

## **Regional strategy and action plan for tobacco control reflecting the commitments of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control**

### **Introduction**

1. The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) is the most powerful evidence-based tool available to combat the global tobacco epidemic. To date, 19 countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region have become Parties to the Convention; however, implementation of the WHO FCTC in the Region remains suboptimal.

2. Data from the *WHO global report on trends in prevalence of tobacco smoking 2015* show that smoking prevalence is expected to decline in all WHO regions by 2025 except in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, where it is expected to rise. This poses a significant threat to achieving the global voluntary target of reducing tobacco use by 30% by 2025, and will undermine achievement of Sustainable Development Goal target 3.a on strengthening implementation of the WHO FCTC by 2030. To achieve these critical targets, higher levels of political commitment and intensified multisectoral engagement are required from all countries in the Region.

3. In view of this situation, in October 2017 the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean requested the development of a strategy and action plan for tobacco control. The regional strategy and action plan for tobacco control 2019–2023 reflects the heightened urgency of implementing the articles of the WHO FCTC to substantially reduce the burden of noncommunicable diseases related to tobacco. The draft strategy provides a vision and strategic approaches to effectively address the tobacco epidemic in the Eastern Mediterranean Region for the next five years, in line with the Thirteenth General Programme of Work 2019–2023. It uses a balanced approach between demand- and supply-side tobacco control measures, taking the complex situation in the Region into account.

4. The draft regional strategy and action plan will be submitted to the 65th session of the Regional Committee for endorsement. This progress report presents the key areas and objectives covered in the strategy.

### **Challenges and opportunities**

5. Ensuring the sustainability of tobacco control programmes remains a major challenge in many countries of the Region. Attempts by the tobacco industry to oppose or circumvent national and regional tobacco control efforts will escalate as Member States expand implementation of the WHO FCTC.

6. Strategic collaboration with other health programmes and government sectors, as well as with development partners, international agencies and nongovernmental organizations, is needed to safeguard the WHO FCTC and strengthen national tobacco control efforts. Innovative means of financing tobacco control, such as tobacco taxes and/or the creation of a special fund, should be explored by countries. Opportunities to mobilize political support also exist with the high profile given to tobacco control at the Third United Nations High-level Meeting on Noncommunicable Diseases in September 2018, and the growing interest in tobacco taxation structures that link tobacco tax revenues to health foundations.

### **Areas of commitment**

7. The draft regional strategy highlights four areas of commitment, which relate to corresponding Articles of the WHO FCTC. The following table shows the key objectives, under each of the four areas of commitment.

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Area of commitment	Key objectives, by 2023
Governance and political commitment	Attain ratification of the WHO FCTC in all Member States and ensure that infrastructure is in place for its implementation.  Strengthen national capacity and leadership for tobacco control to counter tobacco industry interference in at least 50% of Member States.  Establish measures to ensure sustainability of tobacco control programmes in all Member States.
Demand reduction	Initiate new and expand implementation of existing demand reduction measures for tobacco control, consistent with the guidelines and protocols adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the WHO FCTC and with the MPOWER package, in all Member States.
Supply restriction	Establish and implement supply restriction measures for tobacco control, consistent with the guidelines and protocols adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the WHO FCTC, in at least 50% of Member States.
Surveillance, monitoring and research	Enhance surveillance, monitoring, research and information dissemination across the Region so that recent, representative and periodic data for youth and adults are available in at least 50% of Member States.

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