

**REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN
Seventieth Session
Cairo, Egypt, 9–12 October 2023**

October 2023

**YOUTH HEALTH AND WELL-BEING IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN
REGION: A BETTER FUTURE FOR ALL BY ALL**

Objectives of the event

A panel discussion will be held on 11 October 2023 on youth health and well-being in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: a better future for all by all. The panel will include representatives of relevant United Nations organizations, youth associations (medical students' associations and others), and scientific and civil society organizations active in young people's health, disability and engagement.

The objectives of the event are to:

- prioritize approaches for the meaningful engagement and inclusion of adolescents and youth in health issues in the Region;
- address key youth health issues such as mental health, high-risk behaviours, and preventing and managing the health consequences of violence and injuries, including road traffic injuries;
- emphasize the health needs of young people in humanitarian settings, including those of refugees and internally displaced populations;
- capitalize on successful implementation of the Healthy Settings approach to engage young adults, and showcase regional examples of young people's involvement in health-related programmes;
- encourage a positive working synergy between adults and young people during the development, implementation and evaluation of policies, research and/or health promotion efforts that target the youth population.

Background

Youth (between the ages of 15 and 24 years) is a dynamic period in life. It is also a period of complex transition, when many factors affect young people's health, development and well-being. Moreover, half of preventable premature deaths in adulthood are associated with health risk behaviours that start during youth (for example, poor dietary and physical activity patterns, substance abuse). Such behaviours can continue and impact people's lives as the leading causes of noncommunicable diseases, morbidity and mortality. Yet many of the causes of ill health and mortality among young people are preventable if properly and systematically addressed.

Globally, an estimated 2.1 million children, adolescents and young adults aged 5–24 years died in 2021. Over half of these deaths occurred among adolescents and young adults aged 15–24 years (1). In 2021, the global mortality rate for males aged 15–24 years was 13 deaths per 1000 children aged 15, and for females aged 15–24 was 8 deaths per 1000 children aged 15. In the Eastern Mediterranean Region of the World Health Organization (WHO), the probability of dying at age 15–24 years is 13 per 1000 children aged 15, which is the second highest rate after the African Region. In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, the number of deaths among young adults aged 15–24 years was 180 000 in 2021 compared to 147 000 in 1990. It is important to note that male youth are at very much higher risk of death as compared to females (almost double). The regional mortality rate for male youth aged 15–24 was 17 deaths per 1000 children aged 15 and for female youth was 9 deaths per 1000 children aged 15. Road traffic injuries, drowning and violence are among the main causes of death among male youth (aged 15–19 years), while maternal conditions are

the leading cause of death among females. Mental health problems contribute to the majority of years lost to disability for both males and females (2). Engaging in risky behaviours is a key determinant of young adults' current and future health. In the Region, tobacco use, insufficient physical activity and non-healthy eating habits remain highly prevalent. Among girls, early marriage and adolescent pregnancies represent a serious threat to their health and well-being.

WHO advises that young people should be included as active partners in all health-related activity stages, from design through to evaluation, especially for programmes affecting their own health (3,4). Youth engagement enables influencing processes and decisions that affect their health and well-being, and can also enable them to act as change catalysts for their environment (for example, among peers, families, services, communities and policies). It is key to ensure that such engagement is inclusive of young people with disabilities and those living in humanitarian and emergency settings, while taking gender considerations into account.

Young adults have great potential, energy, power, enthusiasm and creativity to collaboratively seek solutions to complex and costly challenges. Evidence shows that young people's participation in institutional and governmental decisions enhances their credibility among communities and society, while improving public services by promoting more transparent actions and a participative culture (5). There are many opportunities for accessing adolescents and youth embedded in WHO Healthy Settings initiatives, such as health promoting schools, healthy universities, healthy villages and healthy cities. Such settings provide opportunities for establishing multisectoral platforms that include young adults of both sexes, allowing them to play a role in programmes to improve their own health and well-being in addition to influencing the health of communities in general.

As youth constitute nearly one fifth of the population of the Eastern Mediterranean Region – around 140 million in 2021 (6) – their health and well-being, as well as their engagement in health-promoting initiatives, needs to be at the top of WHO's agenda in the Region.

Challenges in the Region

The Eastern Mediterranean Region is facing multiple humanitarian emergencies and instabilities which have huge direct and indirect impacts on adolescents and young adults. Traditional sociocultural norms and values also play an influential role in affecting the health of young people in the Region, particularly girls. The COVID-19 pandemic imposed many challenges on youth health initiatives with the obvious shifting of attention and resources, and has had long-lasting consequences on young people's mental health. In addition, the use of social media and digital technologies presents a challenge in today's world, as well as offering opportunities through digital solutions.

Expected outcomes

- Youth health issues prioritized on health ministry agendas in the Region and open dialogue initiated on long-neglected youth health needs.
- Promotion of effective youth involvement in every stage of health-related activities.
- Synergy encouraged between young people and relevant stakeholders including policy-makers, health and development sectors, academia and researchers.
- Youth participation planned and implemented as part of health promotion approaches involving stakeholders and partners to achieve health and well-being goals.
- Implementation of the Healthy Settings approach (health promoting schools, healthy universities, healthy villages and healthy cities) as a platform for young adult development and engagement.

Panellists

- H.E. Dr Ali Haji Adan, Minister of Health and Human Services, Somalia
- H.E. Kamal Daqish, Minister of Youth and Sports, Tunisia

- Dr Faris Elfarsi, Omani Youth Council, Oman
- Dr Arwa Hany, Liaison Officer to WHO and former Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA).

Moderated interventions from:

- Professor Fadia S. AlBuhairan, President, Arab Coalition for Adolescent Health and Medicine (ACAHM) and Member of the Strategic and Technical Advisory Group for Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health and Nutrition (STAGE)
- Dr Abeer Al Maamari, Director of Patient Services, Ministry of Health, Oman
- Dr Laila Baker, Regional Director for Arab States in UNFPA
- Dr Amr Hamdy, Regional Director for Arab Scout Region, World Organization of the Scout Movement
- Iba'a Shawki Amin Hamed, Member of the Jordan Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Agenda

Time	Event	Presenter/speaker
Introductory remarks (10 minutes)		
12:30–12:32	Introductory remarks	Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean
12:32–12:35	Introduction to the session and panellists	Dr Maha El-Adawy, Director for Healthier Populations
Panellists' presentations (30 minutes)		
12:35–12:42	Youth health in emergencies	H.E. Dr Ali Haji Adan, Minister of Health, Somalia
12:42–12:47	Youth dialogue for health and well-being (recorded statement)	H.E. Kamal Daqish, Minister of Youth and Sports, Tunisia
12:47–12:52	Youth involvement in health and well-being	Dr Arwa Hany, Liaison Officer to WHO and former Regional Director, International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA)
12:52–12:57	Youth community-based actions	Dr Faris Elfarsi, Omani Youth Council, Oman
Discussion and conclusion (20 minutes)		
12:57–13:07	Moderated interventions	Professor Fadia S. AlBuhairan, Dr Abeer Al Maamari, Dr Laila Baker, Dr Amr Hamdy, Ms Iba'a Shawki Amin Hamed
13:07–13:25	Q&A	Dr Maha El-Adawy
13:25–13:30	Closing remarks	Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari

References

1. UN-IGME, UNICEF, WHO, WORLD BANK GROUP. Levels & trends in child mortality, report 2022. Estimates developed by the United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation. New York, NY: United Nations Children's Fund; 2022 (<https://childmortality.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/UN-IGME-Child-Mortality-Report-2022.pdf>, accessed 8 March 2023).
2. WHO Global health observatory [online database]. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2023 (<https://www.who.int/data/gho>, accessed 8 March 2023).
3. WHO/UNFPA/UNICEF Study Group on Programming for Adolescent Health. Programming for adolescent health and development: report of a WHO/UNFPA/UNICEF study group on programming for adolescent health. Geneva, World Health Organization; 1999 (<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/42149>, accessed 8 March 2023).
4. Jensen BB, Simovska V, Larsen N, Holm LG. Young people want to be part of the answer. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2005 (https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/111355/E85627.pdf, accessed 8 March 2023).
5. Children's participation in public decision-making. Why should I involve children? Brussels: Jeunesse de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles; 2014 (https://eurochild.org/uploads/2021/01/OEJAJ_VADEMECUM.pdf, accessed 8 March 2023).
6. World Population Prospects 2022 [online database]. New York, NY: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs; 2022 (<https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/>, accessed 8 March 2023).