

Summary report on the
**Regional meeting to
establish and strengthen
emergency medical
teams in the Eastern
Mediterranean Region**

Hammamet, Tunisia
13–15 June 2023



**World Health
Organization**

Eastern Mediterranean Region

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1. Introduction

Emergency medical teams (EMTs) are groups of health professionals, including doctors, nurses and paramedics, who provide care for patients affected by an emergency. The World Health Organization (WHO)-led EMT Initiative was formed after the devastating 2010 earthquake in Haiti, quickly growing into a significant network of qualified medical teams, trained and prepared to provide immediate support during an emergency. When emergencies strike, the EMT network is mobilized as part of the national response—treating patients, imparting training to and supervision of emergency care providers, strengthening coordination between different pillars of emergency medical response, and adhering to guiding principles and standards to ensure quality of care.

The purpose of the EMT Initiative is to improve the timeliness and quality of care and enhance the capacity of national health systems to lead the activation and coordination of rapid response capacities in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, outbreak and/or other emergency. The effective functioning of EMTs thus needs to be embedded within the overall national emergency care system and aligned with national emergency/disaster preparedness and response plans.

At the Seventy-fifth World Health Assembly in May 2022, the WHO Director-General of the presented proposals for strengthening the global architecture for health emergency preparedness, response and resilience (HEPR), addressing three main elements: governance, systems and financing. Discussions reaffirmed the importance of EMTs in addressing challenges as part of the HEPR, particularly regarding strengthening the global health emergency workforce and emergency care systems at national, regional and global levels. In response to these proposals, the EMT Secretariat developed the EMT 2030 Strategy.

The EMT 2030 Strategy considers the EMT concept to be inclusive of all emergency medical teams and capacities for providing emergency care at global, regional, national and subnational levels. The Strategy aims to serve all countries and organizations that want to build and strengthen such surge capacities for their own national systems and for providing international assistance if/when capable.

The WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region is the source of 60% of the global refugee population, and faces many disease outbreaks (including vaccine-preventable diseases) and armed conflicts, which compound other ongoing challenges. State Party Self-Assessment Annual Reporting Tool assessments and Joint External Evaluations of implementation of the International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005) have highlighted a need to monitor and evaluate EMT capacities in the Region. Furthermore, multisectoral action is needed to ensure emergency response efforts include the governmental, nongovernmental and private sectors.

In this context, a regional meeting on establishing and strengthening EMTs in the Eastern Mediterranean Region was held in Hammamet, Tunisia, on 13–15 June 2023, to introduce the EMT 2030 Strategy, foster regional collaboration on emergency care systems and trauma initiatives, and prepare the ground for implementation of the EMT 2030 Strategy.

The specific objectives of the meeting were to:

- raise awareness of and introduce the EMT 2030 Strategy;
- share country experience in establishing and deploying EMTs;
- present the existing framework and regional experiences on emergency care systems and linkages with EMTs;
- develop a regional action plan for establishing and strengthening EMTs in the Region; and
- establish a regional EMT network for implementation of the regional action plan.

The meeting involved more than 70 participants from 19 countries, with diverse representation from across the Eastern Mediterranean Region and other WHO regions, as well as international partners, including the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC), Center for Research and Training in Disaster Medicine, Humanitarian Aid and Global Health (CRIMEDIM), International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), and World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine (WADEM). The active engagement of this diverse representation enriched discussions on EMT Initiative implementation in the Region and collective identification of regional priorities and targets.

As the first-ever regional event on the EMT Initiative, the meeting offered a platform for key stakeholders and the EMT community in the Region to discuss and develop a shared understanding of the Initiative and constituted a milestone in WHO's efforts to assist governments in building and enhancing national EMT capacities to address a wide range of emergency scenarios.

2. Summary of discussions

EMT concepts, evolution and strategies

The meeting commenced by reviewing the ever-evolving role of EMTs in addressing the escalating challenges posed by increasingly frequent and complex emergencies within the Eastern Mediterranean Region. With a staggering 103 million people forcibly displaced in the Region, participants recognized the paramount importance of ensuring that EMT deployments are executed with precision, timeliness, appropriateness, safety and seamless coordination. At present, there are 38 officially classified EMTs operating worldwide, and the discussions during the meeting highlighted a critical need to bolster EMT capabilities through the establishment of robust regulatory frameworks,

efficient coordination mechanisms, cutting-edge research systems and agile operational requirements.

Participants highlighted multi-country training hubs and peer mentoring initiatives as invaluable tools for cultivating EMT competencies. These initiatives, while not without their challenges, were seen as mechanisms capable of fostering resilient EMT teams that can adapt their approaches to suit the unique demands of each national context. An example was provided by Tunisia, where an ongoing effort to establish an EMT has united all relevant stakeholders, including the civil defence, in a collaborative endeavour.

As the meeting unfolded, it became increasingly evident that the evolving landscape of emergency response in the Region demands a multifaceted approach that not only emphasizes the continuous strengthening of EMT capacities but also acknowledges the importance of collaboration between various stakeholders, irrespective of sector. The meeting laid a strong foundation for fostering a regionally cohesive, adaptable and highly effective EMT network, poised to tackle the pressing challenges of an ever-changing emergency landscape in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

Linkages with regional emergency care systems and trauma initiatives

Participants discussed the need for integration of EMTs within the broader framework of national emergency care systems, while aligning them with emergency and disaster preparedness and response plans. Among the paramount concerns that emerged was the high mortality rate during the crucial prehospital care phase, highlighting the need to fortify prehospital care systems, building on the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic underscored the need for investment in prehospital care systems, particularly for facilitating

rapid patient transfers and minimizing critical delays, thereby saving lives. A robust and agile prehospital infrastructure can be a lifeline in times of crisis, bridging the vital gap between initial medical intervention and hospital-based care.

In trauma care, with more than 60% of trauma-related fatalities occurring before individuals reach a hospital setting, the challenges in the Region range from the acute shortage of ambulances in countries like Somalia to other logistical and resource-related hurdles. Several countries have made substantial commitments to enhancing the quality and accessibility of trauma care, recognizing it as an indispensable component of comprehensive emergency care. This shared recognition paves the way for collaborative efforts to advance trauma care capabilities throughout the Region, reflecting a collective determination to mitigate the devastating impact of trauma-related incidents and support overall emergency care resilience.

EMT implementation, governance and regional coordination

The meeting underscored the importance of implementation of the EMT 2030 Strategy through a regional action plan tailored to the priorities and targets of the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Central to this is the delineation of triggers that activate EMTs, a process linked to each country's capacity and the nature of the event. This approach ensures that the deployment of EMTs remains aligned with national systems, a crucial component in the effective response to emergent crises.

There was discussion on the classification process for EMTs, a process that has several challenges, including its time-consuming nature. Participants identified the need for strict compliance with established classification criteria for the successful functioning of the teams. Recognizing that mentoring plays a pivotal role in EMT capacity-

building, participants acknowledged the need to expand the pool of EMT mentors, ideally recruiting experts from within the Eastern Mediterranean Region itself. This approach would cater to the specific needs of EMT teams in the Region, enriching their training and knowledge base.

There was also discussion on the integration of EMTs with other response teams, particularly the rapid response teams. This integration would seek to harness collective resources and streamline operational efficiency during emergency responses, reflecting a strategic commitment to optimizing resource utilization and enhancing overall emergency response capabilities.

Participants identified the importance of establishing a robust regional governance structure. This would facilitate meaningful engagement with subregional and national entities, ensuring the consolidation of regional commitments and the development of action plans attuned to the specific contexts of the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Moreover, it would help foster EMT development by promoting regional training methodologies and guidelines tailored to the Region's unique needs.

In summary, discussions highlighted several key themes: the dynamic evolution of EMTs, the significance of regional collaboration and the need for flexibility in the implementation of EMTs across diverse national and regional contexts. Recommendations and next steps were identified to guide regional implementation of the EMT 2030 Strategy, reinforce emergency care systems and enhance emergency responses.

3. Recommendations

To Member States

1. Adopt and implement the EMT Initiative, ensuring the necessary legislative and organizational frameworks are in place.

This entails ensuring appropriate legislative and organizational frameworks at both national and regional levels. These frameworks should not only endorse the EMT Initiative, but also provide the necessary legal and administrative support for its operation. Robust legal backing ensures that EMT teams can function without hindrance, enabling them to respond promptly and efficiently to emergencies.

2. Assess EMT capabilities, develop national roadmaps and integrate EMTs within the emergency care system.

A critical step in strengthening emergency response capabilities is comprehensive assessment of existing EMT capacities. This entails evaluating the skills, resources and infrastructure available within each country. This should be followed by the development of national roadmaps, tailored to each nation's unique context and needs. These roadmaps serve as strategic guides, outlining the steps required to bolster EMT capabilities. Integral to this process is the integration of EMTs within the broader emergency care system. Integration will foster coordination, streamline communication and enhance the overall efficiency and effectiveness of emergency responses.

3. Enhance the emergency response system by linking EMTs with other rapid response capacities.

An efficient emergency response hinges on the ability to harness the full spectrum of rapid response capacities. It is imperative to

establish strong linkages between EMTs and other swift-deployment teams such as rapid response teams. This will ensure that resources are optimally utilized and response times are minimized, ultimately saving lives. Collaboration between these entities enhances the overall resilience of the emergency response system, making it more adaptable and capable of addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by emergencies.

4. Establish multi-country hubs and engage local entities in capacity-building efforts.

Recognizing the importance of regional collaboration and capacity-building, it is advisable to establish multi-country hubs, as has been done in three other WHO regions. These hubs can serve as regional centres of excellence, pooling resources, knowledge and expertise from various countries. They also offer a platform for sharing learning and best practices, further enhancing the capabilities of individual EMTs. Additionally, a crucial element in building sustainable EMT capacity is the active engagement of local entities. By involving local organizations and communities in capacity-building efforts, a more comprehensive and contextually relevant approach to emergency response is fostered, reinforcing the resilience of the entire system.

To WHO

5. Provide support to countries in implementing national EMT roadmaps and establishing EMT focal points.

Supporting countries in the effective implementation of their national EMT roadmaps entails providing technical support, resources and guidance to help countries develop and execute their strategies for enhancing EMTs. Simultaneously, there is a need to

establish EMT focal points within each country responsible for overseeing EMT activities, coordination and communication, ensuring adherence to accepted standards and serving as a vital link between national and regional efforts. These focal points should be well-trained individuals or teams.

6. Refine and finalize the regional action plan and ensure its alignment with the EMT 2030 Strategy.

The creation of a well-defined regional action plan is essential to guide collaborative efforts effectively. The plan should take into account the specific needs and priorities of the Region and should be aligned with the overarching EMT 2030 Strategy to ensure consistency and a unified approach. Continuous revision and refinement, in consultation with key stakeholders, are needed to adapt to evolving circumstances and emerging challenges.

7. Establish a regional EMT governance structure and support the establishment of a multi-country/regional hub.

The establishment of a robust regional EMT governance structure is vital for coordinated action across borders. This structure should outline roles, responsibilities and decision-making processes. Furthermore, supporting the creation of multi-country EMT hubs fosters regional collaboration and resource sharing. These hubs can serve as centres of excellence, pooling expertise and resources from multiple nations, thereby strengthening the overall response capacity within the Region.

8. Collaborate with regional and global entities to facilitate capacity-building and coordination efforts.

Effective capacity-building and coordination require collaboration with both regional and global partners, such as the IFRC, United Nations agencies and donors. Engaging with organizations and entities specializing in emergency response and health care can amplify the impact of the EMT Initiative. This collaboration can encompass training programmes, knowledge sharing, resource mobilization and the exchange of best practices. By leveraging the expertise and resources of a diverse network, the Region can enhance its emergency response capabilities and strengthen its resilience in the face of complex emergencies.

4. Next steps

1. Draft and share a regional action plan for feedback.

The first step in implementing the EMT 2030 Strategy regionally is to draft a comprehensive regional action plan. The plan will serve as a roadmap for coordinated efforts across Member States. Before finalizing it, the draft will be shared with national participants and WHO country offices. Their feedback and insights will be invaluable in refining the plan to align with the specific needs and priorities of each Member State.

2. Establish a regional governance committee.


Establishing a regional governance structure is essential for effective coordination and oversight. Terms of reference for a regional governance committee will be disseminated to Member States. Each State will designate a national representative to ensure that the governance structure operates smoothly and facilitates collaboration among the participating countries.

3. Continue coordination and collaboration for EMT classification.

To advance the classification process and enhance EMT capabilities, ongoing coordination and collaboration with teams seeking global EMT classification will continue. This includes mentorship visits to teams in need, capacity-building initiatives and workshops focused on developing national roadmaps. These activities are vital for aligning teams with global standards and ensuring their readiness for international deployments.

4. Initiate regional mentorship training in collaboration with the IFRC.

Building a pool of mentors is instrumental for strengthening EMTs regionally. Consultations with the IFRC will continue on implementing the first regional mentorship training programme. This training aims to equip mentors with the necessary skills and knowledge to support emerging EMTs effectively. The formation of a robust regional mentor's pool will contribute significantly to the development and sustainability of EMT capabilities in the Region.



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