



Message from

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the Eastern Mediterranean

on the occasion of

**World Tuberculosis Day**

**24 March 2022**

On World TB Day 2022, I am calling on countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region to “Invest to End TB. Save Lives!”.

WHO estimates that tuberculosis (TB) killed more people worldwide in 2021 than any other infectious disease, except COVID-19. The health, social and economic impacts of TB are devastating.

In 2020, TB deaths rose in our Region for the first time in over a decade, from 77 700 to 83 000. Treatment coverage decreased to 52%, meaning that approximately half of all people with TB were neither diagnosed nor treated.

In 2021, 38% of the financial needs for TB were unfunded. We urgently need to invest more to increase access to essential TB services for children and adults alike. Investing more in TB will help to find missing cases, reduce mortality and improve productivity. One dollar well invested in TB prevention and care can yield more than 40 dollars in return.

Investment in TB is needed across the whole of society. Undernutrition, poverty, HIV, diabetes and tobacco are among the key drivers of the TB epidemic. To address TB comorbidities and unfavourable socioeconomic determinants more effectively in all their dimensions, we need to get beyond the health sector and collaborate as per the TB Multisectoral Accountability Framework. At schools and universities, we must talk about TB to create awareness and reduce stigma. Over half the children and adolescents with TB, experience difficulties in diagnosis and treatment.

The new WHO policy guidance issued around World TB Day this year will allow us to make further progress. In penitentiary and military facilities and in all workplaces, TB screening and early treatment is critical. That way, all members of our societies, including soldiers, detainees, children, students and workers, will be healthier, and more productive for our societies, creating a good return on investment for us all.

We can only end TB if we work closely together, investing more in TB across sectors and with all partners – most importantly, with the communities affected by this dreadful disease. Only then will we reach the milestones and targets in the End TB Strategy and the Political Declaration of the UN General Assembly High-level Meeting on the Fight Against Tuberculosis. To achieve our regional vision of health for all by all and universal health coverage, we must end TB in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

