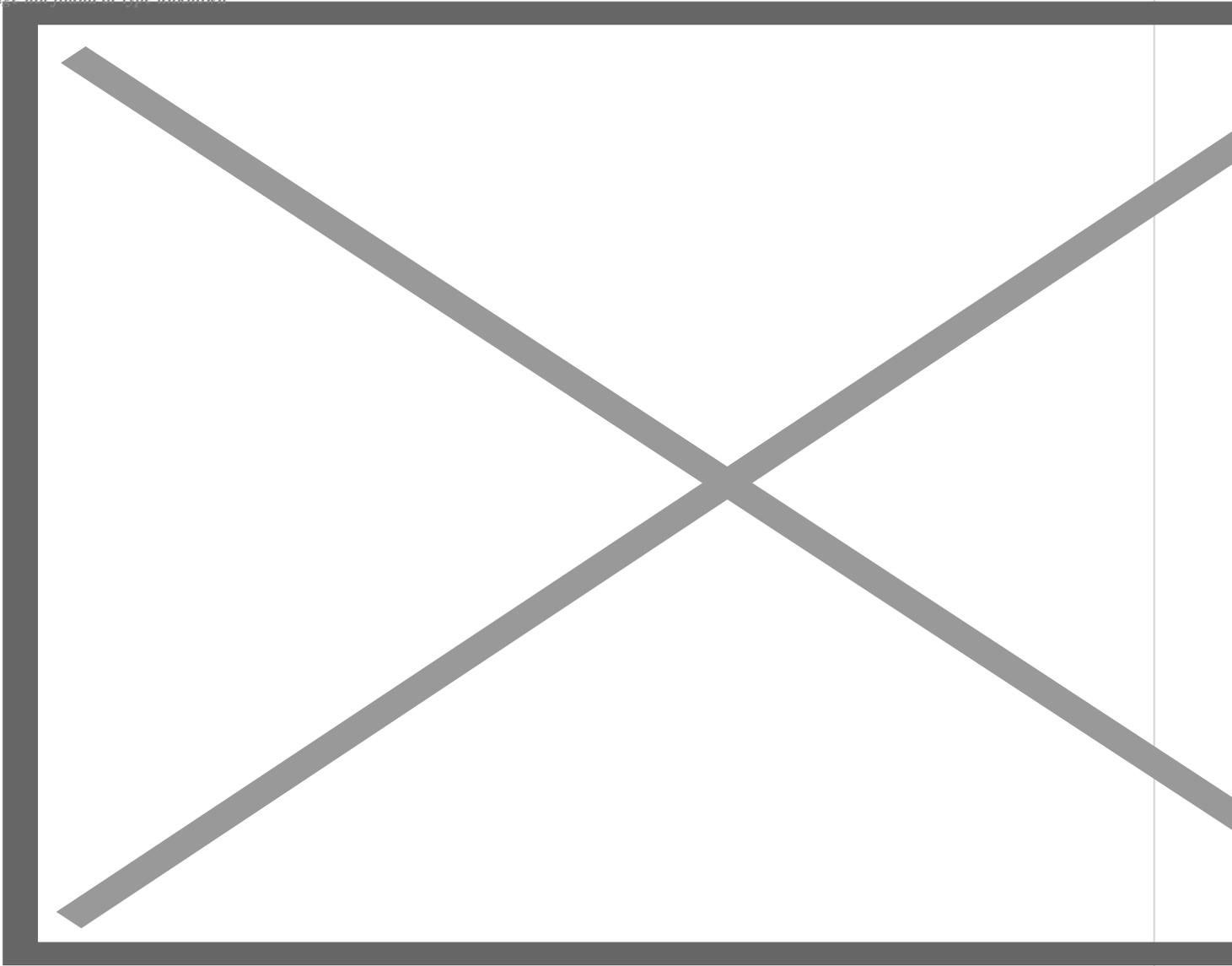# WHO says COVID may have killed 180,000 health workers

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Healthcare workers have been on the front lines of the pandemic since it began [File: Jae C. Hong/AP Photo]

Geneva, October 22 (RHC)--The World Health Organisation (WHO) has estimated between 80,000 and 180,000 healthcare workers have died worldwide due to COVID-19, warning of the danger of burnout, anxiety and fatigue as the virus continues to spread around the world.

"These deaths are a tragic loss," the WHO said on Thursday, as it released the data covering the period between January 2020 and May 2021. Total known deaths from COVID-19 stood at 3.45 million over the same period.

Workers in clinics and hospitals have been on the pandemic's front lines since the first COVID-19 cases emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019 and, while many are suffering from exhaustion and anxiety, there is little sign that the disease has run its course.

Healthcare workers have been given priority in many countries' vaccination programmes, but the unequal distribution of jabs means that on average, across the world, only two in five are fully vaccinated, the WHO said.

"We have a moral obligation to protect all health and care workers, ensure their rights and provide them with decent work in a safe and enabling practice environment. This must include access to vaccines", said Jim Campbell, Director of the WHO Health Workforce Department.

As of September 2021, available data from 119 countries suggests that less than 1 in 10 healthcare workers have been fully vaccinated in the African and Western Pacific regions, while 22 mostly high-income countries reported that more than 80 percent of their staff had been fully vaccinated. A few large high-income countries have not yet reported data to the WHO, it noted.

"Encouragingly, the reported rate of infections and deaths among health and care workers has reduced over time: but the world cannot be complacent. More work is needed to minimize the risk of infection in the workplace," the WHO statement said.

The UN health agency says governments need to strengthen the monitoring and reporting of COVID-19 infections, ill-health and deaths among health and care workers, and create a working environment in which health care workers are protected.

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