A strong immune system protects you and your loved ones. Fortunately, vaccines strengthen immunity and save millions of lives. In 1978, WHO established the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) to build on the success of smallpox vaccination and include six vaccines in routine immunization. Now, WHO recommends 20 vaccines for use in national immunization schedules to protect people of all ages from diseases.

WHO and our immunization partners are working to extend the benefits of vaccines to everyone, everywhere, at any age. The Immunization Agenda 2030 aims for a world where everyone fully benefits from vaccines for better health. Vaccines for diseases including COVID-19, influenza, human papillomavirus (HPV) and cholera reduce morbidity and mortality.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts and emergencies in many countries, 15 million infants in the Eastern Mediterranean Region were vaccinated with routine vaccines in 2021. In addition, more than 100 million children received measles-containing vaccine through campaigns. Besides COVID-19 vaccine, in 2021 five countries introduced seven new vaccines. But sadly, over 2 million children did not receive any vaccine during this period.

COVID-19 vaccines prevent deaths and suffering. As of April 2022, countries in our Region have administered 700 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines, protecting over 300 million people. We have learned how to vaccinate large numbers of adults very quickly, and the pandemic has also taught us how to protect high-risk populations, including the elderly and health care workers. Countries can now use this experience to expand the benefits of vaccines to people of all ages.

I call on all governments and immunization partners to work together to reach the unreached and offer the benefit of other life-saving vaccines to our citizens throughout their lives. In World Immunization Week 2022 we call for a long life for all. Immunization is an essential part of our vision of health for all by all in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.