



**Saving the Lives  
of Mothers & Children**  
Rising to the Challenge

## High-level meeting on saving the lives of mothers and children:

accelerating progress towards achieving MDGs 4 and 5 in the Eastern Mediterranean Region  
29–30 January 2013, Dubai, United Arab Emirates



The Eastern Mediterranean Region is a young region where children up to 18 years old constitute more than 40% of the population (244 million children). Children under 5 years of age represent 12% (73 million children) of the regional population, and women of childbearing age 29%. Both children under 5 and women are highly vulnerable groups for which two specific Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), 4 and 5 respectively, and indicators under other MDGs were set to highlight their role in national development.

### The problem

The average annual reduction rates for maternal and child mortality in the Region between 1990 and 2010 (2% for under-5 mortality rate and 2.6% for maternal mortality ratio) are among the lowest in the world. The Region is unlikely to achieve the targets of MDGs 4 and 5 by 2015 unless intensive and accelerated progress is made, especially in those countries contributing to the bulk of under-5 and maternal deaths.

It is estimated that 923 000 children under 5 years of age and around 39 000 women of childbearing age still die every year in the Region as a result of pregnancy-related complications. Mortality rates are particularly high in the poor, rural and underserved areas, among malnourished children and pregnant adolescents.

### Regional challenges

The Region faces unique challenges that have impact on health, nutrition and development outcomes. A large number of the countries with a high burden of maternal and child mortality are facing armed conflict and insurgency and significant population displacement. Some have also experienced major humanitarian emergencies in recent years. There is a disproportionate number of consanguineous families and genetic disorders in this Region, compared with other regions. In addition, the Region has a high burden of maternal and child undernutrition that is coupled, in many instances, with the rapidly developing challenge of obesity and noncommunicable diseases.

### ... And opportunities

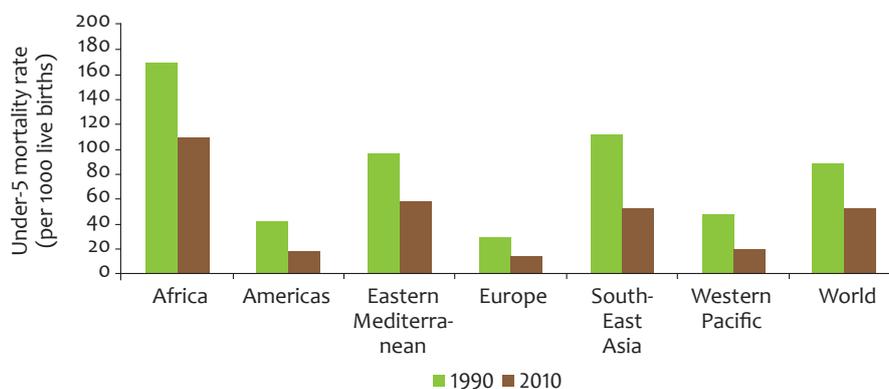
Notwithstanding the challenges, there are huge opportunities for accelerating progress. There is evidence on what should be done, i.e. implementing country-tailored cost-effective interventions for reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health, and on why investments in such interventions are important, i.e. impact of the interventions on maternal and child health.

The desired changes in maternal and child survival over time reflect the need for investment across sectors in many countries and for interventions across a range of social determinants of health, such as female education and empowerment, poverty alleviation, investment in health systems and good governance.

### High-level meeting on saving the lives of mothers and children

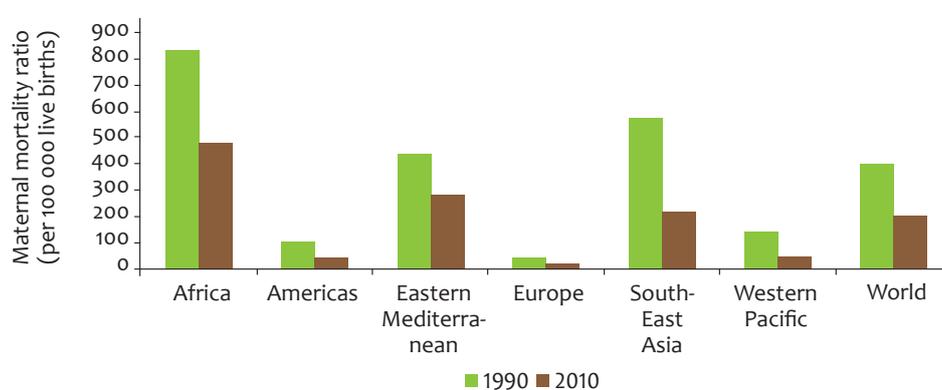
WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and partners will organize a two-day high-level meeting on saving the lives of mothers and children to accelerate progress towards achieving MDGs 4 and 5 in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. The meeting will be held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 29–30 January 2013, under the patronage of HH Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Dubai.

**Every day 2500  
children and 107 mothers  
die unnecessarily in  
the Eastern Mediterranean  
Region. We know what to do.  
We need to join  
hands to act now.**



**Figure 1.** Progress in under-five mortality reduction by WHO region

Source: WHO, UNICEF, The World Bank, United Nations Population Division. Levels and trends in child mortality. Report 2012. Estimates developed by the United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation. New York, UNICEF, 2012.



**Figure 2.** Progress in maternal mortality reduction by WHO region

Source: WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and The World Bank. Trends in maternal mortality: 1990–2010. WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and The World Bank estimates. Geneva, WHO, 2012.

The event will provide a platform for a leadership dialogue to:

- increase the profile and commitment to maternal, adolescent, and child health (including newborn health) with a focus on equity;
- facilitate policy dialogue for accelerated action towards the achievement of universal access to maternal, adolescent, newborn and child health services in the Region;
- discuss and agree on evidence-based packages for care and implementation strategies across the continuum of care;
- establish a high-level regional commission for women and children. The commission will track progress in implementation, advocate for and mobilize resources, and hold countries accountable for improving the lives of women and children.

## Expected outcomes

- Increased commitment of leaders in the Region to improving maternal and child health (including newborn health) in the foreseeable future and in agreement with emerging global targets.

- A regional declaration on maternal and child health with defined commitments.
- Establishment of a regional commission on maternal and child health.
- Agreement on practical coordination mechanisms to accelerate progress towards MDGs 4 and 5 in countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region.
- Increased commitment of partners to support accelerated action for maternal and child health in the Region.

## Participants

Leading figures, including high-level officials from Member States and key partners, parliamentarians, ministers of health, higher education and planning, representatives of regional bodies and stakeholders, will participate in the meeting.