

EV4GH Board Election Proposal

Eastern Mediterranean Seat

Candidate: Omar A. Asfour (EV 2020)

The Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) has broadly diverse political and socio-economic contexts, which variably impact populations' health and shape health systems. Disparities in wealth and economic performance across the region are conspicuous. For instance, Qatar has one of the highest GDPs per capita worldwide, which is about 60 times higher than the GDP per capita in Yemen.¹ Besides, many health systems in the region are disrupted and constrained due to ongoing economic and political turmoil with several political tensions, protracted armed conflicts, humanitarian crises, and over 20 million refugees and forcibly displaced individuals.² Among other challenges to health in the region are the poor overall health research performance, inadequate health research training, human resources development, and weak translation of evidence into policy and practice.³

Despite unprecedented health challenges, the region's contributions to the global health science and practice remain inadequate. Most researchers, professionals, and institutions addressing these challenges are based in the global north. Overall, the interest and attention in health systems research in the EMR do not reflect the region's massive health needs and challenges. Even at the Emerging Voices (EV4GH) network, it seems that participation and representation from the EMR need to improve.

As a board member for the EMR seat, my priority is to promote the EV4GH network at the regional level. My goal is to increase representation and encourage young health professionals based in the region to engage in global health discourse. It requires strengthening connections and communications between Emerging Voices (EVs) at the regional level, ensuring continuous dialogue and exchanging opportunities and experiences. It also requires exploring potential collaborations at institutional levels, through which we can reach out to young voices and health professionals. I believe it is significant to extend our network's outreach into the region's more wealthy states. First, they have their health challenges that need to be addressed, such as climate change. Second, they are subject to repercussions of political and economic instabilities and fragilities in the region. Third, there is a need to promote the concept of solidarity and advocate for health systems investment that aims to achieve the regional and global good rather than acting in silos. I see the EV4GH leading a discourse among young professionals in the region about pertinent issues that are not sufficiently addressed, including corruption, equity, commercialization and privatization of health, health in conflicts, and global health decolonization.

My vision for our network is to become a global health power that advocates for health systems and shapes policy and practice worldwide. We have to establish strong connections between regions and within regions. The EV4GH is a platform to exchange experiences among future global health leaders. Our synergies are our strength, and as a board member, I will exploit all opportunities to strengthen our network and establish channels and platforms to exchange skills, knowledge, and dreams among the EVs.

¹ World Bank, "World Bank Open Data," <https://data.worldbank.org/>

² UNHCR, "Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018," (2019).

³ S. A. Ismail et al., "Assessing the State of Health Research in the Eastern Mediterranean Region," *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 106, no. 6 (2013).