

**REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE  
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN  
Sixty-eighth Session  
Cairo, Egypt, 11–14 October 2021**

**October 2021**

**MEASURING AND VERIFYING EXCESS MORTALITY DURING A PANDEMIC**

**Objectives of the event**

Within the context of WHO's efforts to support countries to implement robust death registration systems and accurate identification of cause of death as part of the broader agenda to strengthen health information systems, the objectives of the event are to:

- highlight challenges to improve the quality of mortality and cause of death data in the Region;
- emphasize the importance of timely collection of data as evidenced by the lack of timely, reliable and disaggregated COVID-19 data which has challenged effective and better targeted policies and resource allocation;
- highlight novel approaches to interpret and use mortality data for evidence-based decision-making.

**Background**

Monitoring the number of deaths by their causes is essential to effectively measure the impact of interventions to improve health outcomes. Despite efforts to improve availability of mortality data by cause of death, most countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region are still struggling to enhance their disease surveillance systems and to reliably report on progress towards achieving health-related targets. This challenge has become more prominent in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the Region reporting almost 14 million cases of COVID-19 and 252 418 deaths as of 17 August 2021. Most countries in the Region have health information systems that generate cause-of-death data, however these systems are limited in terms of coverage, completeness and accuracy. Universal registration of deaths by age, sex and cause of death is still lacking in several countries of the Region and this poses challenges to assessing the direct and indirect impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Where relevant data exist, it is necessary to use all available data sources and methods to assess and compare mortality levels during the pandemic and pre-pandemic period.

**Related documents**

- Progress report on regional strategy for the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems 2014–2019. Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; 2019 ([http://applications.emro.who.int/docs/RC\\_Technical\\_Papers\\_2019\\_Inf\\_Doc\\_3\\_en.pdf?ua=1](http://applications.emro.who.int/docs/RC_Technical_Papers_2019_Inf_Doc_3_en.pdf?ua=1)).
- Vital Strategies, World Health Organization. Revealing the toll of COVID-19: a technical package for rapid mortality surveillance and epidemic response. New York, NY: Vital Strategies; 2020 ([https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/documents/ddi/rms\\_report\\_v04-\(2\)3cb3c4d5-d98d-4dcf-b6fc-39bdbfb1a51d.pdf?sfvrsn=4950b624\\_1&download=true](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/documents/ddi/rms_report_v04-(2)3cb3c4d5-d98d-4dcf-b6fc-39bdbfb1a51d.pdf?sfvrsn=4950b624_1&download=true)).

## **Panellists**

- H.E. Dr Fatima Mohamed Al Ajmi, Undersecretary for Administrative, Financial and Planning Affairs, Ministry of Health, Oman
- Ms Hilda Harb, Head of Department of Statistics, Ministry of Public Health, Lebanon
- Professor Alan D Lopez, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne, Australia
- Dr Philip Setel, Vice President and Director, Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, Vital Strategies, United States of America
- Moderator: Dr Arash Rashidian, Director, Science Information and Dissemination, WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean