

# Increasing Access to Inhalers for COPD and Asthma



***With 5 years left to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the 4th High-level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases and the Promotion of Mental Health and Well-being, in September 2025, now is the time to advance access to quality, affordable, effective inhalers for all patients.***

**Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS)**

# Burden of COPD and asthma is massive and rising

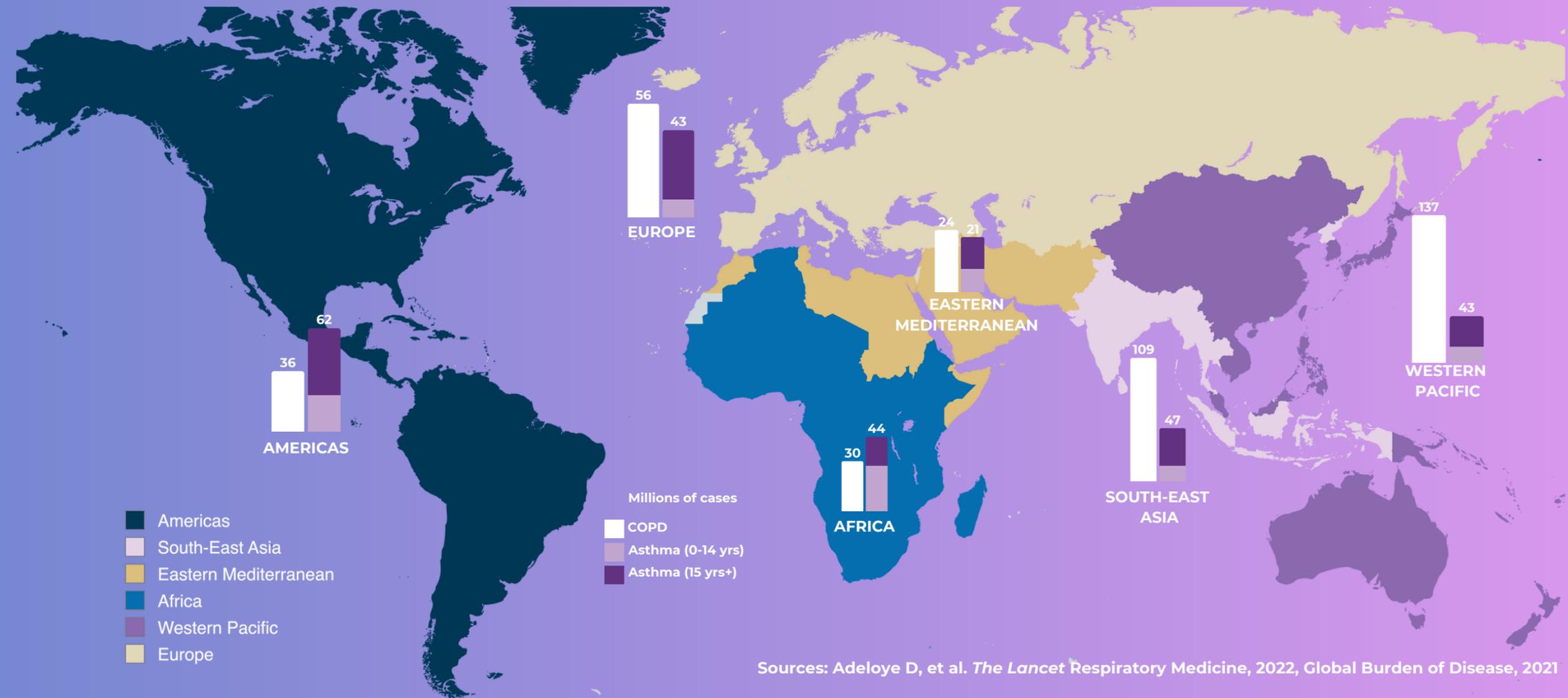
*Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and asthma cause a massive and rising burden of death and disability, placing enormous demands on households and healthcare systems. Most of this burden is preventable and treatable, including with inhaled medicines.*

Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS)



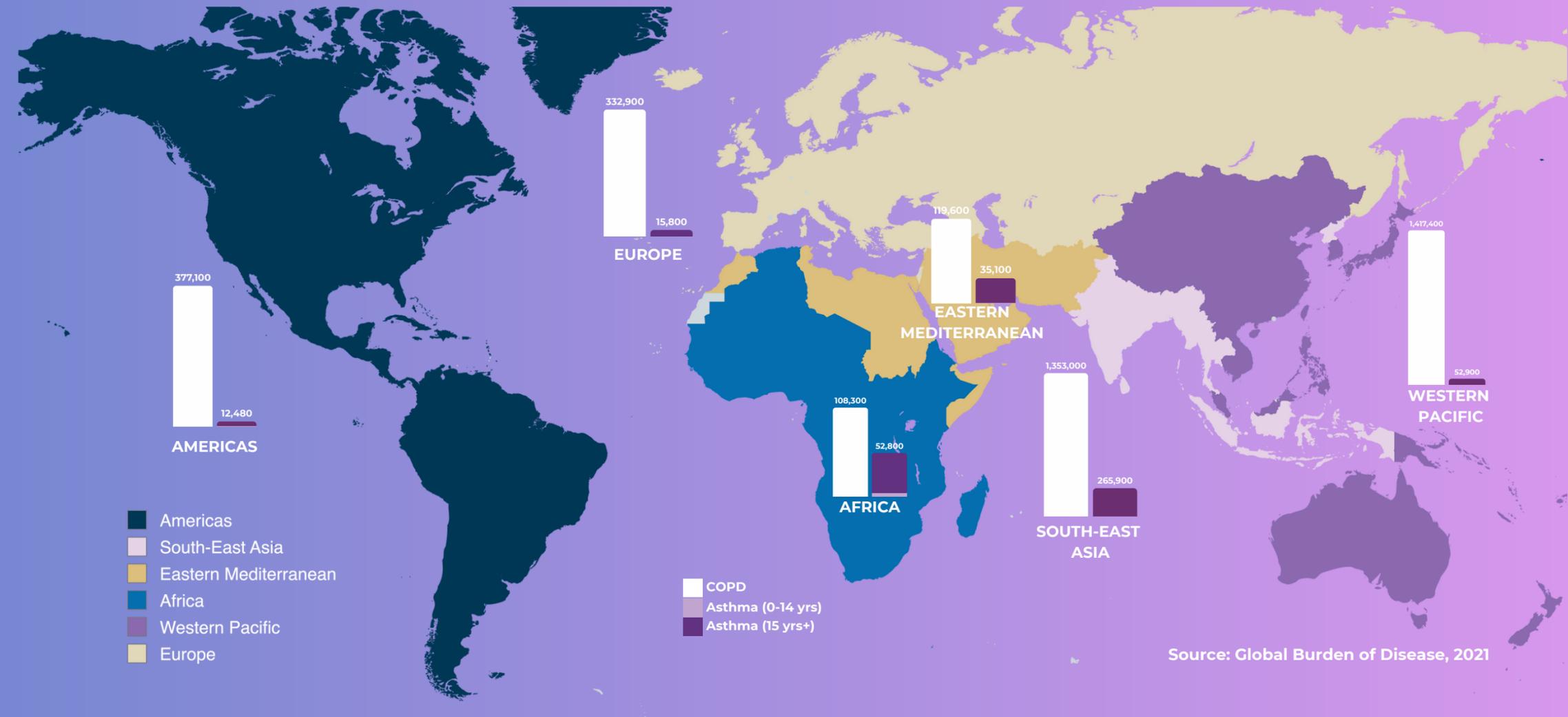
# 652 million people live with COPD and asthma

- 652 million affected in 2021.
  - 392 million COPD
  - 260 million asthma
- 63% of COPD cases are in the Western Pacific and South-East Asia regions.
- The Americas has the largest number of people living with asthma, followed by South-East Asia.



# COPD and asthma kill 4.1 million people each year

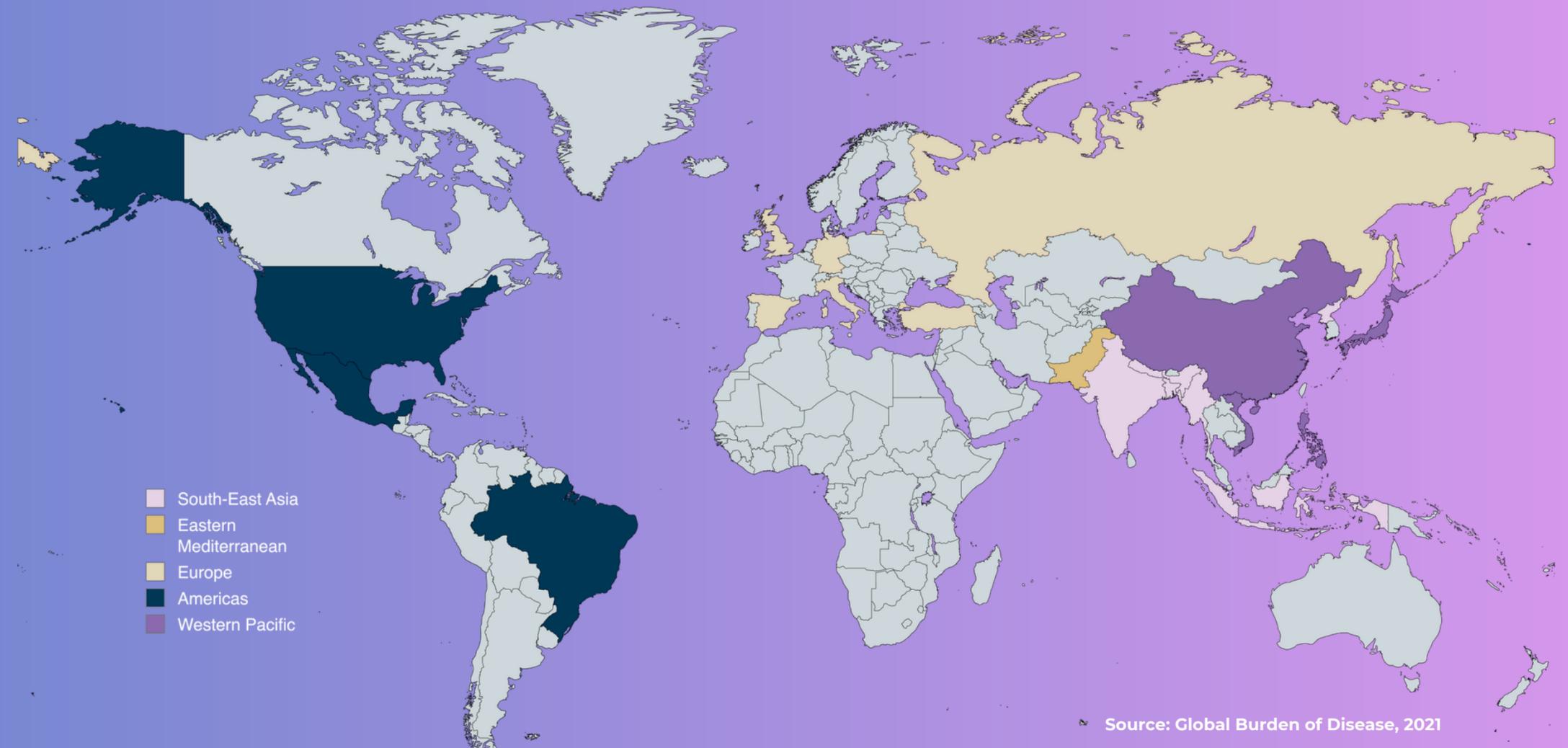
- 4.1 million deaths in 2021.
  - 3.7 million COPD deaths
  - 436,000 asthma deaths
- 74% of COPD deaths are in the Western Pacific and South-East Asia regions.
- 60% of asthma deaths across all ages occur in South-East Asia, but 47% of child asthma deaths are in Africa.



# 80% of COPD deaths are in 20 countries

- China\*
- India\*
- USA
- Indonesia\*
- Bangladesh\*
- Pakistan\*
- Brazil\*
- Germany
- Myanmar\*
- United Kingdom
- Viet Nam\*
- Türkiye\*
- Japan
- Russia
- Mexico\*
- North Korea\*
- Spain
- Italy
- Nepal\*
- Philippines\*

\*Low- and middle-income countries

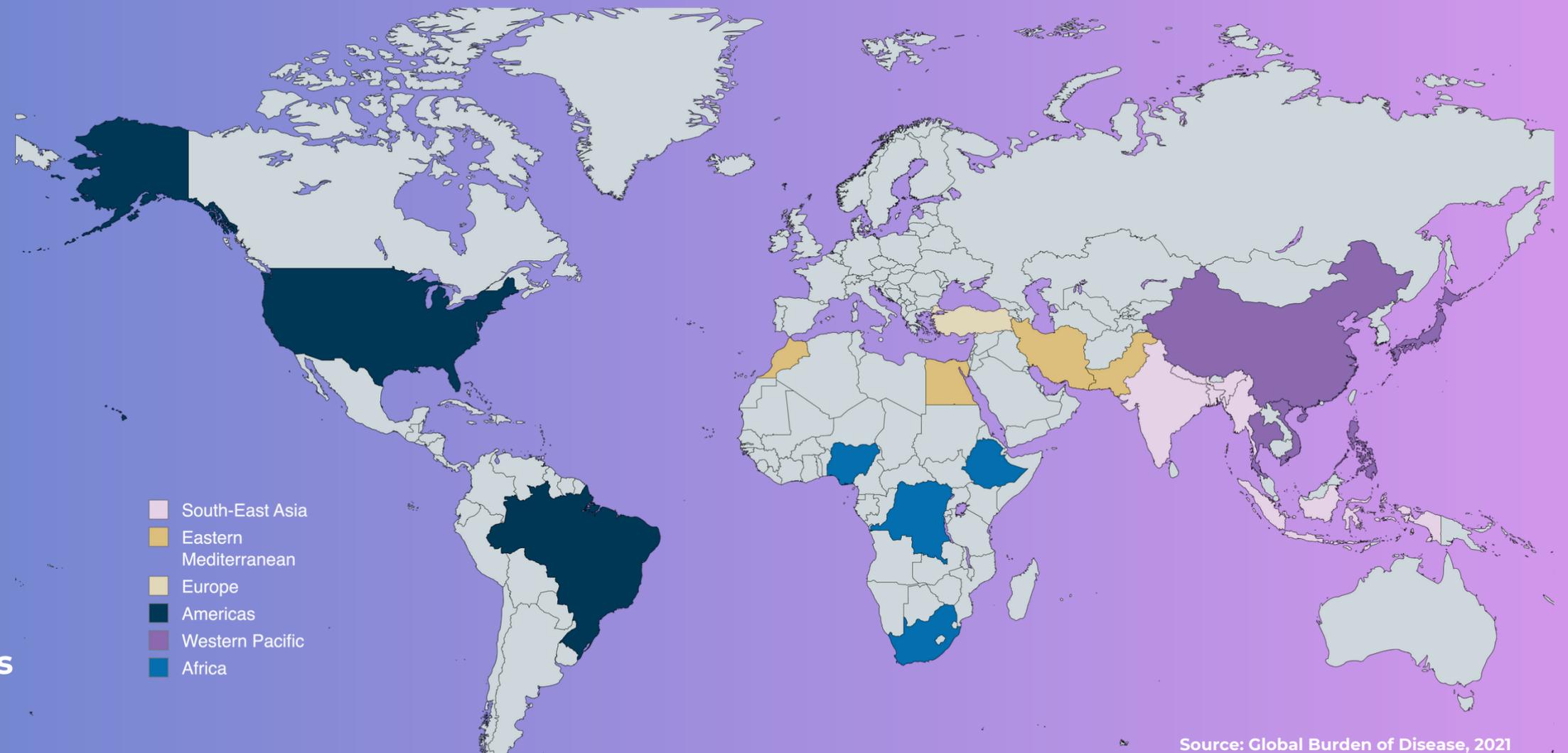


Source: Global Burden of Disease, 2021

# 90% of asthma deaths are in 20 countries

- India\*
- Indonesia\*
- China\*
- Pakistan\*
- Bangladesh\*
- Myanmar\*
- Philippines\*
- Viet Nam\*
- Nigeria\*
- Democratic Republic of Congo\*
- South Africa\*
- Nepal\*
- Thailand\*
- USA
- Iran\*
- Morocco\*
- Ethiopia\*
- Egypt\*
- Brazil\*
- Türkiye\*

\*Low- and middle-income countries



Source: Global Burden of Disease, 2021

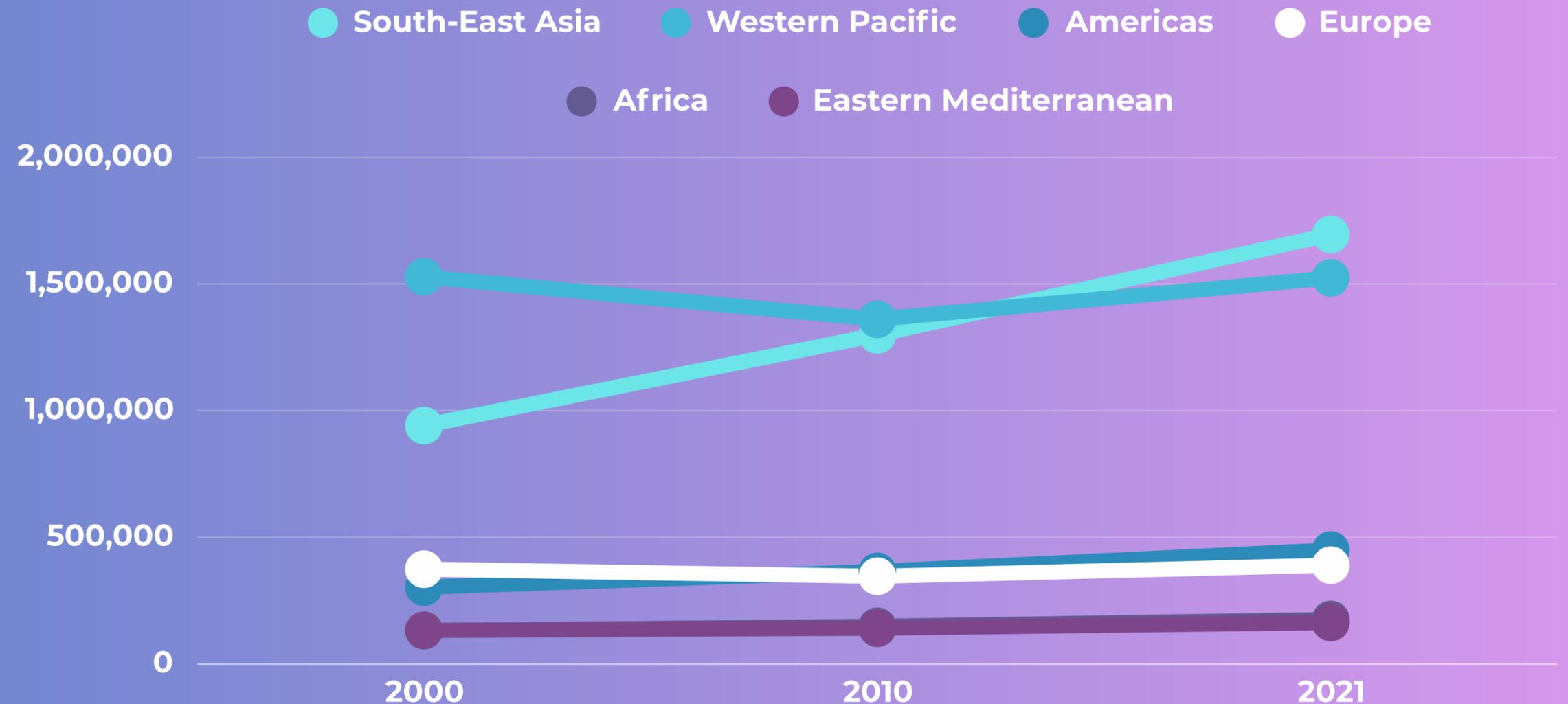
# COPD deaths are rising sharply in most regions

COPD deaths rose by 29% between 2000 and 2021.

- South-East Asia (92%), the Americas (48%), and Africa (44%).

COPD deaths rose by more than 60% in:

- Türkiye
- India
- Nepal
- Philippines
- Mexico
- Indonesia



Source: Global Burden of Disease, 2021

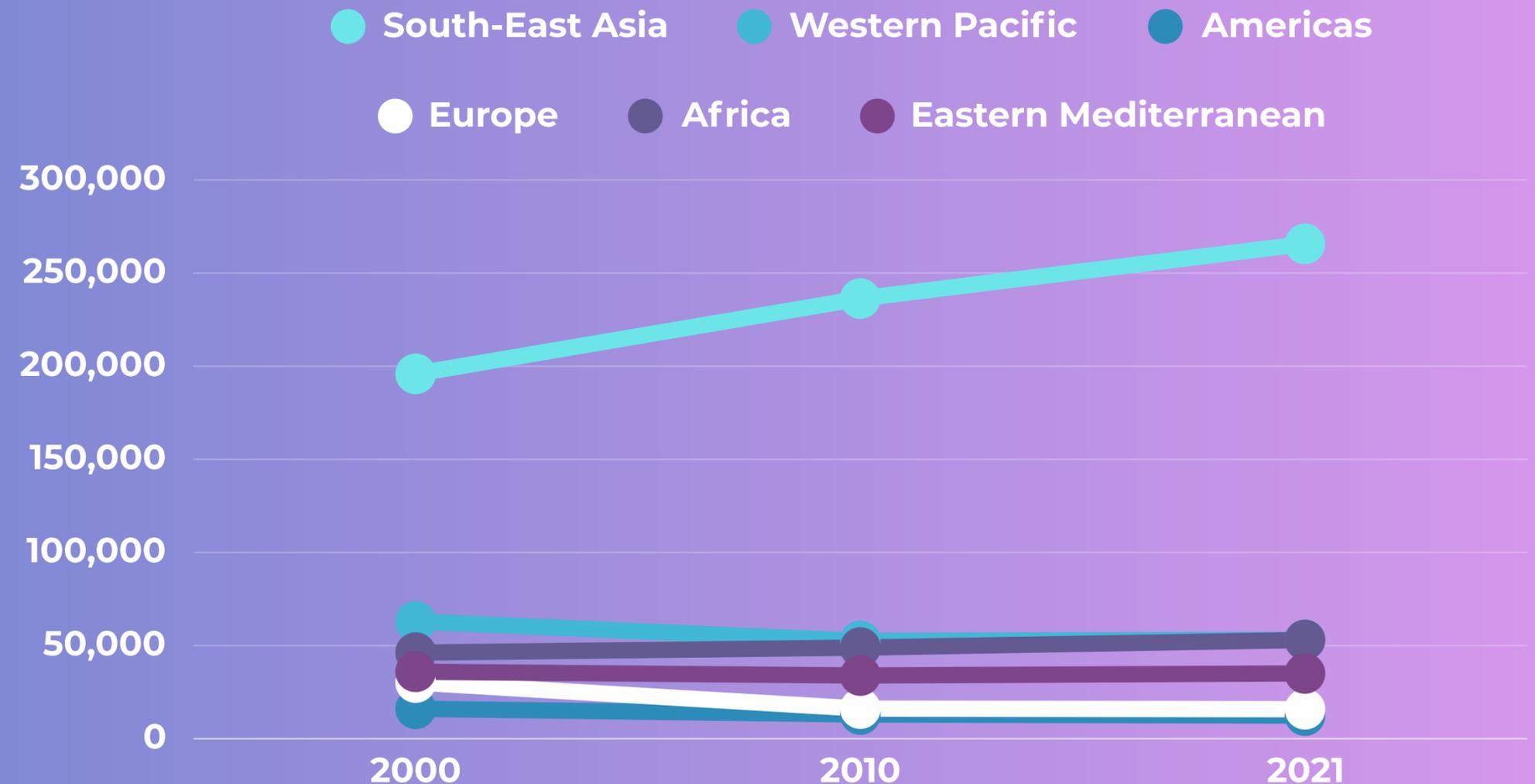
# Asthma deaths are also rising, but not in all regions

Asthma deaths rose by 12% between 2000 and 2021.

- Increases in South-East Asia (36%) and Africa (15%)
- Declines in Europe (-48%), Americas (-23%), Western Pacific (-16%), and Eastern Mediterranean (-12%)

Asthma deaths rose by more than 20% in:

- India
- Nepal
- Democratic Republic of Congo
- Philippines
- Morocco



Source: Global Burden of Disease, 2021

# COPD and asthma impose massive burden on society

**Healthcare costs:**

- hospitalization
- medicines

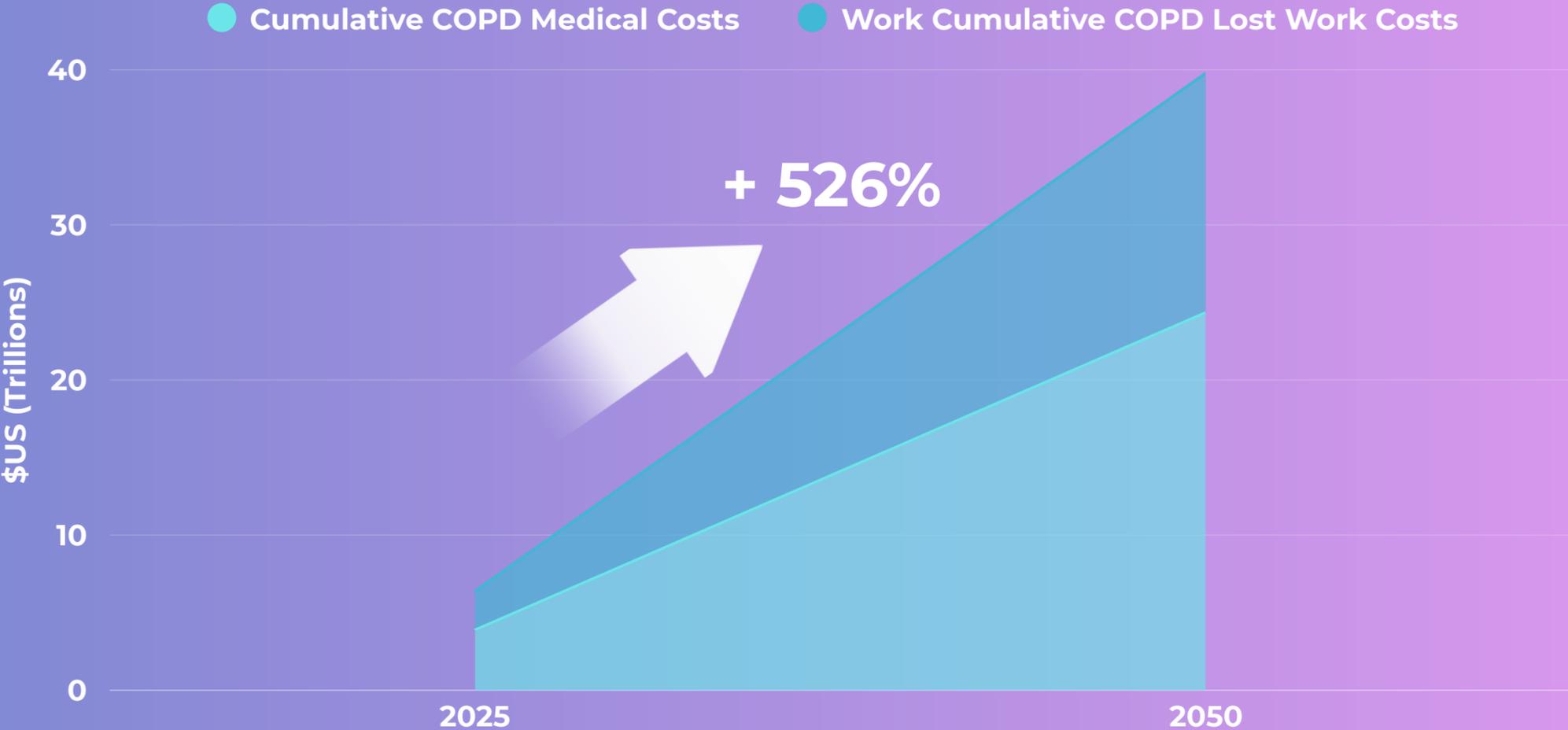
**Educational costs:**

- lost school days, especially for children with asthma

**Economic costs:**

- lost work days
- reduced productivity
- lost wages

Costs will continue to rise with population growth and longer lifespans. A recent study projected a cumulative cost of more than US\$40 trillion by 2050 for COPD alone.

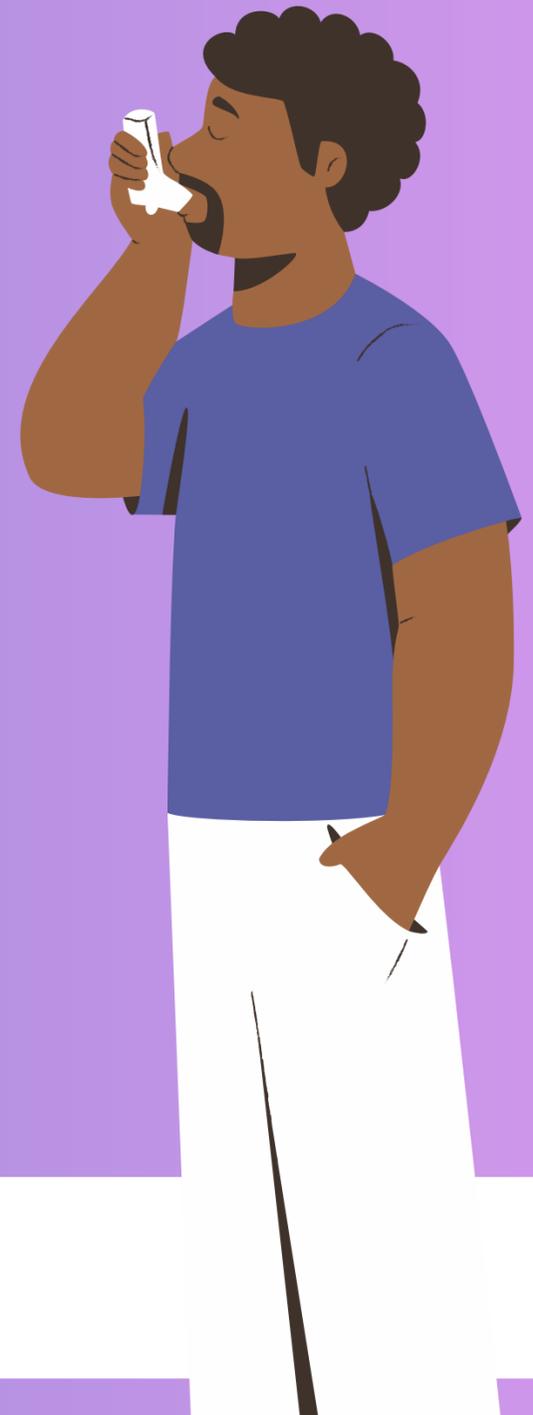


Source: Boers E, et al. Forecasting the global economic and health burden of COPD from 2025 through 2050. CHEST, 2025

# Inhalers proven to reduce disease severity and death

***Inhalers contain medicines - including bronchodilators and corticosteroids and combinations of these - that deliver medication directly to the lungs. Inhalers reduce flare-ups which can be distressing, disruptive, and life-threatening and enable people to manage their condition, lead normal lives, and engage in education, work, and sport.***

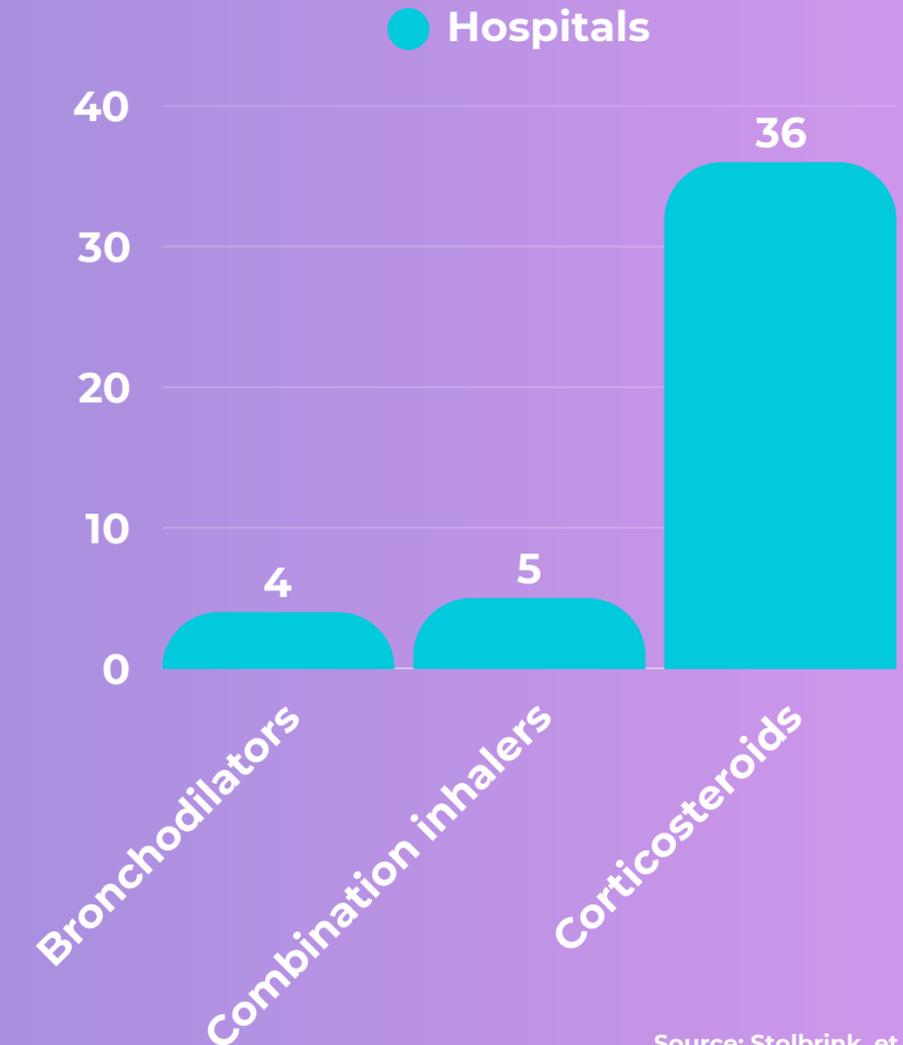
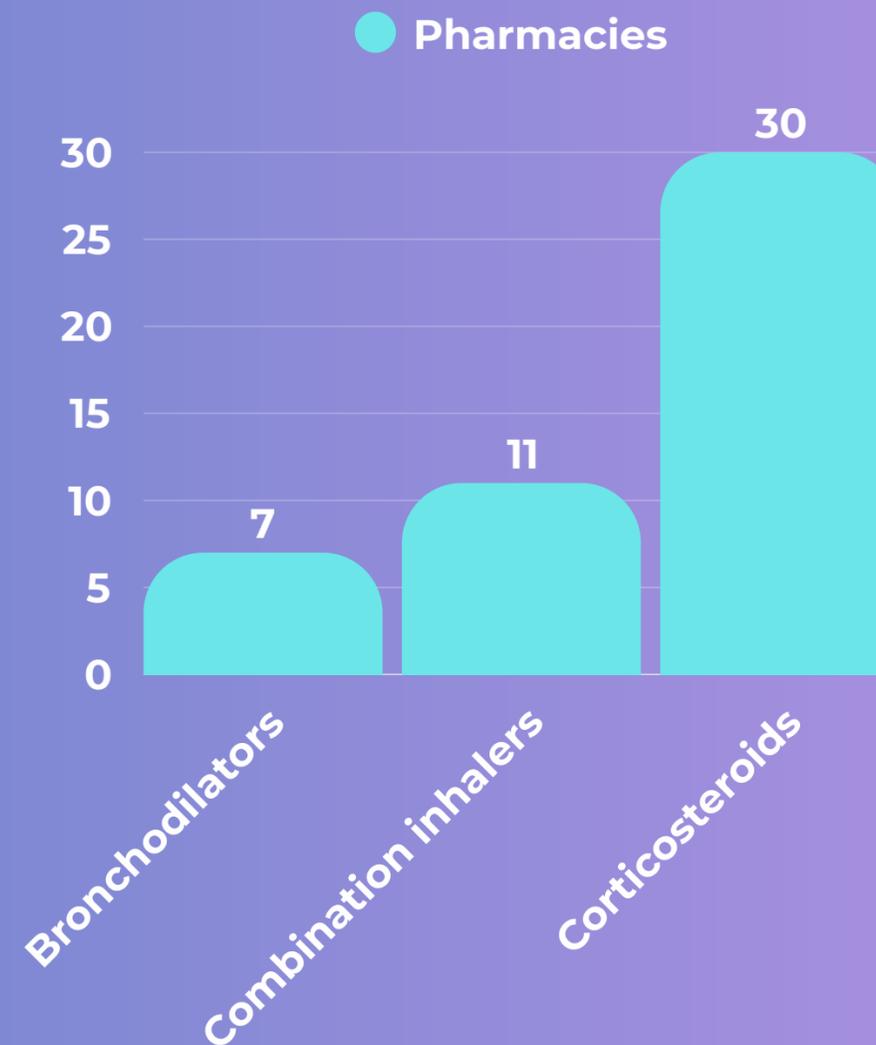
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# Affordable inhalers are hard to find in LMICs

- Long-acting inhaled bronchodilators:
  - 7% of pharmacies
  - 4% of hospitals
- Combination long-acting inhaled bronchodilators and corticosteroids:
  - 11% of pharmacies
  - 5% of hospitals
- Inhaled corticosteroids:
  - 30% of pharmacies
  - 36% of hospitals

Most LMICs have not achieved NCD Action Plan target of at least 80% of health facilities with inhalers.



Source: Stolbrink, et al, 2024

# The access to inhalers “equity gap”

*While many NCD-related medicines were widely available globally, significant differences were observed between income groups when it came to availability of inhalers, which were generally available in only 26% of low-income countries but 93% of high-income countries.*

WHO NCD Country Capacity Survey 2023



# Inhalers often cost more than a week's wages

Inhalers can cost more than a week's wages for a month's supply in many LMICs.

- Corticosteroid inhalers much more expensive than bronchodilators.

Too many patients rely on cheaper and potentially harmful treatments.

**BRONCHODILATORS**  
(short-acting)  
1-4 days' wages

**BRONCHODILATORS**  
(long-acting)  
6-26 days' wages

**INHALED**  
**CORTICOSTEROIDS**  
2-107 days' wages

# Cost-effectiveness of affordable inhalers

***After Brazil introduced free inhaled medicines for asthma care, household costs fell from 29% of income to 2% and the hospitalisation rate fell from 90 per 100,000 to 60 per 100,000 people.***

Comaru et al. Free asthma medications reduces hospital admissions in Brazil, *Respiratory Medicine*, 2016



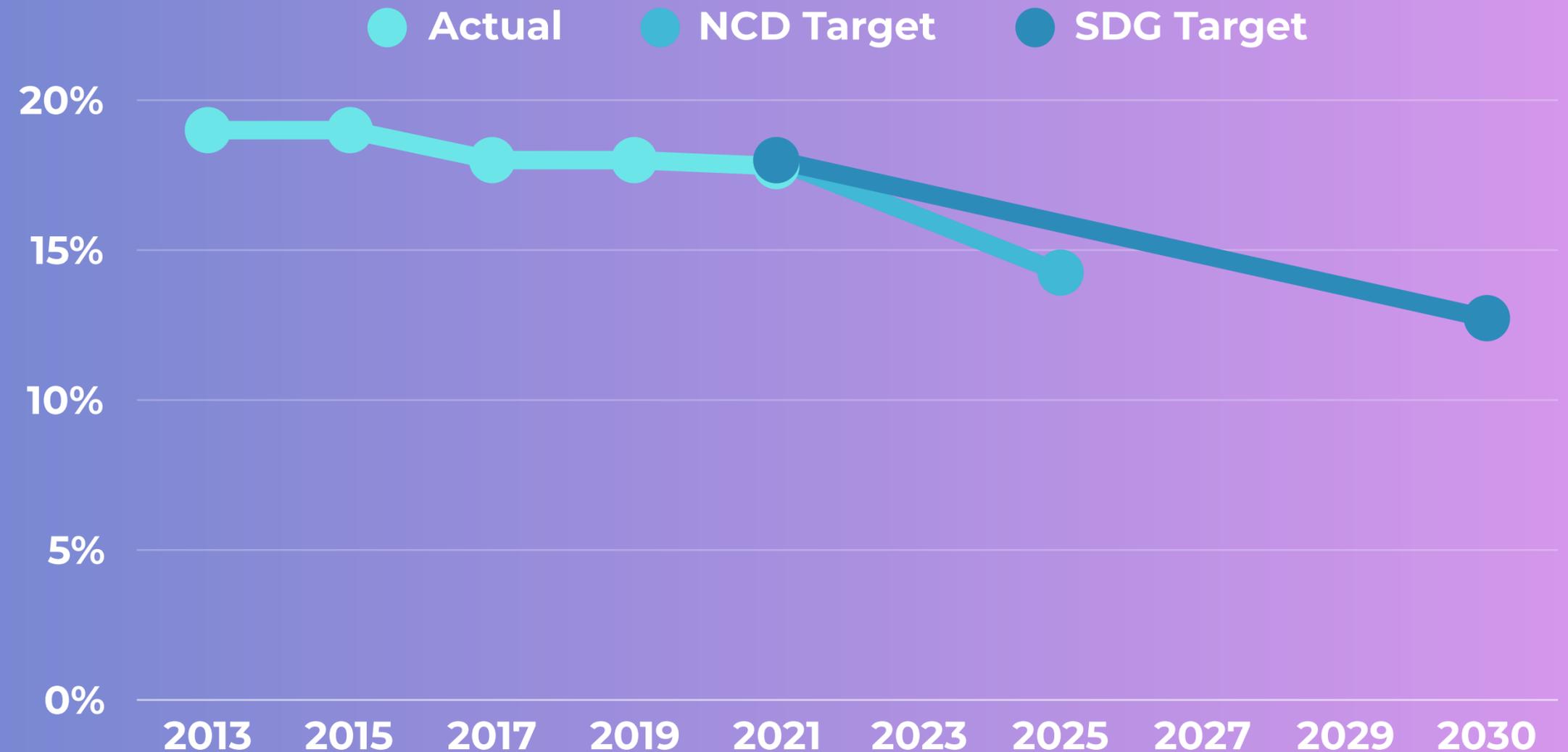
# Momentum for action on access to inhalers building



# Why we need action on inhaled medicines now

Probability of 30 year old dying from a NCD, including chronic respiratory disease, before they turn 70 has barely changed in last decade (19%-18%).

Only 19 out of 194 countries are on track to meet SDG target 3.4 to reduce NCD mortality by one third by 2030.



Source: WHO, 2024