

Epi weeks 9-10 (28 February -13 March)

SITUATION IN NUMBERS (As of midnight GMT+2, 13 March 2021)



KEY HIGHLIGHTS



First shipment of COVID-19 vaccines arrived in Sudan through the COVAX Facility.

- As of 13 March 2021, the Eastern Mediterranean Region has reported 6,865,085 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 150,295 deaths since the start of the pandemic. The total number of tests provided is 104,560,059; and the median cumulative positivity ratio is 10.4% (range from 1.3% to 25.3%).
- During the reporting period, cases continued to increase, with the number of reported cases 22% higher than the previous two weeks. The number of reported deaths also showed a 15% increase compared to the two previous weeks. A biweekly increase in cases was reported from 17 countries, and a biweekly increase in deaths was reported from 14 countries. A biweekly decrease in cases was reported from Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates.
- To date, 14 EMR countries have reported detection of SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern (VOCs). These countries are Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, the occupied Palestinian territory, Oman, Pakistan, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates.
- The reporting period marked the arrival of first shipments of COVID-19 vaccines through the COVAX Facility, with almost 1 million doses delivered to three countries. On 3 March, Sudan received over 800,000 doses followed by Djibouti receiving 24,000 doses on 6 March 2021, and Jordan with 144,000 doses on 13 March 2021.
- On 11 March 2021, WHO's Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean held its first ministerial meeting of 2021 with 13 out of 22 ministers of health and WHO representatives in the Region. The meeting, led by WHO Regional Director Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, focused on reviewing the COVID-19 situation, response, and achievements at country level, and addressing common challenges to strengthen WHO's support to countries. Issues related to the arrivals of vaccines through the COVAX Facility were discussed, including delays in the arrival of some shipments, as well as WHO's role in ensuring countries were prepared to receive and roll out vaccinations.

Map 1: COVID-19 Bi-weekly attack rate per 100,000 population and number of new deaths per country in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

28 February – 13 March 2021

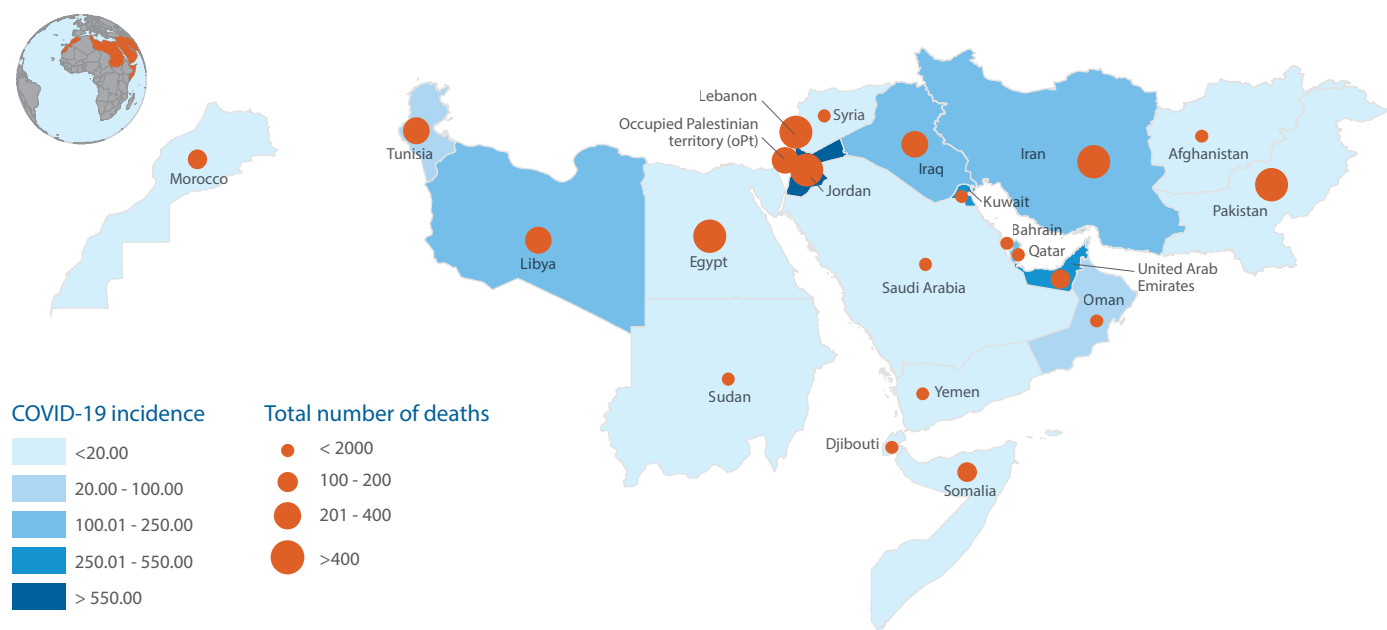


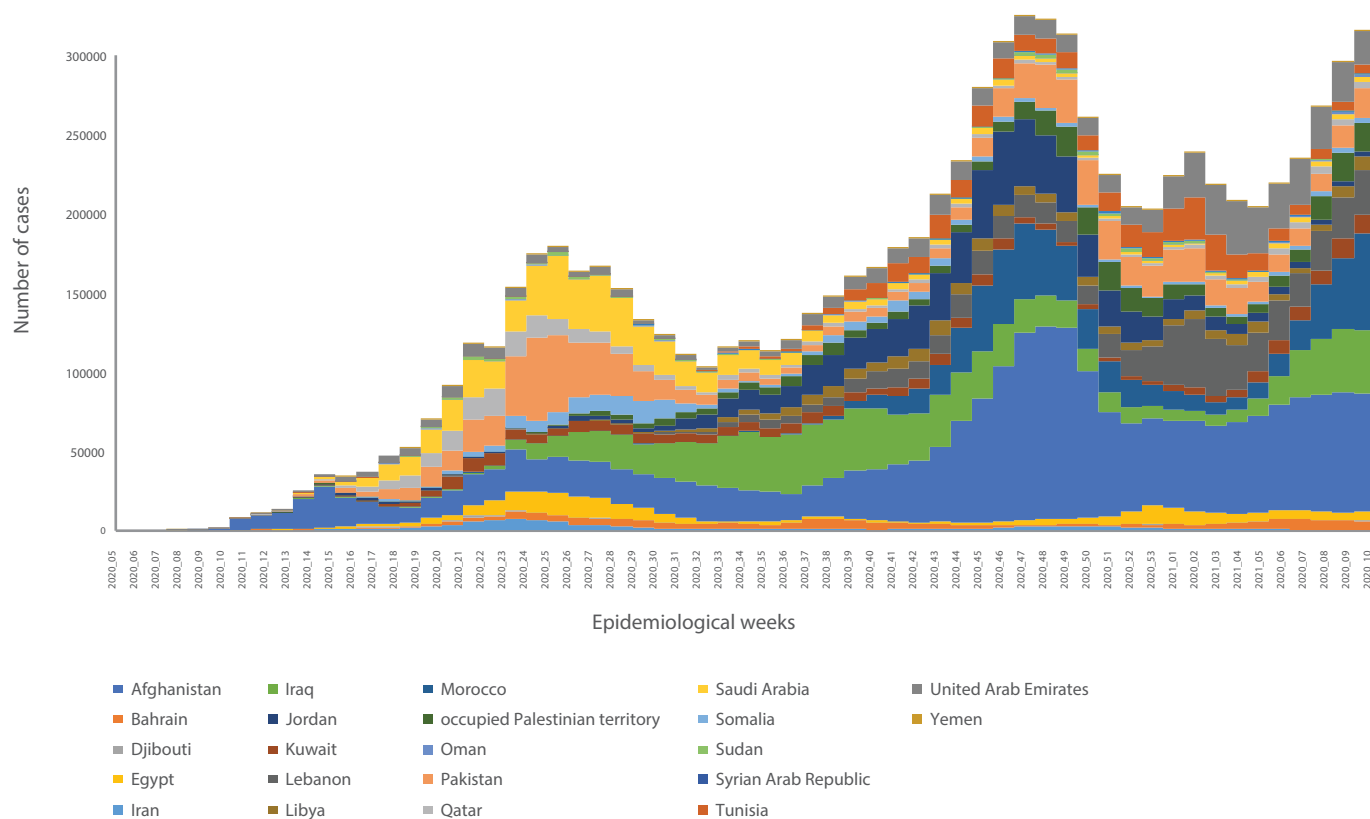
Table 1: Regional Epidemiological Situation

28 February – 13 March 2021

Country	New Confirmed Cases	Total Confirmed Cases	New Deaths	Total Deaths	CFR	Total recovered	Total Tests
Afghanistan	252	55985	15	2459	4.4%	49477	320824
Bahrain	8626	130404	37	481	0.4%	123671	3289371
Djibouti	187	6252	0	63	1.0%	5972	119774
Egypt	8451	190280	617	11256	5.9%	146803	2492115
Iran	116201	1739360	1162	61142	3.5%	1485179	11651917
Iraq	62077	754318	336	13719	1.8%	681828	7353052
Jordan	82504	469000	610	5285	1.1%	390127	5131793
Kuwait	18570	208460	87	1165	0.6%	192782	1901041
Lebanon	42587	415362	682	5334	1.3%	325818	3291733
Libya	11655	144993	207	2386	1.6%	131778	802041
Morocco	5222	488632	103	8718	1.8%	475457	5304996
Oman	28011	234449	258	2494	1.1%	209163	1286127
Pakistan	4669	145257	38	1600	2.2%	135227	1077141
Palestine	25227	605200	648	13508	1.1%	570571	9485702
Qatar	6570	169767	8	265	0.2%	157876	1615021
Saudi Arabia	4998	382059	75	6563	1.7%	372456	14272412
Somalia	1955	8946	118	349	3.9%	4108	117394
Sudan	529	30946	63	1953	6.3%	23483	347329
Syrian Arab Republic	868	16401	71	1094	6.7%	10885	60920
Tunisia	8557	241834	388	8389	3.5%	207686	1034981
United Arab Emirates	35811	424405	175	1388	0.3%	403478	33592518
Yemen	502	2775	52	684	24.6%	1474	11857
Total	474,029	6,865,085	5,750	150,295	2.2%	6,105,299	104,560,059

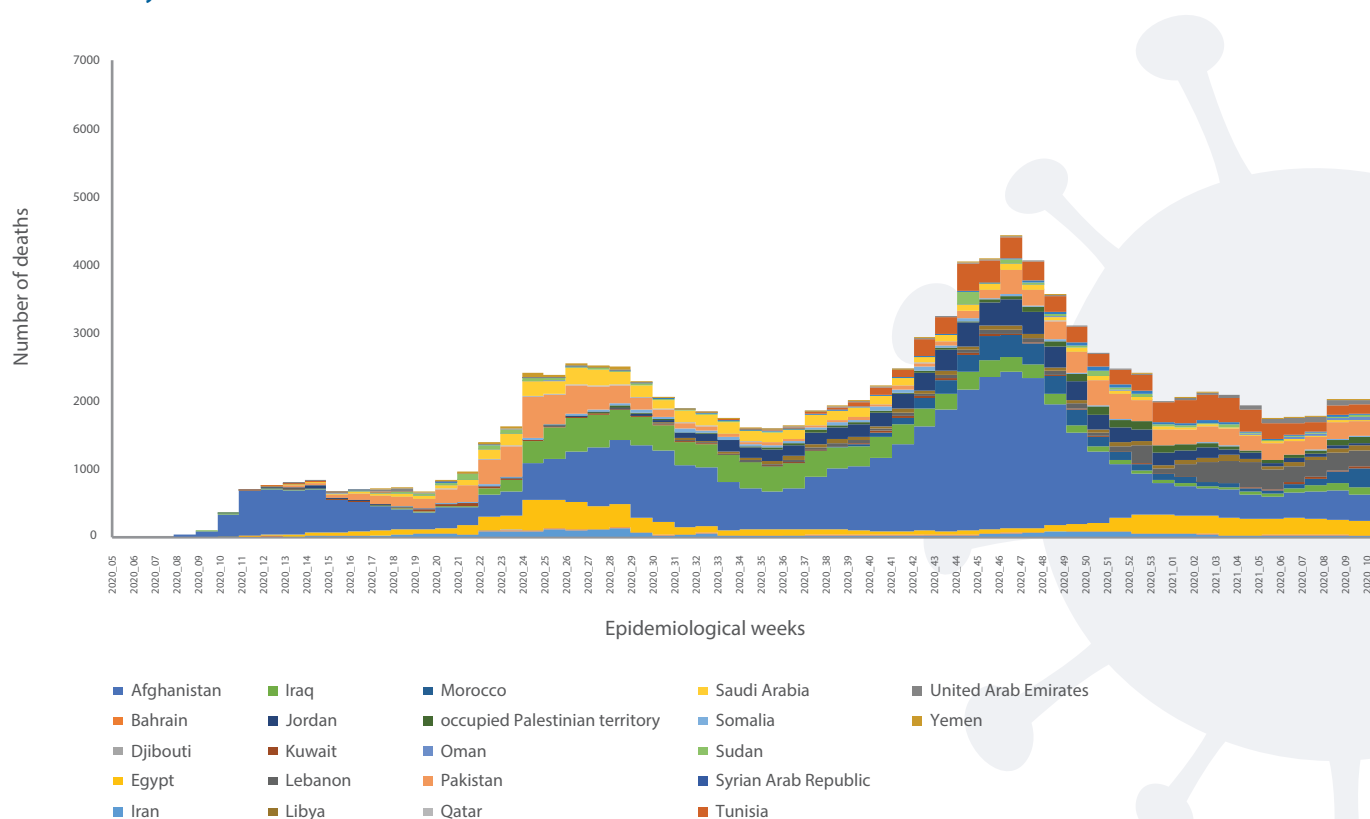
Graph 1: Weekly distribution of COVID-19 cases in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

26 January 2020 – 13 March 2021



Graph 2: Weekly distribution of COVID-19 deaths in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

26 January 2020 – 13 March 2021



IN FOCUS: NEW SARS-COV-2 VARIANTS

- So far, 12 countries have reported the B.1.1.7 variant of concern: Bahrain, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, oPt, Pakistan, KSA, and UAE; UAE has also reported the B.1.351 and B.1.1.28 VOCs.
- Iraq and Libya are still pending full genome sequencing to confirm the type of strain.
- Currently, 14 countries have genome sequencing capacity in country, and the Regional Office has arranged for samples from other countries to be sequenced at regional reference laboratories (Khalifa University in UAE, Oman Central Public Health Laboratory, and AFRO-CDC).

IN FOCUS: COVID-19 vaccines rolled out in the Eastern Mediterranean Region through the COVAX Facility

- Vaccines delivered through the COVAX Facility have arrived in Djibouti, Jordan, and Sudan with a total of around 1 million doses targeting high-risk groups, as part of efforts to cover 20% of populations by the end of this year.
- To date, 15 countries in the Region have commenced vaccination against COVID-19, administering over 13 million doses.
- WHO worked with national authorities to put a vaccination strategy in place that includes training vaccinators, ensuring vaccine safety, and surveillance for adverse effects and delivering supplementary supplies.
- Vaccination roll out in the Region is faced by several challenges, including public hesitancy against vaccines, major inequalities as vaccines are rolled out, critical shortages in supply amid high level of demand and logistics issues related to cold chain storage of some vaccines especially when more tranches of vaccines arrive.

REGIONAL RESPONSE HIGHLIGHTS

Operations Support and Logistics

- Deployed logistics staff from Dubai to Sudan on charter flights and delivered 54 tons of medical supplies. The shipment includes medical supplies of dengue fever reagents, malaria medicines, as well as COVID-19 reagents to support surveillance and detection activities in Sudan.
- Coordinating with WFP and WHO/Yemen to dispatch 3 charter flights to Aden and three flights to Sana'a to support increased distribution of health commodities.

Health Operations and Technical Expertise

Infection Prevention and Control (IPC)

- Trained a total of 556 members of UNRWA staff from Lebanon, Gaza and Syria on IPC to reduce the number of COVID-19 infections.
- Trained 80 IPC members from 15 universities in Egypt on case-control study tools to explore COVID-19 infections among health care workers.
- Trained 25 hospital managers from Islamabad on IPC leadership and role of senior management in collaboration with WHO Collaborating Center in Saudi Arabia and the WHO Country Office in Pakistan.

Clinical Management

- Conducted a gap assessment for intensive care unit (ICU) equipment and supplies in key public hospital in Hargeisa and procured required supplies to fill gaps.
- Conducted on-site ICU training for Hargeisa Group Hospital ICU staff for 1 week.
- Assessed COVID-19 treatment center and recommendation submitted to Somalia Ministry of Health.
- Trained 15 national doctors and nurses selected from different regions for ICU/critical care in Somalia.
- Worked with the Somalian MoH and local institutions to develop a long-term strategy for critical care capacity building. As a start, an ICU simulation and training centre equipped with basic ICU training tools is planned to begin operations in the next few months.

Health Information Management and Surveillance

- Worked to improve Pakistan's COVID-19 monitoring and evaluation database by adding new districts.
- Worked on submission of Yemen Health Resources and Services Availability Monitoring System (HeRAMS) within the COVID-19 implementation plan to the World Bank.
- Conducted mission to Afghanistan to support event-based surveillance (EBS) with focus on COVID-19.
- Conducted Epidemic Intelligence from Open Sources (EIOS) training for Tunisia's Ministry of Health.
- Distributed of contact tracing funds to 4 countries (Afghanistan, Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia).

International Health Regulations and Social Measures

- Conducted 135 trainings to date, for 1121 participants in case management, and 44 trainings for 406 participants in Infection Prevention & Control (IPC) in coordination with the UK-MED Emergency Medical Team (EMT) in Lebanon.
- In coordination with the UK-MED Emergency Medical Team (EMT), prepared and delivered specialist Intensive Care Unit (ICU) training for COVID-19 case management in Al-Amal Hospital in Aden-Yemen, with recommendations for further capacity building trainings in IPC, advanced cardiac life support(ACLS) and basic life support (BLS).
- Formatted an interagency sub-working group dedicated to social and behavioral data, social listening and community feedback strengthening.
- Developed a Risk Communication & Community Engagement (RCCE) training package for community health workers focusing on supporting the vaccine rollout and uptake.

Research and Knowledge Management

- Supported ongoing work on the potential and major drug-drug and drug-disease interactions in patients undergoing treatment for COVID-19 using common treatment protocols in the Region.
- Finalized Lebanon development of Cause of Death COD registration, showing the over-added value of the system during COVID-19 and interaction with surveillance system for daily/weekly validation for publication.
- Worked with Djibouti's Ministry of Health to approve the pilot implementation of Rapid Mortality surveillance, through the detection of burial changes over time utilizing High-Resolution Satellite Imagery (HRSI).

Essential Health Services and Systems

- Identified essential nutrition services for saving the lives of children and mothers in the context of consequences of the economic impact of COVID-19.
- Developed training package for health workers on severe cases of malnutrition in Djibouti and Iraq.
- Reviewed supplementation of women and children with iron and folic acid in Gaza with UNRWA.
- Worked with 9 clinics on promotion of breast feeding in primary health care centers with a hotline for women unable to attend for counselling in Kuwait.
- Conducted mission to Pakistan to formulate a strategy with the focus of primary health care.

COVID-19 Vaccine

- Facilitated COVAX vaccine deployment country by country, including troubleshooting bottlenecks on the last three criteria and communication issues between countries and GAVI regarding the estimated time of arrival of COVID-19 vaccines.
- Managed vaccine-related communications, including around the EMRO ministerial meeting (11 March 2021) and around country concerns regarding the AstraZeneca vaccine following blood clotting cases in Europe.
- Coordinated within EMRO on monitoring vaccination activities for a consolidated system.

COUNTRY SITUATION HIGHLIGHTS

Sudan

- Received its allocation of COVID-19 vaccines through the COVAX Facility. Over 800,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine arrived, and vaccination will be launched today, 9 March 2021 targeting firstly health care workers and people above 45 with chronic medical conditions, living in areas with high transmission or anticipated high transmission. The shipment also included 4.5 metric tons of syringes and safety boxes.
- Received 2 charter planes carrying life-saving medicines and medical supplies to fill critical shortages of emergency supplies in health facilities and support the response to COVID-19 with a total of 54 metric tons of supplies for more than 700,000 beneficiaries across the country.

Djibouti

- Received first shipment of AstraZeneca/Serum Institute of India (SII) vaccines through COVAX Facility targeting health care workers, people over 50 years of age and people with comorbidities. WHO has worked with national authorities to put a vaccination strategy in place that includes training vaccinators, ensuring vaccine safety, and surveillance for adverse effects.



First shipment of COVID-19 vaccines arrived in Djibouti through the COVAX Facility.

Regional COVID-19 website: <http://www.emro.who.int/health-topics/corona-virus/index.html>

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