

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

October 2021

**BUILD BACK FAIRER: ACHIEVING HEALTH EQUITY IN THE EASTERN
MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

On 13 October 2021, a panel event on building back fairer, achieving health equity in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, will be held by virtual modality. Addressing health inequities and the social determinants of health is central to achievement of WHO's Thirteenth General Programme of Work (GPW 13), *Vision 2023* for the Region and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The objectives of the event are to:

- inform participants on the findings and recommendations of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health in the Eastern Mediterranean Region;
- to encourage prioritization of evidence-based actions to reduce health inequities in the Region;
- to discuss the operationalization of the recommendations from the Commission in the context of the Region.

Background

In November 2019, the Regional Director convened the Commission on Social Determinants of Health in the Eastern Mediterranean Region with a one-year mandate to analyse health inequities and recommend an action agenda for Member States, WHO and partner organizations. The Commission, comprising global and regional health and development experts and led by Sir Michael Marmot, collected data, met diverse stakeholders and worked on drafting policy and practice recommendations to address the social determinants of health in the Region. In view of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on health inequities in the Region, the Regional Director extended the duration and mandate of the Commission to March 2021. The Commission had its concluding meeting in December 2020 and its report – *Build back fairer: achieving health equity in the Eastern Mediterranean Region* – was launched on 31 March 2021.

Results of the Commission's analysis indicate widespread inequities in health and development within and between countries of the Region, with serious implications for the realization of the GPW 13, *Vision 2023* and the Sustainable Development Goals. The findings also indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these inequities, compromising the ambition and abilities of governments and stakeholders in health and development in the Region. The Region-specific health equity analysis and the scope of the Commission's recommendations are timely. The Seventy-fourth session of the World Health Assembly in May 2021 adopted resolution WHA74.16 on Social determinants of health which reinforces the significance of the topic and its implications for post COVID recovery in a fairer manner.

Expected outcomes

- Regional Committee participants informed on the findings and recommendations of the SDH Commission.

- Debate generated on how countries, with the support of WHO and other development/humanitarian organizations, can promote health equity with effective implementation of the recommendations of the SDH Commission.
- Consensus gained on the proposed strategic actions to be taken by the Member States, WHO and stakeholders as next steps.

Panellists

- Professor Sir Michael Marmot, Chair of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health in the Eastern Mediterranean Region
- H.E. Faeqa bint Saeed Al-Saleh, Minister of Health, Bahrain
- Mr Ted Chaiban, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa
- Professor Rajae El Aouad, President of the Moroccan Commission on Health Equity
- Ms Arwa Hany, International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA)
- Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Region

The moderator for the panel discussion will be Professor Sir Michael Marmot.