



Message from

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for the Eastern Mediterranean

on the occasion of

**World Tuberculosis Day**

24 March 2023

**Yes!**



**We can  
#EndTB!**

Today is World Tuberculosis Day – a time to reflect on what we can do to end tuberculosis (TB), which kills more people worldwide than any other infectious disease. In 2020 and 2021, more than 85 000 people died from TB in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. But the effects of TB are not limited to health; its impact on societies and economies is devastating.

Today, I have a concern that we are falling behind on our targets. Our regional goal was to cut the incidence of TB by 20% between 2015 and 2020, but we barely reached 5%. Our goal was also to reduce TB-related deaths by 35% between 2015 and 2020, but we only reduced deaths by 6%. So I call for action!

Fighting TB starts by finding people who have been infected and treating them. TB services were among many others disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic but the impact on TB was particularly severe and fewer people were diagnosed. I am pleased to report that now, COVID-19-related disruptions to TB services have been followed by an almost complete recovery. However, in 2021 we estimate that 350 000 people with TB in our Region were neither diagnosed nor treated so WHO is calling for more systematic and inclusive engagement of all health care professionals in the

public and private sectors to improve diagnosis and reporting. Addressing diagnosis is really key for us. Once patients are diagnosed, our treatment success rate remains the highest of all six WHO regions.

While funding for TB increased in 2021 compared with 2020, only half of countries' needs have been met. We are grateful to our donors and partners, but we need to invest more in TB, including from national health budgets. By increasing funding, we can find missing TB patients, lower TB mortality and increase productivity. This can only be done by expanding universal health coverage to ensure that everyone has access to TB diagnosis and treatment everywhere.

But TB is also influenced by social and economic determinants of health and risk factors, including malnutrition, HIV infection, diabetes and smoking. So we can only end TB by working closely together in a multisectoral way. We need to invest more, with a broader perspective, across sectors, with all partners, and with affected communities. Only then will we achieve the milestones and targets of the End TB Strategy. This is our ambition, and in the spirit of our regional vision of Health for All by All, together we can end TB!