

Summary report on the
**First meeting of the
laboratory technical
working group for the
Eastern Mediterranean
Region**

Virtual meeting
21 March 2024



**World Health
Organization**

Eastern Mediterranean Region

Summary report on the

**First meeting of the laboratory
technical working group for the
Eastern Mediterranean Region**

Virtual meeting
21 March 2024



**World Health
Organization**

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE **Eastern Mediterranean**

© World Health Organization 2024

Some rights reserved. This work is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 IGO licence (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO; <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/igo>).

Under the terms of this licence, you may copy, redistribute and adapt the work for non-commercial purposes, provided the work is appropriately cited. In any use of this work, there should be no suggestion that WHO endorses any specific organization, products or services. The use of the WHO logo is not permitted. If you adapt the work, then you must license your work under the same or equivalent Creative Commons licence. If you create a translation of this work, you should add the following disclaimer along with the suggested citation: “This translation was not created by the World Health Organization (WHO). WHO is not responsible for the content or accuracy of this translation. The original English edition shall be the binding and authentic edition”.

Any mediation relating to disputes arising under the licence shall be conducted in accordance with the mediation rules of the World Intellectual Property Organization.

Suggested citation. Summary report on the first meeting of the laboratory technical working group for the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; 2024. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

Sales, rights and licensing. To purchase WHO publications, see <http://apps.who.int/bookorders>. To submit requests for commercial use and queries on rights and licensing, see <http://www.who.int/about/licensing>.

Third-party materials. If you wish to reuse material from this work that is attributed to a third party, such as tables, figures or images, it is your responsibility to determine whether permission is needed for that reuse and to obtain permission from the copyright holder. The risk of claims resulting from infringement of any third-party-owned component in the work rests solely with the user.

General disclaimers. The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the World Health Organization concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. Dotted lines on maps represent approximate border lines for which there may not yet be full agreement.

The mention of specific companies or of certain manufacturers' products does not imply that they are endorsed or recommended by the World Health Organization in preference to others of a similar nature that are not mentioned. Errors and omissions excepted, the names of proprietary products are distinguished by initial capital letters.

All reasonable precautions have been taken by the World Health Organization to verify the information contained in this publication. However, the published material is being distributed without warranty of any kind, either expressed or implied. The responsibility for the interpretation and use of the material lies with the reader. In no event shall the World Health Organization be liable for damages arising from its use.

Contents

1.	Introduction.....	1
2.	Summary of discussions	3
3.	Next steps.....	5

1. Introduction

The core role of laboratories is to provide timely, accurate and reliable results to support diagnosis, surveillance and outbreak investigations. More than 70% of clinical decision-making is predicated upon, confirmed by, or documented by medical laboratory test results. Lack of quality systems in laboratories has resulted in persistently high levels of laboratory error and lack of confidence in laboratory services by physicians and other care providers.

Laboratory accreditation to international standards verifies laboratories' competence and ensures that they can provide evidence that quality test results are reliable and accurate to support patient care and public health practices. Furthermore, quality laboratory programmes protect staff and the community through adherence to rigorous biosafety and biosecurity standards.

Many efforts have been made to strengthen laboratory quality management systems in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, especially at central public health laboratories. However, these efforts are not reaching subnational and lower-level testing sites, especially in resource-challenged countries. For example, of 22 countries/territories in the Region, only 11 (50%) have internal quality control (IQC) procedures standardized throughout the laboratory network for all tests, five (23%) have an external quality assessment (EQA) programme for all priority diseases at all tiers with feedback of results and action for improvement, 10 (45%) have reference laboratories participating in an international EQA programme, seven (32%) have laboratory quality officer positions filled in all public sector laboratories, four (18%) have implemented quality management activities in all laboratories and four (18%) have implemented mandatory certification and accreditation standards for laboratories.

Against this background, the directors responsible for laboratory services in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region met in Cairo, Egypt, in August 2023 and endorsed the creation of a laboratory technical working group (TWG) for the Region.

The regional TWG seeks to bring together regional laboratory leaders to shape the laboratory agenda, define priorities and harness individual countries' strengths, capabilities and success to further build laboratory capacity in the Region. The TWG intends to provide a peer-to-peer environment for senior laboratory leaders to exchange strategic knowledge and information that can inform decisions related to diagnostics and laboratory services in support of clinical care and the response to public health emergencies. The TWG is expected to contribute to the adoption of best practices across the Region and the strengthening of laboratory systems at national and subnational levels, with a focus on networking, advocacy, leadership and governance.

The first meeting of the TWG took place as a virtual online meeting on 21 March 2024.

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- develop a platform of communication to link directors across the Region and facilitate real time engagement with each other through a shared contact list, webinars and in-person meetings;
- facilitate networking to link the TWG to funders, regulatory agencies and industry; and
- generate a consensus that can be published or proposed for adoption.

2. Summary of discussions

Dr Fausta Mosha, Regional Adviser for Public Health Laboratories at the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, opened the first meeting of the TWG by thanking all the participants for attending.

The participants then introduced themselves and their role in their countries.

Dr Mosha presented the agenda for the meeting, which was agreed by the participants.

Presentations were made on: an update from the last regional laboratory directors' meeting; feedback from Regional External Quality Assessment Scheme (REQAS) 2023; the country readiness assessment of the Global Laboratory Leadership Programme (GLLP); and the upcoming training-of-trainers course for laboratory quality mentors and auditors. This was followed by a questions and answers session and discussion on the way forward.

Leadership and governance

Member States agreed to conduct a country readiness assessment with support from WHO before the regional GLLP workshop. Afghanistan, Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco, Somalia and the Syrian Arab Republic expressed their interest in joining the GLLP.

WHO agreed to share the draft regional strategic framework for strengthening laboratory services for consultation with Member States before the next meeting.

Laboratory quality management systems

The following countries will be supported by the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and the African Society for Laboratory Medicine to attend a training-of-trainers course on laboratory quality mentorship and auditing: Djibouti, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan and Tunisia. Bahrain, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Jordan would like to be included in the training. The WHO country office will support their costs.

Lebanon is receiving support from Fondation Mérieux on the implementation of laboratory quality management systems.

Afghanistan and Somalia requested receiving EQA through REQAS.

Biosafety and biosecurity

Afghanistan, Bahrain, Morocco and the Syrian Arab Republic requested support to develop a biosafety and biosecurity framework.

Afghanistan, Jordan and Oman requested support for International Air Transport Association (IATA) training on specimen transportation.

Diagnostic stewardship


The Islamic Republic of Iran and Qatar are implementing a diagnostic stewardship programme on antimicrobial resistance (AMR) for health workers. A protocol is in place and awaiting distribution to all stakeholders after the training. The Islamic Republic of Iran will share the draft with WHO.

Tiered laboratory network

The Islamic Republic of Iran has expanded its COVID-19 network to incorporate other diseases to support their diagnosis and surveillance. They have integrated molecular diagnostic platforms and have an integrated specimen referral network.

3. Next steps

- The next TWG meeting will be on 20 June 2024. Agenda items include:
 - comments on the new strategic framework for strengthening health laboratory services in the Eastern Mediterranean Region;
 - the Islamic Republic of Iran to share their experience of implementing an integrated laboratory network; and
 - Qatar to present the tool kit for risk assessment.
- WHO will follow up with countries that have requested specific support before the next TWG meeting.
- WHO will share the draft regional strategic framework for strengthening laboratory services for consultation with Member States before the next TWG meeting.



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