



EMPHNET's Research Digest

Cancer registration in the Middle East, North Africa, and Turkey (MENAT) region: A tale of conflict, challenges, and opportunities

Introduction

Cancer is a major public health issue across the world, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. The MENAT region, which encompasses Middle Eastern and North African countries along with Turkey, is expected to see a 60% increase in the cancer burden by 2030, which is projected to be the highest increase in the world. This is attributed to factors such as recurring conflicts, shifting demographics, and increased environmental pollution. To effectively address this growing cancer burden, accurate cancer registration is crucial and must be integrated into well-formed national and regional cancer control plans.

The role of cancer registries is to gather data on the incidence and prevalence of cancer, as well as survival and mortality rates. This data informs cancer control strategies, including prevention, screening, early diagnosis, and treatment. Cancer registries also

provide data for epidemiological research studies and feasibility assessments for clinical trials and can be used for health system analysis and quality indicator monitoring. They are also an important tool for evidence-based cancer management in high-income countries.

However, in the MENAT region, the capacity and resources for cancer registration are limited and impacted by multiple challenges. To address these challenges, the [Initiative for Cancer Registration in the MENAT \(ICRIM\)](#) organized a workshop with registry managers, policy makers, and international agencies from 19 countries in the region. The workshop outcome included recommendations to improve the capacity for cancer registration in the MENAT region. The purpose of this digest is to highlight important findings from [this study](#), which was published in November, 2022 in *Frontiers of Oncology*.



**Cancer Registration
Procedures**



Collaborative Governance



**Putting Cancer
Registration on the Map**



Capacity Building

Cancer Registration Landscape in MENAT

Prior to the workshop, a survey was conducted to assess the current state of cancer registration in the region. The survey was sent to 26 national and institutional cancer registry managers and administrators from Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

The results of the survey revealed a significant disparity in the resources and capacities of cancer registration across the region. While some Gulf Cooperation Council countries had well-established population-based cancer registries, countries like Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Iraq faced severe challenges due to the ongoing conflicts and displacement of populations. The challenges included incomplete medical records, inaccurate death records, lack of trained staff, absence of legislation mandating cancer registration, insufficient funding, weak healthcare infrastructure, and poor communication among stakeholders.

Recommendations

Recommendations were categorized under four main headings: Cancer registration procedures, collaborative governance, putting cancer registration on the map, and capacity building.

The first heading focused on standardizing cancer registration procedures, linking it, and digitalizing it, to reduce variability and under-reporting, and ensure high quality vital statistics and mortality data. This involves establishing standard operating procedures (SOPs) for cancer registries in the region and linking cancer registration records with civil and death registries for proper data linkage.

The second heading concentrated on collaborative governance,

the ICRIM recommended that a collaborative governance structure is established to bring together key stakeholders in the region. This involves establishing a common legal framework for reporting and registration as well as establishing formal governmental linkages with cancer registration agencies under the World Health Organization, such as the International Association of Cancer Registries (IACR) and Global Initiative for Cancer Registry Development (GICR). They also recommended the idea of registry twinning programs, which aim to connect MENAT registries with established global registries, to foster exchange of expertise and skills. Additionally, the ICRIM suggested establishing a regional cancer registration expert group that can form a cancer registry scientific coordination committee to oversee the governance, implementation, and financial sustainability of cancer registration in the region.

With regards to raising awareness on cancer registration (putting cancer registration on the map) this entails a proactive approach to raise visibility, awareness, and productive collaboration on cancer registration in the MENAT region and its impact on both practice and policy. They recommended the establishment of an online platform to bring together relevant stakeholders in cancer registration and develop a “community of practice.” The platform would host regular regional webinars and workshops that address topics such as staff retention strategies, technical aspects, economic evaluation, and awareness of cancer registration. This platform would help maximize the dissemination and use of data and knowledge by engaging various stakeholders and using tailored communication channels that are relevant to different audiences.

The MENAT region should also celebrate an annual “Day of Cancer Registration,” where cancer registrars, epidemiologists, policymakers, researchers, and

clinicians can come together to discuss the needs, challenges, and recommendations for cancer registration. These events would include technical, policy, and dissemination meetings to facilitate the transfer of knowledge into policy. Social media campaigns in Arabic, English, French, and Turkish should also be developed to raise awareness on cancer registration, and resources should be produced to educate the general public and policymakers in the MENAT region on the importance of cancer registration.

The fourth and final category of recommendations focused on enhancing capacity building for cancer registration. This recommendation focused on training staff on data entry utilizing electronic systems, which is especially crucial for lower-income countries in the MENAT region, including Palestine and Iraq. To address this need, the Global Initiative for Cancer Registry Development (GICR) should provide regular capacity-building training sessions to all registries in the region. The training should cover all aspects of cancer registration and be designed to benefit all registry staff, including those working at the ministries of health and at medical centers where cancer is diagnosed and treated. Additionally, a certification program should be established for cancer registrars, offering them the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and knowledge. Finally, advanced training should be provided to key staff, with the goal of creating a team of peer-to-peer trainers within the region.

The workshop concluded that further convening events and support from international entities are necessary to address the challenges faced by cancer registration in the region, particularly in countries impacted by conflict. ICRIM has been mandated to continue its leadership role in these efforts in collaboration with all stakeholders.

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