

Road map for neglected tropical diseases 2021–2030

Report by the Director-General

1. In November 2020, the Seventy-third World Health Assembly adopted decision WHA73(33), in which it endorsed the road map for neglected tropical diseases 2021–2030 (the road map) and requested the Director-General, *inter alia*, to report biennially to the Health Assembly, through the Executive Board, on the implementation of the road map. This report is submitted in response to that request.

2. The pandemic of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has disrupted planning and ongoing activities for neglected tropical diseases globally, regionally and nationally. Such disruptions continue to affect programmes, and recovery is slow. Progress in implementing the road map must be considered in this context.

3. This report describes the progress made in implementing the road map during its second and third years (2022 and January to October 2023, respectively) according to the overarching, cross-cutting and disease-specific targets for 2030 and the three foundational pillars; the latest available data are included. It also summarizes the challenges faced and the way forward. The first progress report was submitted to the Executive Board in 2021.¹

PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THE ROAD MAP FOR NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES 2021–2030

Overarching global targets

4. The percentage reduction in people requiring interventions against neglected tropical disease was 25% between 2010 and 2021, the latest year for which estimates are available. In 2021, 1.65 billion people required interventions against neglected tropical diseases, about 81 million people fewer than in 2020. The highest proportion of people requiring interventions against neglected tropical diseases in 2021 was in the South-East Asia Region (52%), followed by the African Region (35%), Eastern Mediterranean Region (4%), Region of the Americas (4%), Western Pacific Region (4%), and European Region (<1%).

5. Estimates of the number of disability-adjusted life years lost are available for 14 of the 20 diseases and disease groups.² In 2019, the latest year for which estimates are available, 14.5 million

¹ Document EB150/10.

² Human African trypanosomiasis, Chagas disease, cysticercosis, dengue, echinococcosis, foodborne trematodiasis, leishmaniasis, leprosy, lymphatic filariasis, onchocerciasis, rabies, schistosomiasis, soil-transmitted helminthiasis and trachoma.

disability-adjusted life years were lost to neglected tropical diseases, down from 16.3 million in 2015, having decreased in all regions.

6. In July 2023, Iraq became the fiftieth country to have eliminated at least one neglected tropical disease. This event marked the halfway point towards the 100-country target set for 2030. Eight countries were acknowledged for eliminating one neglected tropical disease in 2022, and six in 2023.

Cross-cutting targets

7. In 2022, the latest year for which data are available, approximately 643 million people were treated for at least one neglected tropical disease; over 99% received treatment through preventive chemotherapy interventions, achieving a global coverage of 39% across 73 countries, down from 53% in 2021 across 69 countries when a total of 897 million people were treated. Data show that the recovery observed in 2021 (12% more people were treated than in 2020, the year disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic was most severe) was reversed in 2022 (28% fewer people were treated than in 2021). Although worrying, this may be due in part to delays in reporting and the incompleteness of global data; updated figures are expected by the end of 2023.

8. In parallel, the integrated treatment coverage index for preventive chemotherapy was 58% in 2019, 36% in 2020, 46% in 2021, and 38% in 2022.

Disease-specific targets

9. Progress against the diseases targeted for eradication, elimination (interruption of transmission) and elimination as a public health problem is reported, inter alia, in the Global Health Observatory, the Weekly Epidemiological Record articles published in 2023 and the Global Report on Neglected Tropical Diseases 2023 (Annex 2 of which lists the articles on neglected tropical diseases published in the Weekly Epidemiological Record in 2021–2022).

Pillar 1. Accelerate programmatic action

10. In 2022 and 2023, the sixteenth and seventeenth meetings of the Strategic and Technical Advisory Group for Neglected Tropical Diseases were held, respectively; numerous technical products were published and a variety of operational tools were released (52 WHO products in 2022, and 38 between January and October 2023). Key global advocacy events included the adoption of the Abu Dhabi Declaration on Eradication of Guinea Worm Disease (23 March 2022), the Kigali Declaration on Neglected Tropical Diseases (23 June 2022), the first global meeting on skin-related neglected tropical diseases (27–31 March 2023) and the Global Neglected Tropical Diseases Programme partners' meeting (12 and 13 June 2023). Following the recognition of 30 January as World Neglected Tropical Diseases Day by the Health Assembly through decision WHA74(18) (2021), this event was observed by the WHO Secretariat, Member States and civil society in 2022 and 2023. Neglected tropical diseases were also mentioned in the political declaration of the General Assembly high-level meeting on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response (resolution 78/3), and in the political declaration of the high-level meeting on universal health coverage (resolution 78/4), both adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 5 October 2023. Capacity-building has been strengthened following the launch of a neglected tropical diseases channel on the OpenWHO platform in 2021; as of October 2023, OpenWHO offers 57 multilingual courses on 23 different subjects related to neglected tropical diseases, with over 115 000 learners enrolled. In September 2022, WHO published another companion document to the road map to orient and encourage more investment in neglected tropical diseases.

11. Access to medicines and other health products has been strengthened, with the signing or renewal of agreements with pharmaceutical partners to enable the expansion of donations, and to fill existing gaps, with several new medicines or new combinations of existing medicines under evaluation or being progressively introduced and scaled up. In 2022, over 781 million medicines and health products were made available by WHO to 112 Member States free of charge; in 2023, these figures were 972 million and 112.

12. Action to tackle antimicrobial resistance has been taken, including monitoring of programmes for schistosomiasis and soil-transmitted helminthiasis through a standardized protocol. Sentinel surveillance systems for leprosy are in place in over 50 countries. A component on neglected tropical diseases was also added to the awareness-raising activities undertaken during World Antimicrobial Resistance Awareness Week 2022.

Pillar 2. Intensify cross-cutting approaches

13. Intensification of cross-cutting approaches has progressed for the preventive chemotherapy strategy, which is being expanded to include other diseases, such as taeniasis, following the publication of a set of guidance documents. Similarly, the integrated approach to skin-related neglected tropical diseases is emerging as a powerful tool to address the burden of at least 10 diseases with dermatological manifestations.

14. Cross-sectoral coordination has also progressed for One Health, for the global vector control response 2017–2030 and for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). In 2022, a road map companion document on One Health for action at country level was published, followed by a scaling up of activities in several countries. The global vector control response has been strengthened by the launch of the Global Arbovirus Initiative (31 March 2022); the release of several guidance documents, operational tools and capacity-building resources; and responses to outbreaks of several vector-borne diseases. The application of water, sanitation and hygiene interventions has been enhanced by the COVID-19 pandemic, which encouraged greater adherence to recommended hygiene practices such as hand-washing.

15. Efforts have been made to strengthen the cohesiveness of the monitoring and evaluation process for neglected tropical diseases to improve its consistency across all 20 conditions and to boost data visualization through interactive dashboards. In 2022, WHO released version 4 of the Joint Application Package, a joint mechanism and set of forms, to facilitate the process of application, review and reporting of data for implementation of preventive chemotherapy programmes by national health authorities. In 2023, the global neglected tropical diseases annual reporting form (GNARF) was introduced to collect quantitative and qualitative information on road map indicators currently not shared with WHO by Member States, thus filling an important reporting gap. In January 2023, an interactive country profile dashboard was also launched. Finally, the working group on monitoring, evaluation and research for neglected tropical diseases has designed a methodology to update the gap assessment for 11 dimensions of activity identified by the road map as important enablers for achievement of the 2030 targets. A tool has been devised and assessment of four of the 11 dimensions is under way.

Pillar 3. Change operating models and culture to facilitate country ownership

16. Action taken to change operating models and culture to facilitate country ownership has included fostering the preparation of national master plans to guide implementation of national disease control interventions (more than 50 countries in which neglected tropical diseases are endemic have a national plan as of October 2023), and promoting the adoption of WHO's sustainability framework companion

document to the road map and its translation into national sustainability plans, in collaboration with key partners.

17. Coordination has been stimulated by the establishment or expansion of mechanisms, global collectives of partners and platforms for advocacy and information sharing. On World Neglected Tropical Diseases Day 2023, a network was established that brings together more than 50 WHO collaborating centres working on neglected tropical diseases.

18. Work has also focused on identifying mechanisms to enhance sustainable financing, and a costing exercise for the road map is under way. There is a general consensus that the rapid decrease in funding to combat neglected tropical diseases since 2020 is now the most urgent barrier to progress. Increasing resources from both donors and domestic budgets is key to enabling the 2030 road map targets to be achieved.

Challenges and the way forward

19. Programmes for neglected tropical diseases were severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and are still recovering. Services for these diseases were the second most frequently disrupted across the spectrum of essential health services (after those targeting mental, neurological and substance use disorders) and the most affected in terms of the severity of disruptions.

20. Although the fourth round of the global pulse survey on continuity of essential health services during the COVID-19 pandemic (carried out between November 2022 and January 2023) registered some improvement in implementation of activities, the impact of the disruptions on community-based interventions, health facility-based services, and capacity to respond to outbreaks of neglected tropical diseases remained significant throughout 2022. Fewer people affected by neglected tropical diseases were detected and treated, and coverage of interventions such as preventive chemotherapy was reduced. Overall, data available as at October 2023 indicate that the number of people receiving treatment for at least one disease decreased substantially in 2022, after the positive rebound in 2021. Therefore much remains to be done to overcome the devastating impact caused by restriction of movement, disrupted supplies of medicines and other health products, and repurposing of health staff in response to the pandemic.

21. The pandemic also severely impacted support from donors and partners. In the short term, the emergency has necessitated a re-prioritization of resources to other areas, both in cash and in kind. For example, production lines for medicines and diagnostics have been repurposed to support the need for health products in high demand during the pandemic. While the decreasing public health relevance of the pandemic might have been expected to signal a return to normality, this has not been the case in spite of several advocacy events held between 2022 and 2023. Today financial support is still far less than before the pandemic and remains limited at all levels, thus jeopardizing activities in countries, hampering meaningful planning, and preventing effective coordination at global and regional levels.

22. Persistent, additional challenges faced in 2022 to 2023 have included: gaps in knowledge and operational tools; delays in implementing much-needed interventions in some countries; uneven progress in tackling the 20 diseases and disease groups; underlying risk factors (poverty, climate change, migration/population and displacement); rapid population growth; and limited access to areas affected by conflict, insecurity or political instability.

23. Discussions held during the Global Neglected Tropical Diseases Programme Partners' Meeting in June 2023 identified strategic priorities for the future, building on a review conducted by WHO and

aimed at strengthening functions and operations of the global neglected tropical diseases programme. The strategic priorities include: engaging with partners; maintaining and expanding the donor community by nurturing existing relationships and creating new ones; repositioning neglected tropical diseases within the global health agenda by strengthening links with other global programmes, such as, Health Emergency Preparedness, Response and Resilience and primary health care; reinforcing WHO leadership through accountability, transparency, predictability and equity; developing a global action plan for the second half of the implementation period of the road map (2025–2030), including a timeline of activities required to achieve the set targets, roles, responsibilities and forecast costs; and filling normative and operational gaps to ensure strong data systems enabling reliable surveillance, monitoring and evaluation, to facilitate the development and introduction of new medicines and diagnostics, and to leverage efficiency gains in integrating approaches across diseases.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

24. The Board is invited to note the report and to provide guidance on sustaining implementation of the road map. The following questions are proposed for consideration by Member States.

- How can Member States support the Secretariat to overcome the operational and technical challenges highlighted in the present report and facilitate the attainment of the targets set for 2030 in the road map for neglected tropical diseases?
- How can Member States facilitate the implementation of the strategic priorities identified during the Global Neglected Tropical Diseases Programme Partners' Meeting in June 2023?

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