



# Strengthening Tunisia's HPV Vaccine Introduction

## Country Case Study



### Introducing the Linked Network

The Linked Immunisation Action Network facilitates a collaborative, peer-to-peer learning approach that brings together Gavi-eligible Middle-Income Countries (MICs) with common challenges to discuss their experiences implementing approaches and strategies to address them. Countries may have access to global guidance and evidence but often express that they do not have access to the necessary practical “how-to” implementation knowledge that comes from the experiences of other countries. This is a gap that peer learning seeks to address.

Collaborative learning goes beyond convening countries around a specific topic, to facilitate a structured learning process in which country participants who face common challenges systematically share knowledge and produce new ideas that enable them to tackle complex issues and achieve their goals. It creates a shared space to discuss and analyse the root causes of implementation challenges.

Linked continues to support countries to translate learnings to action. After a country identifies an approach or strategy to address a barrier to sustainable immunisation coverage or new vaccine introduction, Linked supports the country to develop and implement an action-oriented roadmap for adapting and implementing the approach or strategy within their own context. The stages of Linked's country causal pathway are identified in Graphic A.

Graphic A: Stages of Linked's country causal pathway



### Key Findings

- *Linked found that one of the most important factors in its engagement with Tunisia was the timing and responsiveness of their first Linked learning engagement which took place during the peak of HPV vaccine introduction preparations.[1]*
- *Following their participation in the network's engagements, Tunisia further refined and improved their HPV vaccine introduction strategy, specifically recognising the need to involve religious leaders in their communication strategy.*
- *Tunisia appreciated the opportunity to engage with peers across regions as it offered greater diversity in experiences which surfaced rich and valuable new learnings.*
- *A critical component of the Linked approach is the participation of Alliance partners to add their experiences and expertise to discussions and to support countries to adapt and implement network learnings in their own countries.*
- *As a country that has never been eligible for traditional Gavi support, Tunisia benefited from access to a global platform like the Linked Network, to understand better the landscape of Alliance partners and the types of support available.*

[1] *Linked facilitates in-person and virtual collaborative learning engagements which bring together countries to discuss shared challenges as well as the implementation of strategies and approaches to address these challenges. In July 2023, Tunisia participated in an in-person workshop in Istanbul along with Cuba, Kosovo, Mongolia, Philippines, and Viet Nam. Further details about this workshop are provided in subsequent sections and also on the [Linked website here](#).*

## Building the Evidence Base for Linked

This case study is a part of Linked's broader monitoring, measurement, and learning effort to assess how the network's collaborative learning approach is contributing to improved immunisation outcomes, specifically achieving and sustaining high and equitable coverage of essential vaccines.

To develop this case study, Linked first conducted a review of project documentation, including plans to adapt and implement learnings from network engagements, as well as notes from follow-on discussions on the progress of these plans. Linked then conducted qualitative interviews with Tunisian network engagement participants and relevant immunisation stakeholders, including representatives from the Ministry of Health's Expanded Program for Immunisation, the Director of Primary Care, a health officer from the UNICEF country office, and the Gavi Senior Country Manager, to further validate and examine the progress that has been made thus far and the linkage between network learnings and contributions to improved outcomes. Additionally, key insights from this case study may further inform which and how aspects of the networks collaborative learning approach have been effective.

## Engaging Tunisia at a Strategic Moment in its HPV introduction

Tunisia joined the Linked Network in 2023 – a strategic moment in the country's path to introduce the HPV vaccine. As a member country, Tunisia participated in a series of cross-regional, highly participatory, collaborative learning engagements with other MICs to discuss common challenges and share experiences implementing strategies to overcome or mitigate these challenges related to HPV vaccine introduction. Linked's collaborative learning engagements are one mechanism of support leveraged by Gavi to support the sustainable introduction of new vaccines and to prevent and mitigate backsliding in vaccine coverage in MICs.

At the time of their initial engagement with the network, Tunisia's Expanded Immunisation Program (EPI) had secured political commitment supporting introduction of the HPV vaccine from the Minister of Health, decided on the introduction strategy, which would be a single-dose schedule targeting 12-year-old girls through a school-based platform, and were engaged in securing financial approval from the Ministry of Finance with the development of a cost-effectiveness study.

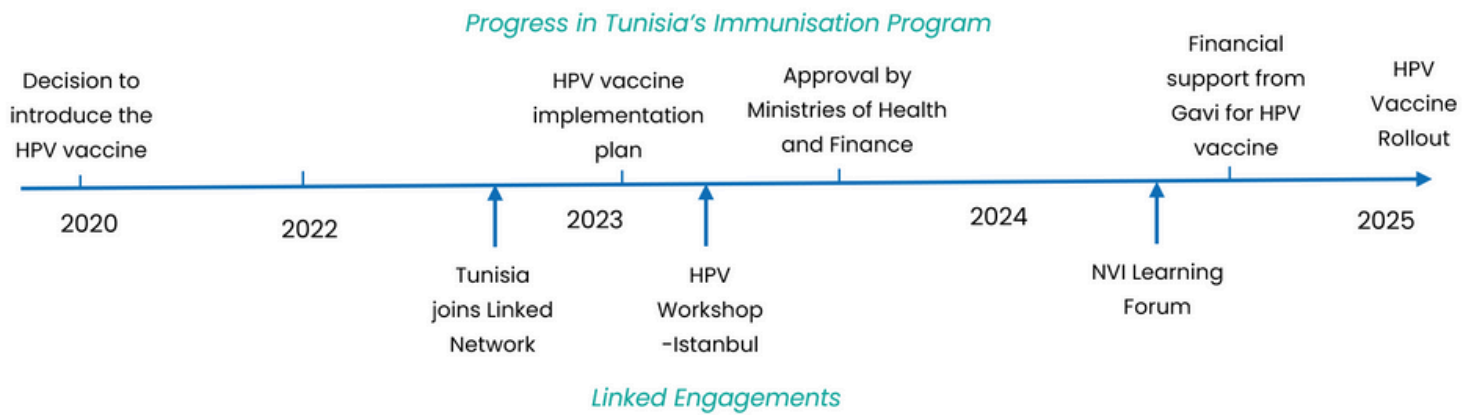
Linked saw an opportunity to engage Tunisia during this critical period of preparation for the introduction so that they may benefit from the experience and knowledge of their peers who are also preparing for introduction, potentially adapting approaches, good practices, and lessons learned from those engagements to further strengthen their own introduction strategy.

Since joining the network, Tunisia has attended three Linked engagements. The country first attended an in-person workshop in Istanbul, Turkey in July 2023 which was focused on HPV vaccine introduction, targeting countries nearing introduction. At the workshop, participants discussed common challenges, as well as experiences implementing strategies to increase demand and reduce hesitancy. Participants also discussed different service delivery strategies and their implications on coverage and resources.

Following the workshop, Linked facilitated a virtual meeting between representatives from Tunisia and Vietnam to further discuss challenges and progress to implement learnings from the workshop. Finally in April 2024, a delegation from Tunisia attended a New Vaccine Introduction (NVI) Learning Forum which was co-facilitated by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and Linked. The learning forum brought together 9 countries in Geneva, Switzerland to discuss political will and decision-making for NVI; vaccine procurement, pricing, and sustainability; challenges and approaches to HPV vaccine introduction; and Gavi support mechanisms for NVI.



**Graphic B: Linked Interventions during Tunisia's HPV Vaccine Rollout**



## Linked's contributions to Tunisia's HPV vaccine introduction strategy

Following their participation in these network engagements, Tunisia further refined and strengthened their HPV vaccine introduction strategy based on learnings from the experiences of other countries in attendance. As was previously noted, many of the vaccine introduction decisions had already been determined prior to the country's first engagement with Linked (e.g. the age and gender of the target cohort, dose schedule, and school-based delivery method); however, the participants from Tunisia shared that they found reassurance and a sense of community in hearing from other countries facing similar implementation decisions and challenges. For example, Tunisia highlighted the experience of the Philippines as helpful in reinforcing their decision to introduce to a school grade cohort versus targeting girls of a specific age. Tunisia's Gavi Senior Country Manager also noted the experience of Mongolia as beneficial to the Tunisians in validating their decisions around process and product choice.



***"The biggest value add for me was meeting other EPI Directors who were challenged by the same things and sometimes were not yet at the stage we are at. It made me feel like I wasn't alone in this, Tunisia is on the right track... "These learnings are helping us build out capacity technically in a sustainable way as we'll apply them for the next vaccine we choose to introduce."***

**- Tunisia's Director of Primary Care**

The EPI Director of Tunisia explained that some risks and enablers for their HPV vaccine introduction plan had not previously been identified prior to the learning forum but became evident during the exchanges between countries. Of note was the need to involve religious leaders in their communication strategy for the introduction. The Director of Primary Care also noted the experiences of Jordan and Uzbekistan as helpful in planning and prioritising the implementation of introduction activities.

## The value of partner presence and cross-regional peer-to-peer engagement

Tunisia's experience and reflections from participating in Linked engagements showcases another critical aspect of the network's approach – the engagement of Gavi and Alliance partners to participate in engagements as co-facilitators and further enrich country learnings with their experience and expertise. Partners also support countries to identify and adapt learnings to address challenges within their own country context.

***“The global aspect of Linked meetings is really critical. It adds a lot compared to regional meetings because we meet people from everywhere and it's reassuring to know they're learning and making progress too.”***

**- Tunisia's Director of Primary Care**

As a country that has never been eligible for traditional Gavi support, Tunisia has had fewer opportunities to engage with partners. Tunisia's Director of Primary Care shared that the NVI Learning Forum was a rare opportunity for him to understand how Gavi, UNICEF, and WHO collaborate across the immunisation landscape and how he may leverage the different technical support and assistance mechanisms available from each partner. Further, the inclusion of Alliance partners at Linked engagements provides the opportunity for country teams to meet bilaterally with partners to review and enhance their shared, on-going work in immunisation at the country-level. The Gavi Senior Country Manager was able to meet with Tunisian Ministry officials during the learning forum to discuss and strengthen their application for Gavi support for the HPV vaccine introduction.

In addition to bringing together countries and Alliance partners, Linked's newly adopted cross-regional model for country engagement also provides a unique benefit. In 2023, Linked recognised the opportunity to further differentiate its engagements from other regional convenings attended by countries and partners with the facilitation of cross-regional learning engagements. In doing so, countries are exposed to new and different experiences, implementation learnings and approaches.



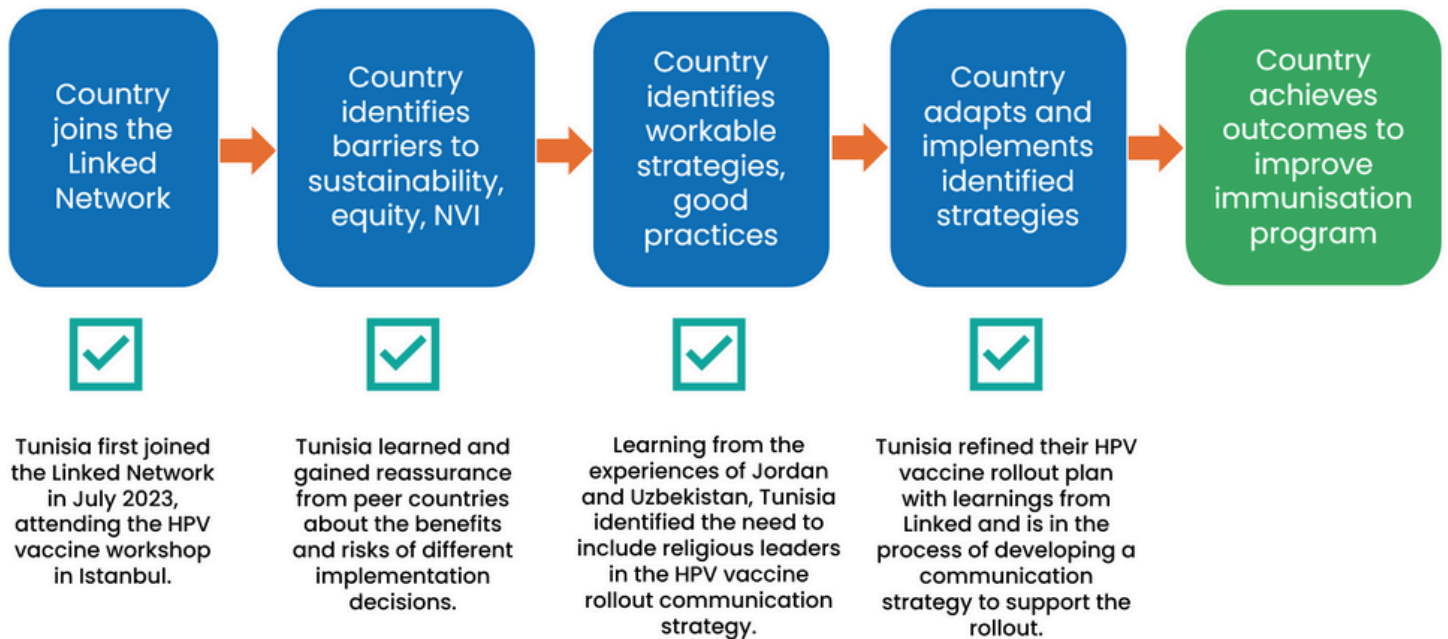
***“The workshop was very useful in sharing concrete examples coming from countries outside the region. Usually, Tunisia is invited to regional events and this one being global added value.”***

**- UNICEF Tunisia**

## The Way Forward

Linked will continue to support Tunisia as they prepare to introduce the HPV vaccine with several in-person and virtual engagements related to NVI planned in 2024 and 2025. As Tunisia continues to advance its HPV vaccine introduction, their experience will be valuable for their network peers who would benefit from learning about their communication strategies, political advocacy, and resource mobilisation approaches.

### Graphic C: Tunisia's Progress Along the Country Causal Pathway



***“It is important to engage a champion in the Middle East and North Africa in the HPV vaccine introduction that could have a spillover effect to the region.”***

**– Gavi Senior Country Manager**