the Ministry of Health and Primary Health Care Centres and the A'ali walk event organized by the Northern governorate. These events convened government officials, United Nations representatives, health advocates, youth associations and clubs and community members. They featured activities such as walkathons, wellness check stations and exhibitions on healthy eating habits, all aimed at promoting physical activity as a priority for everyone.

In 2024, WHO continued to improve public awareness and understanding of the myriad benefits of physical activity for health and human development across different social media channels. To mark Bahrain Sports Day, celebrated every year on 22 February, the country office launched a social media campaign that included a short video of the para-athlete and WH075 champion Ms Ruba Al Omari, as well as a series of awareness-raising posts. The campaign encouraged people to discover what motivates them to be active and utilized positive messages on increasing physical activity to improve health and well-being. It reached over 1170 viewers on social media pages.



Walking initiative, hosted by the Ministry of Health, held at Dohat Arad Park. ©WHO/Bahrain

SUPPORTING EAR AND HEARING CARE

Hearing loss affects more than 1.5 billion people worldwide. Stigma often prevents people with hearing loss from accessing the care, services and products they need. Throughout 2024, strengthened support and leadership to increase public awareness about the importance of ear and hearing care as integral to overall health and well-being and encourage positive behavioural change in the community.

An important case in point was the awareness-raising event organized in collaboration with the Arabian Gulf University to mark World Hearing Day, celebrated every year on 3 March. The event aimed to draw students' attention to the burden of hearing loss and encourage them to promote ear and hearing care among their peers. The event included pop-up stalls where brochures on safe listening and good hearing care practices were distributed, and health specialists demonstrated medical devices used in auditory examinations to encourage routine hearing screenings. Other activities included having students proficient in sign language illustrate basic expressions to meet and greet people to foster inclusivity and engagement with people living with hearing loss. Students were also encouraged to use the [hearWHO app](#) – a software application that gives the general public access to a hearing screener to check their hearing status and monitor it over time. Over 100 students visited the stalls and interacted with the advocacy materials on display.



Dr Saad Al Fuhaid, President of Arabian Gulf University, and Professor Abdelhalim Deifalla, Dean of Medical and Medical Sciences, attend the World Hearing Day 2024 awareness event co-organized by WHO and Arabian Gulf University. ©WHO/Bahrain

PROMOTING DISABILITY INCLUSION

Disability inclusion is an essential prerequisite to achieving the Sustainable Development Agenda and fulfilling its promise to “leave no one behind”. During the year under review, WHO pivoted to innovative ways of mobilizing support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities and promoting their active participation in community life.

In 2024, activities to promote the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities were complemented by strategic partnerships to ensure sustainable and transformative change. WHO actively engaged in an advocacy event held by the Ministry of Social Development and the High Committee for the Care of Persons with Disabilities to mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, which is observed on 3 December. Organized under the theme, “United for a better tomorrow”, the event brought together government officials, persons with disabilities and organizations of persons with disabilities to champion positive change in their community and promote a disability-inclusive, accessible and sustainable world for all. Among the many activities featured in the event was a WHO booth, where participants engaged in art projects and interacted with advocacy material that promoted disability awareness and inclusion.

Further demonstrating the power of collaboration in dismantling barriers and empowering people with disabilities, the country office published an impact story on strengthening the inclusion of persons with disabilities as part of WHO’s end-of-biennium results report 2022–2023. The story outlines the impact of WHO’s work with the Government, other United Nations agencies and the broader community, sharing lessons learned and offering inspiration for other countries in their journey towards integrating and promoting disability inclusion.



International Day of Persons with Disabilities 2024 event organized by the Ministry of Social Development and the High Committee for the Care of Persons with Disabilities. ©WHO/Bahrain

ENGAGING COMMUNITIES TO PROMOTE HEALTH

Empowering community members to explore, plan and act together on their priority issues can significantly enhance collective capacity and improve programme equity and effectiveness. During the year under review, WHO strengthened support to prioritize community participation in designing and implementing public health interventions and fostered meaningful long-term community relationships to achieve health for all.

In a concerted effort to empower the vibrant and diverse youth population of Bahrain, the country office organized a panel discussion on 6 May on the role of young people as active participants in achieving UHC. This event, held in collaboration with the Arabian Gulf University and the Ministry of Youth Affairs, aimed to facilitate dialogue, participation and engagement with youth while amplifying their voices and contributions to building strong, resilient and equitable health systems that meet everyone's needs. Moderated by a student from the Arabian Gulf University, the panel discussion brought together WHO experts, academic staff, government officials and youth advocates, fostering a dynamic environment for discussion and collaboration. More than 30 university students and youth attended the event, sharing their experiences and innovative ideas towards achieving the ultimate goal of UHC for all people.



Dr Saad Al Fuhaid, President of Arabian Gulf University, and Dr Tasnim Atatrah, WHO Representative, inaugurate a plenary discussion on "Universal health coverage: youth as accelerators towards addressing a healthy future for all," co-organized by Arabian Gulf University, WHO and the Ministry of Youth Affairs. ©WHO/Bahrain

Recognizing the importance of fostering robust and meaningful youth involvement in achieving a healthier and more sustainable future, WHO also organized a booth from 11 to 12 August during the 13th edition of Youth City 2030. This nationwide initiative, hosted by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and the Labour Fund (Tamkeen), aims to empower and upskill young individuals by equipping them with the necessary skills for successful integration into the labour market. Coinciding with International Youth Day, celebrated annually on 12 August, the booth sought to engage young people as partners and stakeholders, inspiring them to become active changemakers. It featured interactive tools and activities to enhance young people's understanding of sustainable development and the work of WHO. Additionally, the booth served as a platform to amplify youth voices in health advocacy by encouraging young individuals to participate in a media campaign, leveraging their ideas and perspectives on maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Over two hundred young people visited the booth and interacted with the advocacy materials on display.



WHO Bahrain booth at the 13th session of Youth City 2030, organized by the Ministry of Youth Affairs. ©WHO/Bahrain

ACCELERATING ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH RISKS

Climate-related and environmental risks impact essential health needs, including clean air, safe water, sufficient food and adequate shelter. In 2024, WHO focused on mitigating climate change and protecting human health by fostering collaboration, education and advocacy and strengthening health sector engagement in global and regional forums.

To promote environmental awareness and sustainability, WHO participated in the planting-tree campaigns held by the Northern governorate and the Capital Municipal Council in commemoration of National Tree Week, which takes place annually during the third week of October. This is a national initiative launched by His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, to support the national plan for afforestation and, in turn, contribute to Bahrain's commitments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. During the campaigns, government officials, United Nations representatives, health and climate action advocates and the community came together to plant seedlings to help preserve the environment and promote sustainability.

Furthermore, the country office, through social media platforms, continued to improve awareness and understanding of the planet's most pressing environmental problems. To mark World Environment Day, held every year on 5 June, WHO joined the global campaign towards creating a sustainable and healthy planet by posting an advocacy video of Mr Abbas Almosawi, a world-renowned artist and WHO75 champion, on the impact of climate change on health and well-being. WHO also featured a series of social media posts of the staff members planting seeds to raise public awareness of the importance of restoring land, combating desertification and enhancing resilience to drought.

Furthermore, WHO supported the participation of three experts from the Ministry of Health in WHO global and regional meetings to build capacities on climate change and health and enhance health representation in climate-related conferences and meetings such as the following:

- Face-to-face Alliance for Transformative Action on Climate and Health general meeting and training of trainers on climate change and health. This meeting was organized in March to explore the best approaches to implement the commitments of the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference to build climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable low-carbon health systems.
- Climate change and health: Building resilience, sustainability and lowering the carbon footprint of health care facilities. This meeting was held in November to exchange country experiences and lessons learned from different country initiatives to build the climate resilience and environmental sustainability of health care facilities.



WHO75 champion and artist Abbas Almosawi advocates to raise community awareness of the impact of climate change on health and well-being. © WHO/Bahrain



Dr Tasnim Atatrah, WHO Representative, and members of the country office team participate in a National Tree Week activity, in collaboration with the Northern governorate, in support of Bahrain's National Afforestation Plan. ©WHO/Bahrain

ADVANCING HEALTH IN URBAN SETTINGS

Urbanization is one of the leading global trends of the 21st century that has a significant impact on health. WHO capitalized on its role as the Ministry of Health's technical assistance partner in 2024 to drive improvements in creating supportive and enabling urban environments for health by catalysing political leadership, promoting multisectoral actions and facilitating experience exchange to improve the daily conditions of urban life.

Throughout 2024, WHO leveraged partnerships and supported local initiatives aimed at improving health in cities. For example, the country office participated in an awareness-raising event organized by the Capital governorate to commemorate Gulf Healthy Cities Day, celebrated annually on 1 March. The event was part of the governorate's initiatives to foster healthy and sustainable environments in its pursuit of becoming a healthy governorate. Bringing together government officials, health advocates and the community, the event featured an awareness-raising exhibition on tobacco control, free medical examinations and various healthy eating activities.



Healthy governorate external assessment visit to the Capital governorate conducted by a technical team from the WHO Regional Office Ministry of Health and WHO. ©WHO/Bahrain

Furthermore, the country office continued working to strengthen the implementation of the WHO Healthy Cities programme as a platform to address the social determinants of health, tackle risk factors for NCDs and ensure that no one is left behind. These efforts have yielded significant achievements, including guiding the successful designation of the Capital and Northern governorates (Fig. 2) in Bahrain as healthy governorates. With the strategic support and coordination of WHO, the Capital and Northern governorates received joint regional and country evaluation teams in August and November, respectively, to assess their eligibility for the healthy governorate designation. These in-country evaluations followed a visit by a technical team from WHO and the Ministry of Health to the Capital governorate office in May and the Northern governorate office in July to assist them in completing and submitting their self-assessments. After the evaluation process, certificates were issued for the Capital and Northern governorates, and an award ceremony is scheduled for 2025.

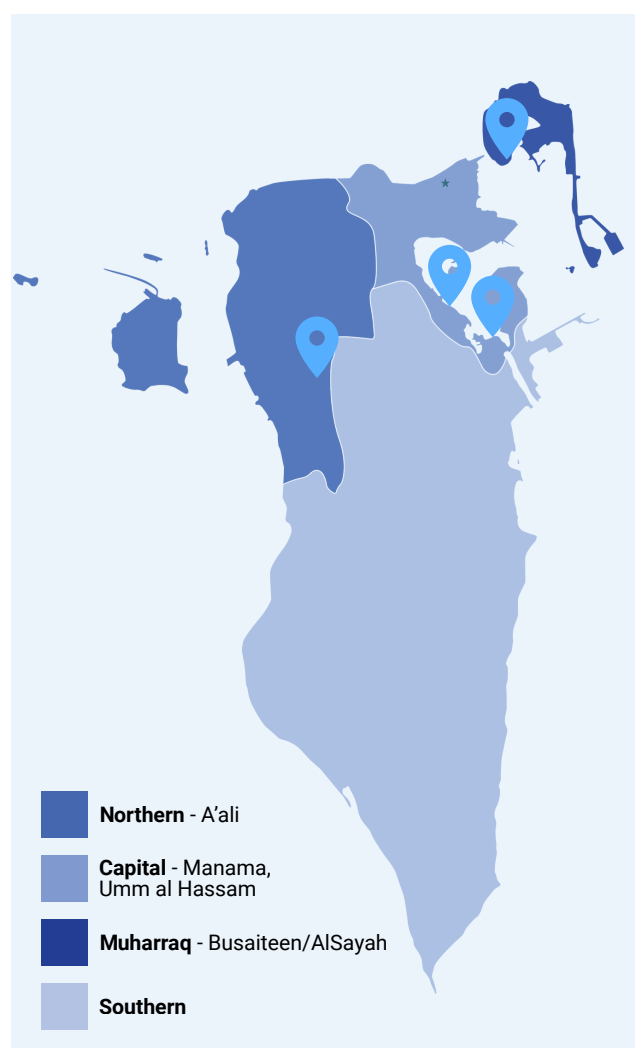


Fig. 2. Healthy governorates in Bahrain

Efforts in this area were furthered by accelerating initiatives to create health-conducive working, learning and living environments in Bahrain's universities. In 2024, WHO awarded the health-promoting university status to the American University of Bahrain – bringing the total number of health-promoting universities in the country to six (Fig. 3). Ahlia University, Arabian Gulf University, Kingdom University, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland – Medical University of Bahrain, and University of Technology Bahrain were designated as health-promoting universities in 2023.

The designation process was ushered in by the technical leadership and expert advice of the WHO, together with the Ministry of Health and the Higher Education Council. In August, a joint regional and country evaluation team visited the American University of Bahrain to assess its eligibility for health-promoting university status. Prior to this, WHO and the Ministry of Health toured the American University of Bahrain in May to assist in completing the self-assessment. Following the evaluation process, the certificate was issued to the University, and an award ceremony took place in December.



Fig. 3. Healthy universities in Bahrain



Health-promoting university assessment visit to the American University of Bahrain conducted by a joint team from the WHO Regional Office and country offices, the Ministry of Health, Higher Education Council and the WHO Collaborating Centre for Healthy Cities in Riyadh. ©WHO/Bahrain

Furthermore, the country office leveraged its technical expertise to enhance peer-to-peer exchanges in implementing the Health Promoting Universities initiative. For example, WHO organized a one-day workshop in November, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the Higher Education Council, to introduce the Health Promoting Universities initiative to academic institutions nationwide. This workshop, held at the American University of Bahrain, involved over 40 participants from various academic institutions who gained first-hand access to the Health Promoting Universities initiative, exchanged ideas and experiences and learned more about the designation process. Additional efforts in this area included capitalizing on policy forums, such as the 10th edition of the My Health conference, which took place in October at the University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, to present Bahrain's approach to introducing and implementing the WHO Health Promoting Universities initiative. These efforts aimed to guide countries of the GGC and those in the Eastern Mediterranean Region in creating healthier learning environments.



WHO Technical Officer delivers presentation at the health-promoting universities workshop co-organized by WHO, the Ministry of Health and the Higher Education Council, hosted at the American University of Bahrain. ©WHO/Bahrain



MAXIMIZING WHO'S IMPACT ON THE GROUND

This section examines the technical and strategic support provided by the WHO Country Office in 2024 to accelerate results on the ground through strengthening engagement with the United Nations development system and partners, promoting coherence and cooperation and elevating its convening power to advance progress towards the goal of a healthier, safer and fairer future.

DELIVERING AS ONE UN

The United Nations Country Team in Bahrain comprises representatives of 23 United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. Throughout 2024, WHO worked closely with other agencies to leverage the added value of the United Nations system and increase the coherence of its actions towards catalysing and accelerating sustainable development in Bahrain.



Signing ceremony of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2025–2029, officiated by H.E. Dr Abdullatif bin Rashid Alzayani, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Mr Khaled El Mekwad, UN Resident Coordinator in Bahrain.
©WHO/Bahrain

LAUNCHING A NEW COOPERATION FRAMEWORK FOR 2025–2029

The United Nations Sustainable Development and Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) is the most essential instrument for planning and implementing development activities at the country level. In 2024, the United Nations and the Government of Bahrain signed a new UNSDCF for 2025–2029. The new UNSDCF is structured around four strategic priorities that are anchored in the national development priorities and the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:

- 1) People – enhanced social equity and well-being;
- 2) Prosperity – sustainable economic transformation;
- 3) Peace – governance for justice and human rights; and
- 4) Planet – resilient environmental stewardship.

Throughout 2024, WHO collaborated with other agencies, under the direction of the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office, to engage a diverse array of partners and stakeholders in developing the UNSDCF, ensuring a participatory and inclusive consultation process. In January, the United Nations Country Team organized a strategic prioritization workshop, in collaboration with the Government, to identify key strategic priorities for cooperation between the Government of Bahrain and the United Nations in 2025–2029. Furthermore, between April and May, the Country Team conducted extensive consultations with civil society, youth, women and representatives from the private sector to ensure that their perspectives are reflected in the UNSDCF. Leveraging its comparative advantage as the strategic leader of global health, WHO provided technical advisory support during these discussions, facilitating the identification of common health priorities and approaches for the new programming cycle. The WHO Country Office also contributed to the drafting and reviewing processes of the UNSDCF, addressing feedback received from the Government on health-related priorities and outcomes to enhance coherence and coordination on the health agenda.

ENGAGING IN THE UNITED NATIONS GENDER THEME GROUP

Gender significantly impacts health outcomes, influencing lifestyle, well-being and access to health care throughout a person's life. Throughout 2024, WHO actively engaged in the Gender Theme Group, co-chaired by UN Women and the United Nations Population Fund, to strengthen collective results for gender equality and women's empowerment in Bahrain. This included participating in the time and cost analysis led by UN Women to assess the return on investment of agencies' involvement in the Group's activities. WHO also contributed significantly to the Gender Theme Group's quarterly meetings and its first-ever retreat in October by sharing knowledge and leveraging technical expertise to enhance the integration of a gender perspective into the United Nations Country Team's joint work and promote investment in gender-responsive programming.

SUPPORTING THE WORK OF THE UNITED NATIONS DISABILITY INCLUSION TASK FORCE

Promoting the rights and advancement of persons with disabilities is crucial for fostering participatory and inclusive societies. During the year under review, the country office supported the Disability Inclusion Task Force in mainstreaming disability inclusion in the work of the United Nations Country Team work driving transformative action. A key example was participating in a leadership engagement session organized by the Task Force for the International Day of Persons with Disabilities to stocktake efforts in mainstreaming disability inclusion. The Task Force is currently chaired by the United Nations Development Programme and was previously chaired by WHO in 2023.

CHAMPIONING ROUNDTABLE ON HEALTH RESEARCH AND MEDICAL EDUCATION

Health research and medical education are essential for addressing public health issues and advancing health care. In October, WHO actively participated in a roundtable at the Royal University for Women, coordinated with the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office, to explore the challenges and opportunities in enhancing health research and medical education in Bahrain. The roundtable involved public health officials, health professionals, medical education leaders and representatives from United Nations organizations. During the discussion, participants assessed the current needs of the health sector and developed actionable strategies in alignment with national priorities. One significant highlight was the bridging role that Dr Tasnim Atatrah, WHO Representative during the year under review, played in steering the discussion, sharing information and advice and pointing to best practices to strengthen health research and build a sustainable health workforce.



Dr Tasnim Atatrah, WHO Representative, participates in a roundtable discussion on the future of Bahrain's health sector, hosted by the Royal University for Women under the patronage of H.E. Lt. Gen. Dr Shaikh Mohamed bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, alongside representatives from United Nations agencies and national institutions. ©WHO/Bahrain

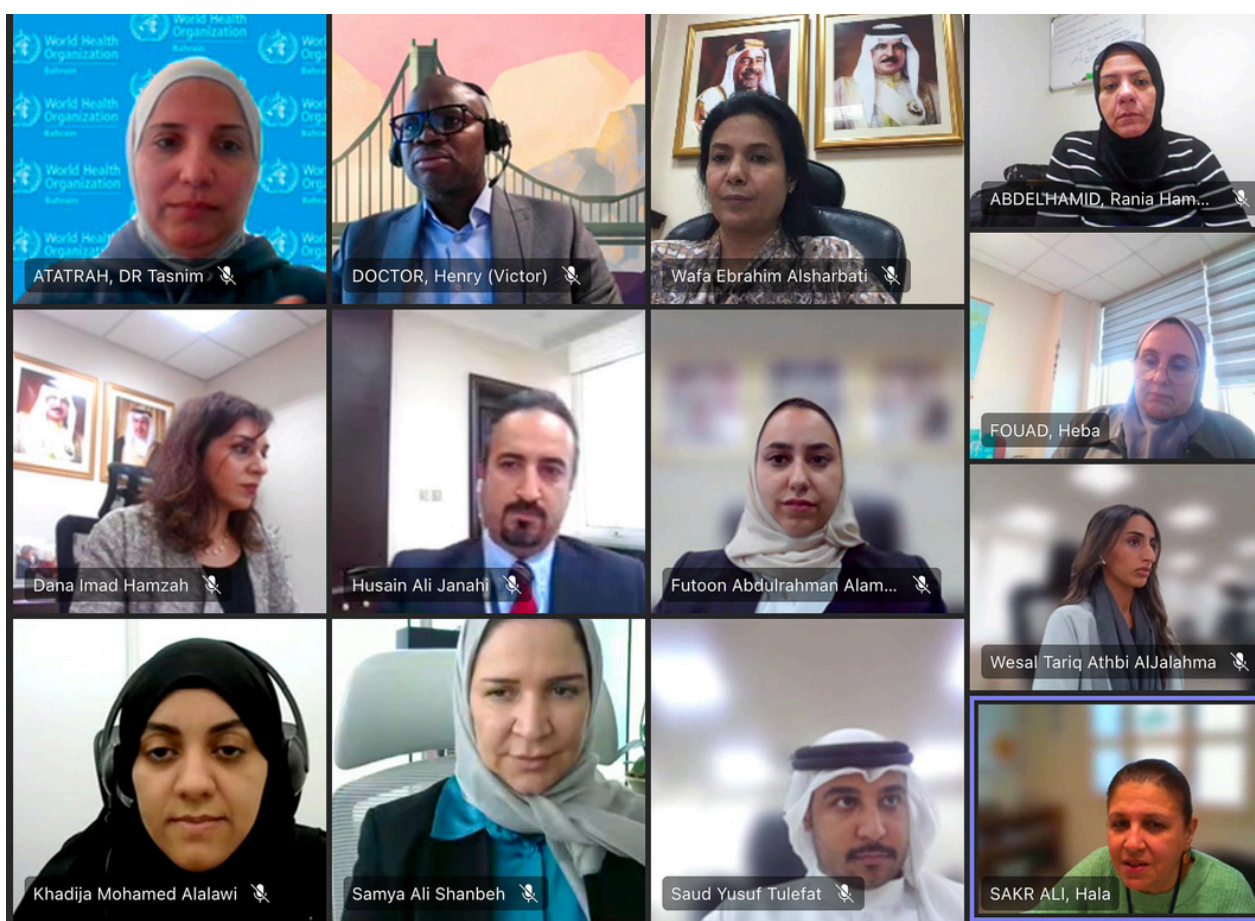


Dr Tasnim Atatrah, WHO Representative, participates in a roundtable discussion on the future of Bahrain's health sector, hosted by the Royal University for Women under the patronage of H.E. Lt. Gen. Dr Shaikh Mohamed bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, alongside representatives from United Nations agencies and national institutions. ©WHO/Bahrain

DELIVERING SDG CONSULTATION TO ENHANCE HEALTH MONITORING

Accurate, timely and disaggregated data are vital for measuring progress towards the 17 SDGs. In March, WHO convened a virtual technical consultation on monitoring the health-related SDGs. This event was part of a series of 17 consultations organized by the Ministry of Sustainable Development, in collaboration with the United Nations Country Team, to enhance national statistical capacities and streamline the collection, monitoring and reporting of SDG data.

Delivered by WHO staff members from the Regional Office, the consultation built the knowledge and skills of over 20 experts on data collection and calculation of health-related SDG indicators and their integration into national monitoring and evaluation frameworks. They included statisticians and specialists from the Ministry of Health, the Information and e-Government Authority, and the Ministry of Sustainable Development. The SDG consultations followed a roundtable discussion held in August 2023 between the Ministry of Sustainable Development and the United Nations Country Team, which explored the challenges and opportunities in collecting and reporting SDG data in Bahrain.



Workshop on calculating Sustainable Development Goal indicators, organized in coordination with the Ministry of Sustainable Development, UN Resident Coordinator Office and WHO, with participation of government representatives. ©WHO/Bahrain

MEETING WITH THE UNITED NATIONS ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR YOUTH AFFAIRS

The United Nations Youth Office was established in 2023 to lead the engagement and advocacy for the advancement of youth issues across the United Nations. The WHO Country Office actively participated in the meeting between the Country Team and Dr Felipe Paullier, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs, on 6 November. The meeting took place on the sidelines of Dr Paullier's visit to Bahrain to participate in the Hope Network, an initiative hosted by the country to support global youth competitiveness. During the meeting, WHO, together with other agencies, briefed Dr Paullier on their ongoing activities to empower the youth of Bahrain, increase their participation in society and enhance their access to education and health care services.



Dr Tasnim Atatrah, WHO Representative, attends the UN Country Team meeting with Dr Felipe Paullier, Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs, held at the UN House in Bahrain. ©WHO/Bahrain

CELEBRATING UNITED NATIONS DAY WITH PARTNERS AND NATIONAL OFFICIALS

United Nations Day, on 24 October, marks the anniversary of the day in 1945 when the United Nations Charter entered into force. The Day offers the opportunity to amplify the common agenda and reaffirm the purposes and principles of the Charter that have guided the United Nations for the past 80 years. On 30 October, organizations and offices of the United Nations system in Bahrain celebrated the Day. The celebration was attended by government officials and the diplomatic corps, in addition to many other stakeholders and partners. The WHO Country Office joined the celebration with other United Nations Country Team members, reflecting the spirit of operating and communicating as one. The event featured many initiatives undertaken recently by the Country Team in Bahrain to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A notable highlight was the booth organized by WHO, which distributed advocacy materials outlining its initiatives and significant achievements.



Dr Tasnim Atatrah, WHO Representative, together with the WHO country team, participates in the United Nations Day 2024 commemoration event. ©WHO/Bahrain

STRENGTHENING WHO'S PRESENCE ON THE GROUND

The physical presence of WHO in countries is pivotal to delivering WHO's technical and normative work and driving impact tailored to the country context. Throughout 2024, WHO worked to enhance its footprint on the ground and ensure the alignment of its programming with the national health needs and priorities through fostering strategic policy dialogues and strengthening technical cooperation.

One key milestone was organizing a consensus-building workshop on the *Country Cooperation Strategy for WHO and Bahrain, 2024–2026*, on 19 September, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health. The workshop aimed to foster a participatory dialogue on WHO's technical cooperation in and with Bahrain in mutually agreed-upon priority areas, guided by national health priorities, the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 and WHO's General Programme of Work. It brought together more than 25 government officials from the Ministry of Health, Primary Health Care Centres, Government Hospitals, the Supreme Council for Environment, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Sustainable Development (Fig. 4).

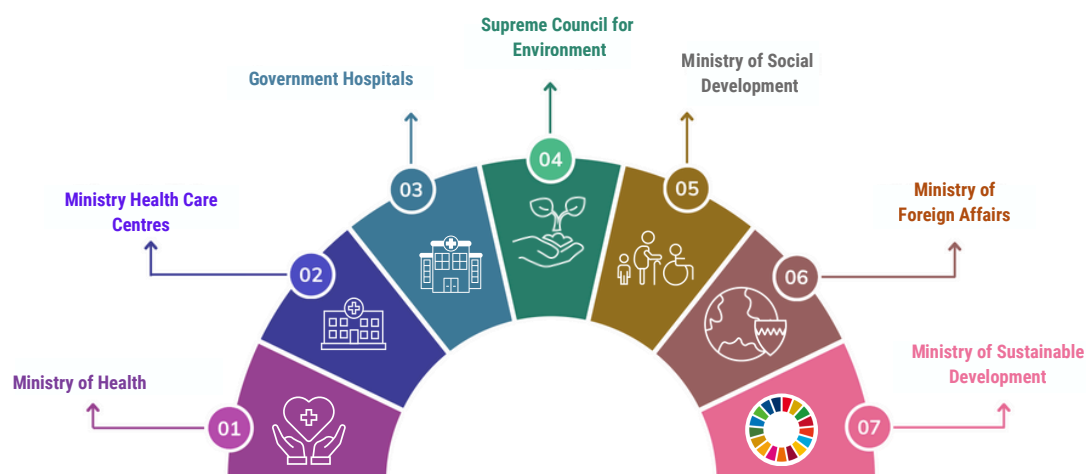


Fig. 4. Stakeholders involved in the development of the CCS

Five strategic priorities for WHO support for the next three years were identified during the workshop: 1) promoting health through transformative action on environmental challenges and the social determinants of health; 2) expanding coverage of essential health services to achieve UHC; 3) protecting health by taking action to strengthen health emergency prevention, preparedness, response and resilience; 4) reinforcing the use of evidence and translating it into interventions and national decision-making; and 5) strengthening health diplomacy, collaboration and partnership, advocacy and strategic communications. The workshop followed the strategic and operational planning workshop, held on 15–16 November 2023, to foster a participatory dialogue on WHO’s technical cooperation with Bahrain and reflect on joint workplan activities for 2022–2023.

FIVE STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR WHO SUPPORT FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS

1

Promoting health through transformative action on environmental challenges and the social determinants of health

2

Expanding coverage of essential health services to achieve UHC

3

Protecting health by taking action to strengthen health emergency prevention, preparedness, response and resilience

4

Reinforcing the use of evidence and translating it into interventions and national decision-making

5

Strengthening health diplomacy, collaboration and partnership, advocacy and strategic communications

COMMUNICATING FOR IMPACT

Strategic communication can change people's attitudes and behaviours and empower them to protect and improve their health and that of their family and community. During the year under review, WHO harnessed the power of communication, incorporating behavioural science insights and principles of accessibility, credibility and relevance, to engage key audiences, communicate health guidance and foster relationships with the broader community. The full range of WHO's products and activities included social media posts, featured stories, Intranet content for WHO staff, news releases and visibility and outreach activities.

176 000 social media shares, likes, saves and comments



5700+ followers over X (formerly known as Twitter), Instagram and Facebook



600+ posts on the WHO Country Office's social media channels



10 social media campaigns to mark international health days



8 news releases on WHO different activities and initiatives



6 media interviews with the WHO Representative in Alwatan, Akhbar Al Khaleej, Al Khaleej Altebi, Bahrain This Week, Gulf Daily News, and Bahrain TV



2 intranet stories on the experience of interning at WHO and the preparations for the 71st session of the Regional Committee



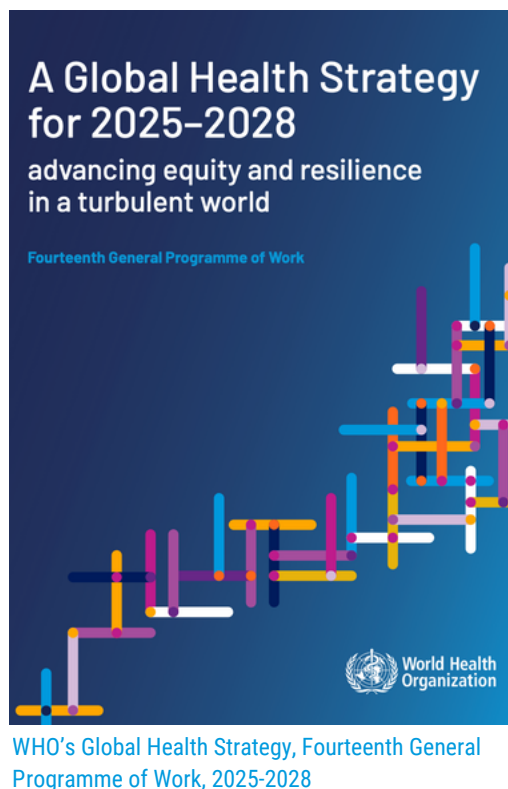
2 two biannual newsletters disseminated electronically to showcase country results



BOOSTING ENGAGEMENT IN WHO GOVERNANCE

WHO's governing bodies serve as an important vehicle for ensuring effective and sustainable mechanisms for dialogue, consultation and cooperation with Member States and key partners. In 2024, WHO contributed to the meaningful and effective participation of Bahrain's ministerial teams in WHO global and regional governing body sessions by providing regular technical briefings, facilitating discussions and disseminating information on proposed agenda items, working documents and draft resolutions.

WHO dedicated significant effort to ensure Bahrain's active participation throughout the Seventy-seventh World Health Assembly, held from 27 May to 1 June. A notable development in this regard was the statement delivered by H.E. Dr Jaleela bint AlSayed Jawad Hasan, Minister of Health, on behalf of the Member States of the Middle East, affirming their commitment to ensuring the highest attainable standard of health for all. In addition, WHO guided the engagement of the national delegation in deliberations on a broad range of global health priorities, including enhancing pandemic preparedness, addressing the impact of climate change on health and increasing access to UHC. The World Health Assembly session concluded with several hard-fought wins, including the adoption of the *WHO Fourteenth General Programme of Work, 2025–2028*, towards building resilient and future-ready health systems.



H.E. Dr Jaleela bint AlSayed Jawad Hasan, Minister of Health, represents Bahrain at the Seventy-seventh World Health Assembly held in Geneva, Switzerland. ©WHO



Dr Hanan Balkhy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, participates in the 71st session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean held in Doha, Qatar. ©WHO



Dr Samya Bahram, Assistant Undersecretary for Public Health, represents Bahrain at the 71st session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean held in Doha, Qatar. ©WHO

Furthermore, WHO provided extensive technical support in the preparation for and during the 71st session of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean to ensure Bahrain's high-level engagement. This included facilitating Bahrain's participation in the nineteenth meeting of the Programme Subcommittee of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, held on 6–7 March, to discuss arrangements for the 71st session, including the proposed technical agenda items. Similarly, WHO supported the national delegation throughout the Regional Committee session from 14 to 17 October, prompting their active participation in discussions about technical papers and draft resolutions tackling priority public health challenges, from trauma and mental health needs in emergency settings to AMR, immunization and the digitalization of health information systems. One defining feature of the 71st session was the formal endorsement of the WHO Strategic Operational Plan, which covers the Regional Office's work for the next four years. Additionally, the Committee approved the Regional Director's three flagship initiatives on expanding equitable access to essential medicines, vaccines and medical products, investing in a more resilient health workforce and scaling up public health action on substance use.

REGIONAL DIRECTOR'S THREE FLAGSHIP INITIATIVES



Expanding equitable access to essential medicines, vaccines and medical products



Investing in a more resilient health workforce



Scaling up public health action on substance use

LEVERAGING PARTNERSHIPS FOR HEALTH

Health partnerships support coordination efforts and offer common platforms for collaborative work towards a healthier world. Throughout 2024, WHO worked to deepen existing partnerships and establish new ones. One flagship example is the partnership that WHO established and nourished with the diplomatic corps in Bahrain to enhance strategic collaboration and foster constructive dialogue on improving health and well-being. WHO actively participated in a number of events organized by the Embassy of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to promote the rights of expatriate workers and inform them about available social and health services. These events saw the presence of government officials, United Nations representatives and the wider Bangladeshi community. Similarly, WHO arranged meetings with the ambassadors of Egypt, Kuwait, Oman, the Republic of Korea, Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates to explore areas of joint cooperation and partnership.

Moreover, WHO continued to strengthen partnerships with the three Bahraini health champions selected as part of WHO's 75th-anniversary campaign: Dr Amal Al Jowder, former Director of Health Promotion at the Ministry of Health; Mr Abbas Almosawi, a world-renowned artist; and Ms Ruba Al Omari, a pioneering para-athlete. For example, the country office team met Ms Ruba Al-Omari on the occasion of Bahrain Sports Day to celebrate her remarkable achievements at the 12th Sharjah International Open Para Athletics Meeting and inspire positive change towards better health and well-being for all.



WHO country team meeting with Ruba Al-Omari, WHO75 Health Champion, at Bahrain Fort. ©WHO/Bahrain

PROMOTING STAFF WELL-BEING AND INVESTING IN THE WHO COUNTRY OFFICE'S CAPACITIES

The WHO Country Office is committed to fostering a healthier, safer and more inclusive workplace that places the well-being of its workforce at the centre of its management strategy. For example, WHO continued to organize wellness activities for its staff, including walks and creative art projects, to improve their physical and mental well-being.

Efforts were also exerted to strengthen the skill set of the country office staff and consultants in different areas by facilitating their participation and involvement in global, regional and country-level capacity-building activities.

CELEBRATING TEAM INNOVATION

Dr Tasnim Atatrah, WHO Representative in Bahrain during the year under review, received the WHO Director-General Lead Innovation Award in 2024 in recognition of her pivotal role in the LEAD Catalyst Innovation Network, a catalytic space for the WHO workforce to innovate and solve global health challenges.





WHO country team in Bahrain walking around Bahrain Fort on the occasion of Bahrain Sport Day 2024. ©WHO/Bahrain



WHO country team celebrates World Environment Day 2024. ©WHO/Bahrain

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