

Summary report on the **Twentieth meeting of the Regional programme Review Group and national neglected tropical diseases programme managers**

Virtual meeting
23–25 May 2022



**World Health
Organization**

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE **Eastern Mediterranean**

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1. Introduction

The twentieth meeting of the Regional Programme Review Group (RPRG) on neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) and national NTD programme managers was held by the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean on 23–25 May 2022.

The virtual meeting was attended by representatives from the ministries of health of Afghanistan, Egypt, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Morocco, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen, as well as disease experts from WHO collaborating centres, WHO country offices, the Global Leprosy Programme, the Expanded Special Project for Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases (ESPEN), the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and WHO headquarters.

Representatives from partner organizations also attended, including the Christian Blind Mission, Eastern Mediterranean Region Trachoma Initiative, International Trachoma Initiative, The End Fund and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- review country-specific progress made during 2021–2022;
- present the Eastern Mediterranean Region NTD implementation plan 2021–2025;
- present the key recommendations of recent global/WHO guidelines published during 2021–2022; and
- provide recommendations to countries on the control/elimination of NTDs during 2022.

2. Summary of discussions

During the meeting presentations were made on: global and regional progress on reaching the targets of the NTD road map 2021–2030, and its companion document on One Health outlining actions on NTDs; integrated surveillance and control for vectors transmitting NTDs in the Region; arboviral NTDs and rabies; schistosomiasis control and elimination guidance; deworming for girls and women of child-bearing age; an update on visceral leishmaniasis diagnostics and medicines; lymphatic filariasis post-elimination surveillance; monitoring of morbidity management and disability prevention; the global strategy on water, sanitation and hygiene to combat neglected tropical diseases 2021–2030; and implementation opportunities in the Region.

Two panel discussions were held on country experiences and challenges in eliminating trachoma and preparing trachoma elimination dossiers and on next steps for countries in the Region in the elimination of schistosomiasis. A review was presented of the evidence and experiences for the use of cryotherapy and thermotherapy for treatment of cutaneous leishmaniasis, and representatives from national NTD programmes presented on topics relevant to their NTD situation.

Globally, the number of people requiring interventions against NTDs (SDG indicator 3.3.5) decreased by 20% between 2010 and 2020, from 2.19 billion to 1.74 billion. Forty-five countries, territories or areas have eliminated at least one NTD. Only seven countries remain to be certified for eradicating dracunculiasis. The number of children (recent transmission) and of people with grade 2 disabilities (delayed detection) due to leprosy also progressively decreased over the last decade. During 2020–2021, over 2.3 billion NTD medicines (tablets, vials, etc.) and diagnostics were delivered (for free) by WHO to 112 Member States.

In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, 75 million people require interventions against NTDs. In 2019, more than 1 million disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) were lost due to NTDs.

The Region faces a continuing increase in cutaneous and visceral leishmaniasis. In 2020, the Region recorded 73% of the global burden of cutaneous leishmaniasis, with 161 088 cases reported, 87% of them from Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and the Syrian Arab Republic. The Region also recorded 29% of the global burden of visceral leishmaniasis, with Sudan reporting the highest number of cases globally.

Countries also reported 4077 leprosy cases, with 64.7% in Somalia. Compared with 2019, in 2020 there was 10% increase in the number of child leprosy cases detected and a 22% decrease in the number of grade-2 disability cases reported.

However, six countries have eliminated at least one NTD and in 2021, 13 million people received treatment to eliminate NTDs amenable to preventive chemotherapy.

Many challenges remain in the Region for the control and elimination of NTDs, including compromised security situations, lack of political commitment, inadequate domestic funding, donor fatigue to support NTD programmes, a global deficit on diagnostics and effective medicines for some NTDs, a high turnover of health staff and weak health care delivery systems.

Despite these challenges, the majority of countries in the Region are set to achieve NTD elimination by 2030.

3. Recommendations

Country-specific recommendations

Afghanistan

1. Conduct and report on a deworming programme for pre-school-aged children in collaboration with partners.
2. Conduct behaviour change communication interventions for pre-school and school-aged children in collaboration with partners to improve coverage and compliance and drive a further reduction in the prevalence of soil-transmitted helminthiasis.
3. Develop a national trachoma action plan to implement the SAFE strategy where required.
4. Improve cutaneous leishmaniasis case management by introducing and scaling up physical treatment methods.
5. Strengthen sandfly control in an integrated manner, especially in areas co-endemic for malaria.
6. Improve visceral leishmaniasis clinical management by training clinicians on using liposomal amphotericin-B and include this medicine in the treatment protocol.
7. Improve visceral leishmaniasis surveillance.
8. Assess the possibility of implementing single dose rifampicin prophylaxis for leprosy contacts.

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