

THE FIRST PARENTS SUPPORT CONFERENCE

for the Eastern Mediterranean/Middle East
And North Africa Regions



8 - 10
August 2023



CONCEPT NOTE

BACKGROUND:

The health and wellbeing of children and adolescents (0 – 19 years of age) are of key importance to stakeholders across the region in the Eastern Mediterranean/ Middle East and North Africa Region. Evidence shows that parents¹ and the environment at home are central pillars in supporting children's health and development.⁽¹⁾

Parenting is the process of supporting the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development of a child from infancy to adulthood. It refers to providing nurturing care in a stable environment that is sensitive to children's needs, protects them from threats, provides opportunities for learning, with interactions that are responsive and playful, emotionally supportive, and developmentally stimulating. Children's interaction with their parents shapes their development as they observe, imitate, emulate, and engage in various learning opportunities physically, socially, and emotionally.⁽²⁾ The quality of parenting and caregiving practices is a key determinant of every child's ability to develop their cognitive, emotional, and social potential and resilience against adversity.⁽¹⁾ Adolescent social development and sense of self is particularly critical to their ability to parent in the future, informs gender socialization and their role as future fathers and mothers, with respectful relations and positive parenting. Also, given the high rates of child marriage, parental support to older adolescent and young parents is critical. All of this would not be possible without healthy and happy parents; which is the reason their wellbeing is one of our priorities as well.⁽³⁾

The planned regional conference is organized by WHO Regional Office for Eastern Mediterranean Region EMR and UNICEF Regional Office for Middle East and North Africa (MENA) as a complementing activity to the Global Initiative to Support Parents (GISP). This initiative aims to elevate parenting and family support so that every child, and their family, can receive the care they need for optimal development, thus building human capital in the first two decades of life and for future generations of parents. GISP is led jointly by UNICEF, WHO, End Violence Against Children, the Early Childhood Development Action Network (ECDAN) and Parenting for Lifelong Health.

¹ Parents refers to any biological parent, guardian, or any other caregiver to a child (0-18 years of age) who provide consistent care. Caregivers include mothers and fathers, siblings, grandparents, and other relatives, including non-biological caregivers such as stepparents or foster parents. This definition is adapted by the GISP initiative, and we will adapt it for our conference purpose as well. Any time the word Parent/s mentioned, it encompasses the above definition.

OBJECTIVES:

Advocate for the social, mental and physical wellbeing of parents and the implementation of evidence-based policies and interventions in the Eastern Mediterranean/Middle East and North Africa Region region

1. Examine available evidence on the state of the family and parenting support programming, strategies and approaches in the Eastern Mediterranean/Middle East and North Africa Region region particularly the impacts of COVID with a view to identifying gaps and areas for further investment
2. Facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration between Eastern Mediterranean/Middle East and North Africa Region countries and globally in the planning, adaptation, resourcing and scale up of effective interventions and delivery strategies, channels or platforms on parents' support.
3. Strengthen the work with governments and partners to influence, policies, planning, strategies, cooperation, resources and capacities for adoption and scale up of parental support interventions.

The convening is proposed to be delivered under the following thematic areas based on the ongoing work in the region in the field of child and adolescents' health and wellbeing. Furthermore, the ongoing literature review about parents support in the region will further inform these themes:

1. Nurturing care for early childhood development.
2. Supporting parents of adolescents, and adolescent/young parents.
3. Supporting parents of children with disabilities.
4. Promoting parents and children/adolescent's mental health, including in the digital space.
5. Preventing child maltreatment and violence against children including gender-based violence against girls (child marriage, interpersonal violence, and female genital mutilation), child labor, witness of violence in schools/at homes, sibling abuse, bullying, violence in digital space, violence in humanitarian settings
6. Integrating gender responsive parenting perspectives for parents and frontline service providers
7. Promoting community development, empowering women, reducing harmful practices, advancing economic development, including through household based cash grants, family friendly policies, social protection mechanisms, and other areas as relevant. relevant.
8. Supporting parents across the diverse contexts and with differing populations in the region, including those living in humanitarian settings with particular focus on trauma informed parenting, as well as those in stable, development contexts
9. Digital Space: (explicit/ implicit supervision of parents and of schools on the use of digital space by children and adolescents; violence in digital space, increasing literacy of media and digital space for parents, development of protocols for digital space use)
10. Engagement of cross-sectoral, cross-stakeholder action in support of parents and caregivers

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

Emerging examples of good practice for Eastern Mediterranean/Middle East and North Africa Region countries identified under each of the key themes

- Knowledge on evidence-based parenting initiatives and policies improved
- Advances in the pillars of the Global Initiative to Support Parents Interagency Vision, to Innovate, Generate Evidence, Advocate and Scale
- Division of labour assigned among regional partners who can take a joint agenda forward.

ORGANIZERS AND PRECONFERENCE PREPARATIONS:

The conference will be led by WHO (EMR² with HQ support) and UNICEF MENA Regional Office³, with other GISP partners engaged in supporting the conference preparation, such as: International Rescue Committee (IRC); Arab Network for Early Childhood Development (ANECD); Developmental Paediatrics Unit in Sultan Qaboos University/Oman; WHO/EMR Collaborating Centre for mental health in Iran; National Family Safety Program, Saudi Arabia (WHO/EMR Collaborating Centre on child maltreatment), Doha International Family Institute (through UNICEF partnership) and Save the Children International, UNICEF regional offices, International Step by Step Association, Plan International, and others.

Considering that parenting support by nature is a multi-sectoral task, demanding joint efforts from those involved, WHO EMRO and UNICEF MENARO will coordinate an organizing committee including representatives from the aforementioned partners. Through this committee partners will agree on respective roles and responsibilities to deliver the conference objectives and outcomes successfully. Lead organizations may choose to serve in organizing capacity, as presenters, as participants, or as actors who mobilize others to engage and participate.

ATTENDEES:

Invitees will be concerned focal points from ministries of health, ministries of education, ministries of social welfare/solidarity(or protection, family promotion, women and children, gender, youth and sports, finance or other name as relevant to the country context), WHO, UNICEF, cross sectoral partners in advancing parenting, and other relevant agencies from the countries of the region. The following is a proposed list of possible attendees:

- › Senior government officials and technical staff from concerned ministries (e.g. health, education, social welfare (or social development, social protection child protection, solidarity, family promotion, women and children,) gender, youth and sports, finance, justice departments, police departments and municipal officials in the region 4 including those involved in GISP and liable to expansion according to stakeholders view and involvement with countries in the Eastern Mediterranean/Middle East and North Africa Region region as well.
- Technical staff and focal persons from implementation partners/civil society/non-governmental organizations in Eastern Mediterranean/Middle East and North Africa Region and globally who are concerned with promoting early childhood development, ending violence against children, promoting mental health, ensuring adolescent well-being, promoting community development, empowering women, reducing harmful practices, advancing economic development, social protection, digital issues, and other areas as relevant.
- Concerned experts and academics in Eastern Mediterranean/Middle East and North Africa Region and globally, including schools and universities.
- Representatives from development partners including bilateral and multilateral partners, private donors, foundations, private sector, faith-based actors, funders, coalitions, impact investors and other types of and global or regional funding initiatives.
- Parents, children, adolescents, and volunteers with lived experiences will be invited based on the inputs from partners and the works ongoing in the Eastern Mediterranean/Middle East and North Africa Region

² From the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, the initiative is coordinated by Child and Adolescent Health, Violence and Injury Prevention and Mental Health and Substance Abuse units.

³ From UNICEF MENA Regional Office, the initiative is coordinated by the Regional 'Parenting Working Group' under the Deputy Regional Director of the Programme Group.

⁴ comprises 23 Member States (Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Islamic republic of Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen) and the Occupied Palestinian territory (including East Jerusalem).

CONFERENCE METHODS:

- › Presentations
- › Panel discussions
- › Group work sessions
- › Multimedia
- › Potential physical gatherings in areas of low connectivity

VENUE AND DATES

- › The conference is planned to be virtual via zoom
- › Proposed to be for 3 days, 8 -10 August 2023, 3 hours per day, 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM Cairo time, (7:00 am - 10:00 am in Universal Coordinated Time)
- › English will be the main language with simultaneous translation into Arabic and French.

RESOURCE/MATERIALS

Examples of inter-agency technical resources that include reference to parenting support that have guided and will continue to guide strategic inputs for the conference include:

- › The Global Initiative to Support Parents (GISP).
- › The Nurturing Care Framework and implementation tools.
- › The Adolescent Well-being Framework and the Helping Adolescents Thrive Toolkit.
- › The INSPIRE seven strategies for ending violence against children technical package.
- › UNICEF Global Parenting Framework
- › [Parenting-Guidance-Note.pdf \(unicef.org\)](#)
- › WHO mhGAP guidelines and related parenting interventions for children with developmental disabilities.
- › WHO guidelines on ECD and parenting support interventions.
- › UNICEF Parenting for Adolescents Global Guidance
- › The AFRO convening on parents and caregivers support report.
- › UNICEF gender-responsive parenting modules/resources/facilitator guide and training for parents with disability
- › UNICEF MENA Strategic Framework for Parenting Support (unpublished)
- › UNICEF Mapping of Parenting programmes in MENA Region (unpublished)
- › The results of the WHO/EMR literature review on parents' support (under process).
- › [Early childhood care and development in the Syria and Iraq humanitarian responses](#) (Plan International)
- › [Advancing Nurturing Care in Humanitarian Settings: Overview of workshops in Arab countries](#)
- › The Status of Parents and Caregivers During Crisis in Six Arab Countries: The Case of COVID-19 Pandemic in Arabic and English

BUDGET

This will cover the cost of simultaneous translation, IT support and communications.

The cost will be covered by WHO through the Global Initiative to Support Parents . UNICEF will support with resources as relevant.

REFERENCES

1. Organization WH. Global Initiative to Support Parents [Internet]. [cited 2023 Jan 25]. Available from: <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/global-initiative-to-support-parents>
2. UNICEF. STANDARDS FOR ECD PARENTING PROGRAMMES [Internet]. [cited 2023 Jan 25]. Available from: https://www.earlychildhoodworkforce.org/sites/default/files/resources/UNICEF-Standards_for_Parenting_Programs_6-8-17_pg.pdf
3. Rochat TJ, Redinger S, Rozentals-Thresher R, Yousafzia A SA. Caring for the caregivers [Internet]. 2019. Available from: <https://www.unicef.org/media/69861/file/Participants-Manual-Prototype.pdf>

