

# Middle East Response Initiative

The fight against HIV, tuberculosis and malaria is more important than ever in a world increasingly affected by conflict, disasters and climate and economic crises.

The largest displacement crisis in the world and the COVID-19 pandemic have had devastating consequences for the poorest and most vulnerable communities in many countries in the Middle East. Diseases know no borders, and as people move throughout the region, the Global Fund is an ongoing source of support to people affected by HIV, tuberculosis (TB) and malaria.

## The challenge

In Iraq, Syria and Yemen, countries with fragile health systems, most health facilities have been destroyed by years of conflict. Infrastructure, equipment, health workers and resources are scarce. The health infrastructure in countries hosting displaced populations, such as Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon, is overstretched. Jordan and Lebanon, which previously had strong health systems, have been overwhelmed by a deluge of refugees that increased their populations by one-third and strained social assistance and economic systems.

COVID-19 has compounded suffering. While much of the world went into lockdown, keeping safe at home was not an option for refugees and other forcibly displaced persons fleeing persecution and conflict.

Stopping preventable diseases like HIV, TB and malaria from spreading not only protects already weakened refugees, displaced people and people affected by disasters from falling ill, but also frees up critical resources to treat other illnesses and optimize health services.



# Our response

The Global Fund launched the Middle East Response Initiative (MER) in 2017 to better respond to the complex and acute emergency situations in many countries in the Middle East.

MER is designed to provide essential HIV, TB and malaria services to key and vulnerable populations including refugees, internally displaced people, women and children in Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Jordan and Lebanon.

MER brings together the Global Fund's investments in these countries under a consolidated grant management platform implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The aim of combining multiple programs is to bring greater value for money, reach more vulnerable populations and support stronger regional partnerships that can deliver health services in conflict-affected and hard-to-reach areas.

## Countries supported through the Middle East Response Initiative



Syrian refugees in Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan receive prevention education, diagnosis and treatment for TB through the Middle East Response Initiative. Over 18,000 children are enrolled in Zaatari's 32 schools. With more than 60 babies born every week, the camp is home to increasing numbers of Syrian children who have never lived in the country their families fled.

The Global Fund/Tanya Habjouqa/Panos

# Our results

The Global Fund has committed almost US\$311 million in funding to the countries that make up the MER regional portfolio. To mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on HIV, TB and malaria and support formal and community systems for health in their pandemic response, the Global Fund has also approved over US\$24 million since 2020 through our COVID-19 Response Mechanism. This has helped MER countries to procure personal protective equipment, oxygen plants, diagnostic tests and tools.

The initial Middle East Response grant (2017-2018) supported TB and HIV interventions in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Yemen (Yemen is the only country implementing malaria interventions under MER). The grant also included HIV and TB services to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Programs in Iraq were managed as a stand-alone emergency TB grant to avoid any interruption of services and ensure continuity of critical services that were covered under previous grants.

The second Middle East Response grant (2019-2021) continued to support activities in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, and in support of Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon. The grant also supported key and vulnerable populations in Lebanon and focused on providing TB diagnosis and treatment services in Iraq.

## Impact in countries covered by MER 2017-2020



**47,000**

lives saved by health programs supported by Global Fund partnership



**3.9 million**

mosquito nets distributed



**78,000**

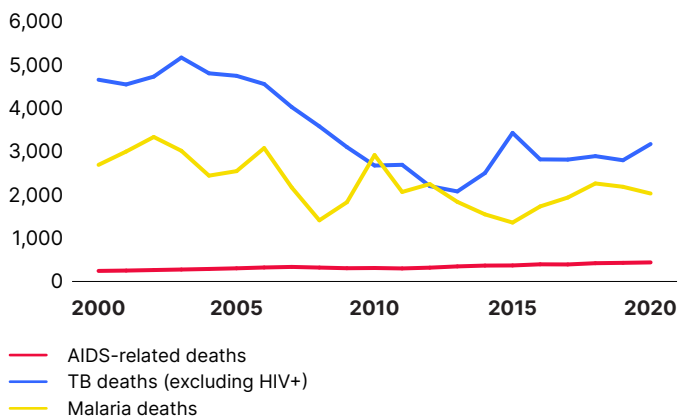
TB cases notified



**94,000**

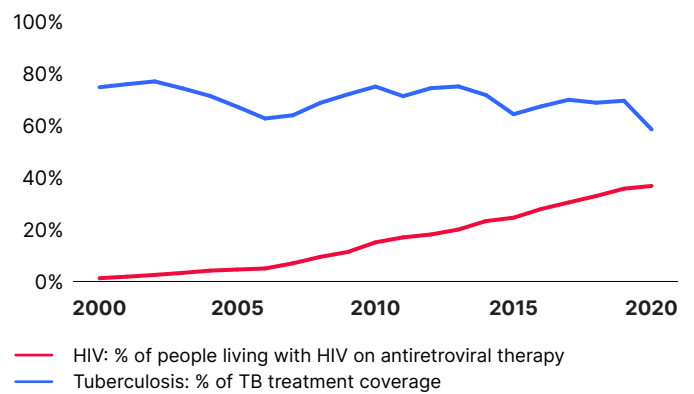
people tested for HIV

### Deaths from AIDS, TB and malaria in MER countries



Source: UNAIDS 2021 release, WHO Global TB Report 2021

### Coverage of treatment and prevention interventions in MER countries



### TB

- **632 people with drug-resistant TB (DR-TB) began second-line treatment (2017-2020)**
- **At least 85% TB treatment success rate (2019, in countries with available data)**
- **5 countries successfully transitioned to all-oral DR-TB treatment**

The TB burden across Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Jordan and Lebanon is estimated to be about 30,000 cases per year. Two countries – Iraq and Yemen – represent 83% of these cases.

The Global Fund partnership is focused on improving service coverage for TB in hard-to-reach areas and among refugees and displaced people, increasing detection of DR-TB cases and expanding the availability of TB prevention, care and control in urban “TB hot spots” of big cities and refugee camps.



### HIV

- **5,073 people on antiretroviral therapy (ART) for HIV (2020)**
- **97% (Lebanon), 82% (Syria), 41% (Yemen), 38% (Jordan): the percentage of people living with HIV who know their status (2020)**
- **No major disruptions in accessing ART services despite COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns**

Several countries in the Middle East are affected by concentrated HIV epidemics among key populations, with low prevalence in the general population. We are supporting activities to strengthen HIV data collection and reporting to better understand subnational epidemics. We also continue to invest in scaling up high-impact HIV prevention measures for key and vulnerable populations, improving HIV testing coverage and community outreach, and expanding HIV treatment for those who need it.



### Malaria

- **40% fewer malaria deaths in Yemen in 2020 compared to 2002**
- **61% of people in Yemen with access to long-lasting insecticidal nets (2020)**
- **97% of people with suspected malaria receive a diagnostic test (2020)**

Yemen is the only country implementing malaria interventions as part of MER. The country has the highest rate of malaria prevalence in the Eastern Mediterranean region, and the disease remains a major public health concern, particularly given the recently reported incursion of *Anopheles stephensi* – an invasive species of malaria vector well-adapted to urban environments which could spread the disease to inner-city areas.

Through the MER grant, the Global Fund supports prevention and reduction of the impact of malaria outbreaks through early detection and timely implementation of vector control and case management.

## MER and challenging operating environments

Investments and activities in all the countries covered by MER are managed under the Global Fund's Challenging Operating Environments Policy. Challenging operating environments are countries or regions that experience infectious disease outbreaks, natural disasters, armed conflicts or civil unrest, weak governance, climate change-related crises and/or mass displacement.

We adopt a tailored approach to each challenging operating environment in the Middle East, striving to be flexible and adaptable while still maintaining responsible oversight of funds and facilitating service delivery as effectively as possible to populations in need. This dynamic approach places the Global Fund at the intersection of development and humanitarian work.



Aya Awade, a laboratory technician at Karantina Tuberculosis Center in Beirut, Lebanon, uses a GeneXpert machine purchased with Global Fund support to test sputum from a TB patient suspected of having drug-resistant TB.

The Global Fund/Sarah Hoibak



A health worker for IOM, the Global Fund's implementing partner for the Middle East Response Initiative, tests a man in Aden, Yemen. Testing, prevention and reduction interventions funded by MER have supported hard-won progress in some critical respects in Yemen, particularly against malaria: Deaths from the disease have fallen by 40% in the past two decades.

Rami Ibrahim/IOM 2020

## Looking ahead

The Global Fund's 2022-2024 Middle East Response Initiative grant of up to US\$67 million continues our deep commitment to fighting HIV, TB and malaria and strengthening health systems in the region.

Despite many countries in the Middle East still experiencing restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict and economic or political challenges, this third round of MER funding is strongly focused on translating investment into impact. It continues to provide essential services to support progress in TB reduction, HIV prevention, treatment and care, malaria vector control and case management and building stronger and more resilient systems for health.

The 2022-2024 MER grant supports a range of high-impact interventions, including some which have the potential to deliver breakthroughs for communities:

- **TB elimination in Jordan and Palestine.**
- **Significant increases in access to and use of long-lasting insecticidal nets in Yemen.**
- **Investment in oxygen plants in Syria.**
- **Scale-up of differentiated HIV testing and the inclusion of key and vulnerable populations in HIV prevention initiatives.**
- **More robust surveillance and data systems to support populations in need.**

## Fighting for what counts, together

Given the challenging operating environments in many countries in the Middle East, increased collaboration is critical to achieving future progress against HIV, TB and malaria. This year, the Global Fund is launching our Seventh Replenishment resource mobilization campaign to raise at least US\$18 billion to fight HIV, TB and malaria, build stronger systems for health and strengthen preparedness for when, not if, the next pandemic comes.

With reinforced support from governments, partners and the private sector, the Global Fund partnership can continue to deliver essential services for some of the world's most vulnerable populations. Global health investments like the Middle East Response Initiative strengthen global security and stability, making the world safer and more prosperous for us all.

### About the Global Fund

The Global Fund invests more than US\$4 billion a year to defeat HIV, TB and malaria and ensure a healthier, safer, equitable future for all. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have invested an additional US\$4.3 billion to fight the new pandemic and reinforce systems for health. We unite the world to find solutions that have the most impact, and we take them to scale worldwide. It's working. Together, we have saved 44 million lives. We won't stop until the job is finished.