

Global report on neglected tropical diseases 2023



Executive summary

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the global community of countries, partners, donors, technical experts, scientists and field implementation teams continue to work towards the ultimate goal of a world free of the burden of neglected tropical diseases (NTDs). This work is described in the NTD road map 2021–2030, WHO’s blueprint to drive global efforts in the fight against NTDs in the context of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. These goals encompass a vision of a world population for whom equality of opportunity and of health are fundamental.

Within this context, and during the two years since the launch of the road map (2021–2022), progress has been made. Nevertheless, hindrances towards achieving the targets for 2030 have arisen and work to overcome these obstacles continues. These endeavours have also revealed the scale of the task still facing the global NTD community.

Disruption as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to afflict longstanding and new programmes alike, while other entrenched issues have re-emerged in new and challenging ways. The global NTD community is also confronted with a changing, multi-dimensional funding landscape as donors reassess priorities and adapt to new ways of working, as well as a challenging and unpredictable international context. As a result, progress in controlling, eliminating or eradicating NTDs has not been as far-reaching as expected.

The burden of NTDs continues to be unequally borne by a small number of countries: 16 countries bear 80% of this burden. Slower than expected progress in high-burden countries, uneven progress across certain of the 20 diseases and disease groups, persistent underlying risk factors (poverty, climate change) and rapid population growth are all threats to achieving the 2030 targets within the defined timescales.

There have, however, been many noteworthy successes, which are documented in this report, along with evidence of disease burdens and the relative strengths and weaknesses of programmes designed to address these.

Over the past decade, the number of people requiring interventions against NTDs has decreased by 25%, falling by some 80 million people between 2020 and 2021 alone. The burden of disease calculated in disability-adjusted life years is also steadily decreasing. More than one billion people were treated every year for four consecutive years between 2016 and 2019. As of December 2022, 47 countries had eliminated at least one NTD.

This positive trend was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, however, which severely affected NTD programmes, leading to reduced implementation of community-based interventions, restricted access to health-facility-based services and severe impacts on the supply chains for health products. Consequently, the number of people treated for NTDs decreased by 34% between 2019 and 2020, although a generalized resumption of activities enabled an increase of 11% in 2021. The 2021–2022 period also saw several outbreaks of NTDs, including dengue, chikungunya, leishmaniasis and scabies, whose management was made more challenging by restrictions on movement.

Echinococcosis
Foodborne trematodiasis
Human African trypanosomiasis

Work around the three main pillars of the 2030 road map has also progressed.

Accelerate programmatic action

Programmatic action has been accelerated for the areas identified in the road map: strategic and technical recommendations (three meetings of the Strategic and Technical Advisory Group for Neglected Tropical Diseases held), normative guidance and tools (54 WHO publications released in 2021, and 52 in 2022); global advocacy (recognition of 30 January as World Neglected Tropical Diseases Day; adoption of the Abu Dhabi Declaration on Eradication of Guinea Worm Disease and the Kigali Declaration on Neglected Tropical Diseases); capacity-building (launch of the NTD Open WHO channel); as well as in the areas of medicines and other health products, with expanded donations reaching new diseases (albendazole for cystic echinococcosis) and ensuring more quality-assured medicines (four pharmaceutical products prequalified by WHO in 2021–2022). Innovation has been fostered to fill existing gaps, with several new medicines under evaluation and 18 target product profiles for diagnostics developed. Action has also been taken to address the challenges of antimicrobial resistance, and work on gender, equity and human rights, an area of particular relevance to NTDs, has also progressed.

Intensify cross-cutting approaches

Cross-cutting approaches have been intensified. Preventive chemotherapy is being expanded to other diseases such as taeniasis, and the skin-NTD approach is rapidly imposing itself as a powerful resource to address the burden of at least 10 diseases with dermatological manifestations. Cross-sectoral coordination has also progressed for One Health and WASH, while the global vector control response has been strengthened by the launch of the Global Arbovirus Initiative. Finally, efforts have been made to strengthen the cohesiveness of the monitoring and evaluation process for NTDs, to improve its consistency across all 20 conditions and to boost data visualization through interactive dashboards.

Change operating models and culture to facilitate country ownership

Action has also been taken to change operating models and culture to facilitate country ownership, for example in facilitating the adoption of WHO's sustainability framework by a number of countries. Coordination within the NTD community has been stimulated by the establishment or expansion of global collectives of NTD partners and platforms for advocacy and information-sharing. The need for sustainable financing has also emerged as a key factor in enabling the 2030 road map targets to be achieved, amidst the turmoil generated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, during a year in which the global NTD community mourned the loss of Dr Mwelecele Ntuli Malecela, the preceding Director of WHO's Department of Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases, a mentorship programme was established in her memory, thus cementing the legacy of an inspirational and dedicated public health official who embodied the global fight against NTDs and the pursuit of health as a fundamental human right.

In our pursuit now of the road map 2030 targets, we need to reverse delays to progress and ensure that past gains are not lost. We must invest in innovative operations and financing solutions that foster integration and cross-sectoral collaboration. We must boost global support for countries with the highest NTD burdens, and continue to facilitate country ownership and the sustainability of NTD programmes through new approaches to financing and implementation.

Time is of the essence as we work together to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 3.3 and end the epidemic of NTDs by 2030.

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Soil-transmitted helminthiasis
Taeniasis and cysticercosis
Trachoma

