

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

**October 2023**

**MINIMIZING MORBIDITY AND MORTALITY DUE TO TRAUMA IN HUMANITARIAN  
SETTINGS**

**Objectives of the event**

On 9 October 2023, a technical discussion will be held on trauma care in humanitarian settings in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

The objectives of the event are to:

- brief Member States on the substantial public health burden of trauma-related injuries in humanitarian settings and the need to invest in robust trauma care services in these settings to reduce avoidable death and disability;
- extend WHO technical support to low- and middle-income countries for the development of robust trauma care services in humanitarian settings;
- discuss the need for a resolution on trauma care in humanitarian settings in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

**Background**

Traumatic injuries are a major cause of death and disability. Globally each year, approximately 5 million deaths occur as a result of injuries and nearly 45 million people acquire a disability due to traumatic injuries (1,2). Worldwide, a significant burden of injury-related death is borne by low- and middle-income countries. In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, injury death rates are nearly three times higher in low- and middle-income countries than in high-income countries (1). Fragile and conflict-affected settings are particularly affected; therefore, the populations most in need of trauma care services are those least able to access them.

In 2021, fatalities resulting from organized violence increased by 46% globally compared to the previous year (3). In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, trauma-related fatalities are similarly on the rise with nine of its 22 countries and territories experiencing ongoing conflict or sporadic outbursts of violence. However, the surge in demand for trauma care services across the Region is not only attributable to conflict but is also a result of natural and man-made disasters, such as the earthquakes that have affected the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, the Beirut port blast that injured more than 6500 people in 2020 (4) and a blast in Pakistan that killed at least 100 civilians in January 2023. WHO recorded more than 400 mass casualty incidents across the Region in 2022, but the actual number is likely to be at least twice as high. Civilian trauma remains a constant and inherent threat across many Member States of the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Furthermore, evidence shows that children (the future of any society) and young adults (the most economically productive demographic) are disproportionately affected by trauma. Specifically, WHO data revealed that in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, children under the age of 15 account for 40% of civilian trauma, often leading to premature death or long-term disability (Emergency Operations Unit, WHO Health Emergencies Programme, WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, unpublished survey, 2022).

In high-income countries the management of trauma has improved significantly, both through advancements in clinical interventions and (perhaps more importantly) the development of trauma systems that coordinate prehospital-, facility- and community-level care. This has yet to permeate into health systems in low-income economies: basic trauma care services do not exist in large parts of the Region – least of all in humanitarian settings – resulting in avoidable deaths and disability. It is vital to build sustainable trauma care capacity in

humanitarian settings through investment in and enhancement of national structures and the local health workforce. This should take into consideration the necessity of managing a patient from the point of injury through to rehabilitation, and should be underpinned by robust prevention strategies. The goal is to save lives and enable victims to be re-integrated into society, thereby reducing the long-term social and economic burden on communities.

The WHO Regional Trauma Initiative is the first of its kind, committed to ensuring that effective trauma care services can be consistently established during humanitarian emergencies in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Within 18 months of its inception, the Initiative reached approximately 800 000 injured patients across fragile and conflict-affected countries, responding to over 200 mass casualty incidents. It has paved the way for trauma management within WHO and extended its support to other WHO regional offices. Central to the Regional Trauma Initiative is supporting the development of national and local trauma care services and integrating efforts into health systems for lasting change.

## Challenges in the Region

A recent WHO analysis in the Region revealed that between 60% and 80% of all trauma-related deaths in low- and middle-income countries occur before reaching the hospital (Emergency Operations Unit, WHO Health Emergencies Programme, WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, unpublished research, 2022). Approximately one quarter of these fatalities could be avoidable with basic control of haemorrhage at the time of injury. However, in low-resource settings, prehospital services are rudimentary and often laypersons are required to stabilize and even transport injured patients (5). Cited barriers to improvements in trauma care include inadequate funding, lack of leadership, lack of legislation for setting standards, and a lack of expertise (6).

## Expected outcomes

- Member States briefed on the substantial public health burden of trauma-related injuries in humanitarian settings and the need to invest in robust trauma care services in these settings to reduce avoidable death and disability.
- WHO technical support extended to low- and middle-income countries for the development of robust trauma care services in humanitarian settings.
- Discussion of the need for a resolution on trauma care in humanitarian settings in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

## References

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