

**REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE  
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN  
Sixty-ninth Session  
Cairo, Egypt, 10–13 October 2022**

**October 2022**

## **REGIONAL CERVICAL CANCER ELIMINATION STRATEGY**

### **Objectives of the event**

On 10 October 2022, a technical discussion will be held on the regional cervical cancer elimination strategy.

The objectives of the event are to:

- increase understanding of the regional context in relation to cervical cancer; and
- review a regional strategy to help improve implementation of evidence-based and recommended public health interventions to eliminate cervical cancer as a public health problem.

### **Background**

On 17 November 2020, WHO launched the *Global Strategy to eliminate cervical cancer as a public health problem*, which had been adopted by the World Health Assembly in August 2020.<sup>1</sup> In order to eliminate this highly preventable and treatable disease, which is estimated to have claimed the lives of almost 342 000 women in 2020 alone,<sup>2</sup> the Global Strategy aims to reach the following bold targets by 2030:

- 90% of girls fully vaccinated with the HPV vaccine by age of 15 years;
- 70% of women screened with a high-performance test by 35 years of age and again by 45 years of age;
- 90% of women identified with the cervical disease receive treatment (90% of women with precancer treated, and 90% of women with invasive cancer managed).

Recognizing that women and girls face multiple and intersecting sociocultural, economic and health challenges, the Global Strategy emphasizes that biomedical and clinical interventions alone will not be sufficient to reach the HPV and cervical cancer targets, as many of the implementation challenges are related to health system weaknesses and inequities that commonly affect low- and middle-income countries, where the burden of disease is the highest. Furthermore, addressing the multiple and intersecting sociocultural and structural drivers of cervical cancer morbidity and mortality is key to reaching those women and girls who carry a disproportionate burden of disease.

The implementation of comprehensive and strong cervical cancer programmes, in line with the Global Strategy, remains low in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. In order to gain a better understanding of health system readiness and potential barriers to the implementation of the Global Strategy, it will be necessary to ensure close interaction with national stakeholders to better understand the perceptions of policy-makers as well as the barriers and opportunities related to implementation. This will help to inform the adaptation and development of a regional cervical cancer elimination strategy that can pave the way forward and meet the needs of Member States, taking into account the regional context and additional challenges posed by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240014107>.

<sup>2</sup> International Agency for Research on Cancer. Globocan 2020. <https://gco.iarc.fr/today/data/factsheets/cancers/23-Cervix-uteri-fact-sheet.pdf>.

## **Challenges in the Region**

One of the main challenges in the Region is a lack of political commitment to the cervical cancer elimination agenda by Member States. Competing priorities, particularly in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and the lack of effective communication strategies for cervical cancer have resulted in low numbers of HPV vaccination programmes in Member States. Currently, screening programmes are opportunistic and/or have low coverage and there is poor access to quality treatment and palliative care. Poor quality data and the stigma around cervical cancer and HPV vaccination remain key challenges.

## **Expected outcomes**

- increased understanding of the regional context in order to improve implementation of evidence-based and recommended public health interventions to eliminate cervical cancer;
- feedback on the regional cervical cancer elimination strategy from Member States which will be incorporated into the final version.