

Summary report on the

**Regional meeting on
integrated disease
surveillance in the
Eastern Mediterranean
Region**

Cairo, Egypt
14–18 May 2023



**World Health
Organization**

Eastern Mediterranean Region

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1. Introduction

The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean held a regional meeting on integrated disease surveillance (IDS) in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region in Cairo, Egypt, on 14–18 May 2023. The meeting was convened by the inter-departmental WHO Technical Working Group on IDS and attended by representatives from the countries in the Region, WHO staff from headquarters, the Regional Office and country offices, and key donors and partners. The meeting was held in a hybrid format, with participants able to attend virtually as well.

The specific objectives of the meeting were to:

- update the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region on the recent steps taken to support the adoption of IDS;
- identify best practices, challenges and lessons learned in IDS implementation in countries of the Region, including polio transition countries;
- assess countries against agreed benchmarks for implementation of the regional strategy for integrated disease surveillance;
- develop a road map of key actions to be taken at country level and obtain consensus on national IDS coordination and monitoring mechanisms; and
- ensure IDS strategies are conducted as part of an integrated national health information system.

As part of the meeting, a workshop was held on using the open-source District Health Information Software (DHIS2) as an electronic platform for IDS to create awareness of DHIS2 capacities in disease surveillance, familiarize countries with DHIS2, collect Region-specific user requirements for the customization of DHIS2 and provide input to the electronic component of the regional IDS road map.

The meeting aimed to assess the surveillance situation in the Region, guide countries in developing national implementation plans and establish a monitoring and evaluation framework for IDS.

In his opening address, Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, observed that the COVID-19 pandemic had underlined the need for effective public health surveillance as a core component of health information systems and public health intelligence, detecting potential public health threats and monitoring disease morbidity and mortality to guide prevention and control measures. He emphasized that effective disease surveillance and response not only saved lives, but also offered a high return on financial investment by helping to avoid large-scale economic disruption from epidemics. The Regional Director noted that the regional strategy on IDS was a guide for Member States in strengthening and integrating their national surveillance systems, feeding into regional and global efforts to strengthen collective public health intelligence. He said that effective IDS entailed good governance and multisectoral coordination to organize the convergence of disease- and programme-specific surveillance systems towards integration. Dr Al-Mandhari concluded by saying that he hoped the meeting would pave the way for the integration of IDS in the Region and stronger regional collaboration and knowledge-sharing.

2. Summary of discussions

The meeting included interactive presentations and information-sharing by WHO, countries and partners in plenary sessions followed by discussions and group work. The plenary sessions include presentations on the major challenges for IDS and proposed solutions, the surveillance workforce and the engagement of IDS stakeholders.

The following challenges were identified and extensively discussed during the meeting:

- poor governance structures and mechanisms for IDS;
- limited country technical and operational capacity to integrate different surveillance data;
- limited funding or funding fragmentation due to different surveillance systems and powerful vertical programmes;
- donor-driven surveillance systems that limit the sustainability of IDS;
- limited multisectoral collaboration between surveillance actors;
- lack of a clear vision and policy for a national integrated surveillance system by governments and stakeholders;
- limitations in data quality and completeness, even when surveillance systems are in place; and
- disconnection between laboratory and surveillance systems.

The participants identified the following approaches to overcome the identified challenges: strengthening governance mechanisms (including the development of legislation, policies and national road maps/action plans), ensuring the availability of clear guidance documents, the costing and sustainable financing of IDS systems, digitalization, capacity-building and engaging broader surveillance stakeholders.

The meeting concluded with over 90 participants from 22 countries/territories and nine partner organizations worked to draft country road maps for successfully implementing IDS, guided by the 10 domains of the regional strategy.


3. Recommendations

To Member States

1. Establish a national governing body to support IDS.
2. Involve all relevant sectors in the planning, design and implementation of IDS.
3. Develop legislation and policies for a national surveillance system.
4. Conduct a comprehensive assessment of existing surveillance systems to identify gaps and needs, and plan to address these gaps.
5. Develop a national IDS road map and action plan.
6. Develop/adapt technical guidance and standard operating procedures.
7. Allocate sufficient human resources for surveillance and laboratories.
8. Pool the resources for surveillance and promote integrated surveillance to avoid the duplication of efforts and to improve efficiency and effectiveness.
9. Allocate domestic investment and funding, when needed.

To WHO and partners

10. Enhance the capacity of countries and promote ownership of the IDS by national governments and entities.
11. Consolidate country-specific support from the WHO Regional Office's Technical Working Group on IDS within a single masterplan that supports progressive convergence towards integration.
12. Provide countries with guidance and tools for IDS national planning and implementation.
13. Support countries in the digitalization of their surveillance systems.
14. Support countries in costing the integration of surveillance.
15. Mobilize technical and financial partners to support the implementation of national IDS plans.
16. Provide tools for monitoring, evaluation and supervision.



World Health Organization
Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean
Monazamet El Seha El Alamia Street,
Extension of Abdel Razak El Sanhoury Street
P.O. Box 7608, Nasr City
Cairo 11371, Egypt
www.emro.who.int