

# Introduction



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The Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) comprises of 22 member states in the Middle East, North Africa and West Asia, with a total population of around 712 million (1). Many of these states share similarities in language, religion and culture, yet vary widely in terms of their economic situation, healthcare system development, and the corresponding health challenges faced. In 2020, over 700,000 people were diagnosed with cancer in the EMR and, unfortunately, approximately 500,000 lost their lives to cancer in the same year (2). These figures are predicted to double by 2040 (2).

Whilst the EMR demonstrates many challenges in cancer care, understanding these is often obscured by issues of conflict, resources and inequality. The *Cancer Control: Eastern Mediterranean Region Special Report*, draws on the expertise and knowledge of more than 60 contributors, most from within the region, to analyze cancer issues at first hand, what is being done to overcome them, and future directions. This is the first time such information has been documented in one report and provides an opportunity for more in-depth study of cancer control across the EMR and the interaction between countries, as well as providing a basis for shared information and ongoing cooperation.

*Cancer Control: Eastern Mediterranean Region Special Report* is the first in a new series of region-specific reports from Global Health Dynamics, the publishers of the *Cancer Control* series ([www.cancercontrol.info](http://www.cancercontrol.info)).

Work on this special report started in early 2019 and draws on my previous experience of the region through the World Health Organization (WHO). It was obvious that EMR countries needed to describe the variability in cancer resources across the 22 countries of the region, as well as explaining particular regional cancer issues, including the impact of the rising incidence of cancer, the current state of cancer control and prevention strategies. There was also a need to take stock of new global cancer initiatives and the scale-up to achieve the

Sustainable Development Goal target 3.4 to reduce premature NCD mortality by 2030.

Discussions were initiated with more than 60 colleagues, cancer experts from across the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as from global institutions involved in the region. Authors from the WHO, International Agency for Research on Cancer and International Atomic Energy Agency, have also welcomed the idea and contributed greatly to the special report.

The special report consists of ten chapters covering the whole cancer care continuum, including planning, prevention, early detection, access to care, treatment, palliative care, and cancer surveillance and research. Besides covering the unique regional situation, and the new WHO initiatives, the regional experts have added three further chapters on cancer care in humanitarian settings, paediatric oncology to assist with the scale-up of the global childhood cancer initiatives (GICC), and the role of civil society organizations in advancing cancer care in the EMR.

Each chapter outlines the current status in EMR countries, the challenges and progress with a set of recommendations targeting cancer managers and policy-makers. I hope this will make the special report a valuable resource for healthcare practitioners, researchers, academics and policy-makers who are interested in cancer control programmes from the region and globally.

Finally, I would like to thank the chapter leads for their hard work in coordinating activities, Eman Alkhawali, Ali Al Zahrani, Andre Ilbawi, Mark Lodge, Saleh Alessy, Asmus Hammerich, Heba Fouad, Ariana Znaor, Slim Slama, Deborah Mukharji, Raya Saab, Kazem Zendehel, Sami Ayed, Nasim Pourghazian, Fatemeh Toorang, and all the authors who contributed their knowledge and time to the project.

I hope you find the special report useful in your work and if you have any comments or suggestions please feel do not hesitate to contact me. ■

## References

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