

The Eastern Mediterranean Regional Committee meeting: a focus on key EMR issues in health

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Dr Ibtihal Fadhil at Global NCD Alliance Forum 2022

The World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Committee meetings convene once a year in each of the six WHO regions. Dr Ibtihal Fadhil from Eastern Mediterranean Non-Communicable Disease Alliance (EM-NCDA) shares her recent experience of attending.

This year, I participated in the 70th session of the WHO Regional Committee meeting (RC70) in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) held this year in Cairo, Egypt from 9-12 October. These are WHO's highest decision-making bodies, where ministers of health and high-level dignitaries meet to shape political commitment and action to improve the health and health systems of the people living in each region. At the EMR meeting, ministers of health from the 22 EMR countries attended, as well as invited non-state actors and various UN agencies.

The meeting provided valuable insights, emphasizing the need for collaborative efforts in the EMR with the engagement of CSOs, and served as a platform for in-depth discussions on critical topics. These included the new model of care for Primary Health Care (PHC), the integration of NCDs in emergency settings, the regional framework for enhancing the health workforce in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR), and the intersection of climate, environment, and health. I was invited to present interventions on each of these four topics.

A opportunity for civil society: presenting at EMR RC70

The RC70 event was a significant opportunity for civil society to engage with important matters in the field of public health and collaborate on solutions and strategies for the Eastern Mediterranean Region. My interventions across the four topics allowed EM-NCDA to share key findings and evidence on each of the matters. For the PHC session, I highlighted its critical role in the delivery of NCD care and the need for a more patient-centred approach in the delivery of PHC services. I also emphasized the importance of addressing NCDs at the primary care level, and the need for patient empowerment and innovative, comprehensive, and community-oriented solutions.

During the next session, a technical paper was presented on the integration of NCDs in emergency settings. I presented the [joint statement](#) [1] that highlights the significance of preparedness and response to NCDs in times of emergencies, including conflicts, war, and political instability, given that over half of EMR countries are facing various types of emergencies, natural disasters, and pandemics. We called for endorsing the WHO regional framework for the integration of NCDs in emergency settings to ensure the development of resilient health systems capable of handling NCDs even during crises.

For the third session, I discussed the crucial role of strengthening the healthcare workforce in the region. It is evident that enhancing the skills and capacity of healthcare professionals is essential for addressing NCDs effectively. I had the opportunity to present the [joint statement](#) [2] (NCDA, EM-NCDA) focusing on the common challenges of the health workforce in the region and calling for investment in the training of NCD healthcare professionals and supporting patient-centered NCD care, ensuring a skilled and motivated health workforce.

And finally, the fourth session, 'Climate change, health, and environment: a regional framework for action, 2023-2029' highlighted the impact of climate change on health care in EMR countries. I presented the [joint statement](#) [3] to highlight the intersection between NCD and climate change, calling for raising awareness about the impact of climate change on NCD morbidity and mortality. The statement also highlights the need to develop early warning systems and action plans for adaptation and mitigation in healthcare to enhance resilience against climate change.

More involvement of youth and people living with NCDs

Young people had an important seat at the table during the RC70. The Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean has set up a regional Youth Council, which is aligned with the global forum, to scale up the ideas, experiences, and expertise of youth-led organizations to promote regional public health systems. This will enable Member States to meaningfully engage young people as key drivers in the policy-making process. The new initiative was introduced through panel discussion and youth organizations from the region are invited to join the regional youth council. I had the opportunity to meet the new president of the International Federation for Medical School Association and members of other youth organizations to discuss their NCD engagement.

I also learned that EMRO has intentions to launch a pilot program in 2024 to implement the WHO framework for the meaningful engagement of people living with NCDs in six countries within the Eastern Mediterranean Region. The plan involves collaboration with EM-NCDA and the International Patient Alliance Organization to align their efforts, ultimately enhancing NCD advocacy and response within the region.

In conclusion, the RC70 highlighted the urgency of a united front against NCDs, emphasizing the necessity for coordinated action within the EMR. To effectively combat these diseases, we call for active collaboration of all stakeholders including CSOs. For further details on how you can get involved and contribute to our shared mission, please contact me, Dr Ibtihal Fadhil, at ibtihalfadhil@emrncda.org [4]

About the author:

Dr Ibtihal Fadhil is the founder and chairperson of the eastern Mediterranean NCD Alliance. A medical doctor with an MSc and PhD in public health, she has worked on NCD control at government and CSOs level. As WHO Regional Adviser on noncommunicable diseases, Dr. Fadhil has worked with most of the regional CSOs for more than 8 years and developed the core regional network of CSOs working against non-communicable diseases. She has worked jointly with the World Health Organization and other regional partners to develop the civil society organization capacity-building program. This program has been instrumental in uniting CSOs at national and regional levels.

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[1] [https://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/about-](https://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/about-who/NCD_Alliance_and_the_Eastern_Mediterranean_NCD_Alliance-_NCDs_in_emergency_settings.pdf?ua=1)

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[2] https://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/about-who/RC_70_statement_on_Workforce__1.pdf?ua=1

[3] [https://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/about-](https://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/about-who/RC_70_EMRO_Statement_on_NCD__Climate_changes__1.pdf?ua=1)

[who/RC_70_EMRO_Statement_on_NCD__Climate_changes__1.pdf?ua=1](https://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/about-who/RC_70_EMRO_Statement_on_NCD__Climate_changes__1.pdf?ua=1).

[4] <mailto:ibtihalfadhil@emrncda.org>

[5] <https://old.ncdalliance.org/taxonomy/term/1382>

[6] <https://old.ncdalliance.org/taxonomy/term/1612>

[7] <https://old.ncdalliance.org/taxonomy/term/891>

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