

Get malaria response 'back on track,' UN says, as progress stalls and funding flatlines

Marking World Malaria Day, the head of the United Nations health agency on Wednesday stressed the need to get the global response against the disease back on track while acknowledging progress that had helped avert millions of malaria deaths, especially among children, since 2000.

"The latest data from WHO [[World Health Organization](#)] show that the global malaria response is [at a crossroads](#)," the agency's Director-General, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said in his video message for the Day, explaining that the declining trend in malaria cases and deaths has stalled, and vital funding for malaria programmes has flatlined.

"If we continue along this path, we will lose the gains for which we have fought so hard," he added.

This year's theme of the Day is "Ready to Beat Malaria."

Although more and more countries have eliminated the disease, challenges remain.

In 2016, there were an estimated [216 million cases](#) of malaria in 91 countries, an increase of 5 million cases over 2015, and malaria deaths reached 445,000, a slight decrease from 446,000 in 2015 but still a significant number.

The UN health chief called on countries and the global health community to close the critical gaps in the malaria response, and urged all partners to unite around a common goal: accelerating the pace of progress.

"Together, we must ensure that no one is left behind in accessing life-saving services to prevent, diagnose and treat malaria," he said.

Key Facts

- Malaria is a life-threatening disease caused by parasites that are transmitted to people through the bites of infected female Anopheles mosquitoes. It is preventable and curable.
- In 2016, there were an estimated 216 million cases of malaria in 91 countries, an increase of five million cases over 2015.
- Malaria deaths reached 445,000 in 2016, a similar number (446,000) to 2015.
- The WHO African Region carries a disproportionately high share of the global malaria burden. In 2016, the region was home to 90 per cent of malaria cases and 91 per cent of malaria deaths.
- Total funding for malaria control and elimination reached an estimated

\$2.7 billion in 2016. Contributions from governments of endemic countries amounted to \$800 million, representing 31 per cent of funding.

UN enlists youth in combat against violent extremism in Jordan, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia

With one in four of the world's 1.2 billion youth affected by some sort of violence or armed conflict, the United Nations on Tuesday launched a project to support new, youth-driven initiatives in education, science, culture and the media to prevent violent extremism in Jordan, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia

Vladimir Voronkov, who heads the UN's counter-terrorism office ([UNOCT](#)) met in Paris with Audrey Azoulay, head of the UN cultural agency, to initiate the [joint project](#), 'Preventing Violent Extremism through Youth Empowerment in Jordan, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia.'

"Working at the local level with young people [is important] to identify the best ways to prevent violent extremism and win youth's hearts and minds," Mr. Voronkov said, adding that the UN places youth high on its agenda.

The project supports young women and men to become responsible citizens, resilient to any form of abuse or manipulation – including violent extremism – and to address hate-related issues.

Mr. Voronkov commended the innovative work of youth-led peace and security networks, and stressed the value of young people's ideas to improve our world.

Ms. Azoulay, the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), added that the UN is working "with youth and for youth" to achieve this goal.

UNESCO aims to create opportunities for young women and men to be change-makers and peacebuilders in their own communities and wider societies as well as leaders in addressing hate-related issues.

Youth organizations, educators and media professionals will be mobilized around programmes to include cross-cultural youth dialogues, training in conflict-sensitive reporting and critical thinking labs.

Mr. Voronkov invited Ms. Azoulay and youth representatives to attend a follow-up event in New York, on the margins of the Secretary-General's High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States, which will take place from 28 to 29 June.

Taking advantage of Mr. Voronkov's visit, Ms. Azoulay [signed](#) the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, which will further seal the collaboration between both entities.

The agreement between the Secretary-General and 36 UN entities plus the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) and the World Customs Organization, the largest UN coordination framework, aims bolster counter-terrorism capacity-building support to Member States in implementing the [UN Nations Global-counter-Terrorism Strategy](#), which UNOCT coordinates.

Disasters could cost Asia-Pacific region \$160 billion per year by 2030, UN warns

Economic losses to disasters in Asia and the Pacific could exceed \$160 billion annually by 2030, the United Nations development arm in the region warned on Tuesday, urging greater innovation in disaster risk financing.

The need is all the more pressing given that only eight per cent of region's losses are insured, said the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific ([ESCAP](#)).

"The time for establishing solutions to these complex emerging challenges is now," underlined Shamshad Akhtar, the Executive Secretary of ESCAP, speaking at an [event on financing for disaster risk reduction](#) in Asia-Pacific at the UN Headquarters, in New York.

The low insurance coverage has persisted in the region even though it has suffered nearly \$1.3 trillion in losses over the last 50 years.

The result is that individuals, businesses and Governments are left to bear the staggering costs of natural calamities. And with extreme weather events increasing as the region's cities become more crowded, the gap could widen.

"Business as usual is unsustainable [...] policy makers and financial strategists in both the public and private sectors have to work together," said the head of ESCAP.

The time for establishing solutions to these complex emerging challenges is now – *ESCAP chief Shamshad Akhtar*

In her remarks, Ms. Akhtar outlined the opportunities offered by recent innovations such as catastrophe risk modelling, parametric insurance, a mix

of traditional and global financial reinsurance, and concessional insurance.

She also highlighted the role ESCAP – which spans a geographic region from Turkey in the west to the tiny Pacific island of Kiribati in the east, and from Russia in the north to New Zealand in the south – could play.

“The provision of a regional platform for building capacity as well as mutual trust among countries is the key to successful sovereign risk pooling [and] ESCAP, whose primary mandate is regional cooperation, is well suited for this role,” said Ms. Akhtar.

Speaking alongside Ms. Akhtar, Mami Mizutori, Head of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction ([UNISDR](#)), highlighted the importance of both disaster risk financing and resources to reduce disaster risk to ensure resilient and sustainable development.

“At present, we need both [...] Let’s face it: when natural hazards hit, without these mechanisms, we cannot cope with the aftermath,” she said.

Ms. Mizutori, who is also the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, also highlighted the importance national strategies to strengthen resilience and mitigate natural hazard risks, a call made in the [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#).

[UN-EU conference on future of Syria opens in Brussels with urgent call for international support](#)

“We want Syrians to know that they are not forgotten; that we are trying to find better ways to help them in this terrible situation,” said Mark Lowcock, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, at the opening of a [two-day conference](#) in Brussels, co-organized by the European Union, called [Supporting the future of Syria and the region](#).

“Despite fighting, bombing and violence, [we will not give up](#),” Mr. Lowcock said.

The fighting in Syria, which erupted in March 2011 and has now lasted longer than World War II, has left hundreds of thousands dead and more than 13 million in dire need of [humanitarian assistance within the country](#). Another 5.6 million Syrians have fled to neighbouring countries for refuge.

The first few months of 2018 saw over 700,000 people fleeing their homes – many more than once – as well as 72 reported attacks on medical facilities.

"As the number of people in urgent need of assistance continues to grow, the United Nations has exhausted its resources to respond," Mr. Lowcock said.

"We call on donors to pledge funds to assist and protect Syrian families wherever they are," said Mr. Lowcock, who is also the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.

According to the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA), which Mr. Lowcock heads, [only \\$2.3 billion, or about 25 per cent](#), of the \$9.1 billion needed for humanitarian and development assistance in 2018 has been received.

The total includes funds needed to meet needs both within Syria and among some 3.9 million vulnerable people in communities hosting refugees.

Unless more funding is secured, critical programmes risk closure or sharp reductions in the coming months, with a potentially devastating impact on the most vulnerable and desperate families.

"Of all the humanitarian emergencies facing us today [none match Syria's in terms of scale](#) or in the immensity of need," said Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

["Whether for refugees, for host countries, or for host communities those needs are as urgent, as great, as ever."](#)

Graphic: Where are Syrian refugees registered? Source: UNHCR

Development set back decades

The widespread destruction of livelihoods and infrastructure has pushed 70 per cent Syrians into extreme poverty. At the same time, neighbouring countries are [reeling under the strain](#) of the massive influx of refugees from Syria.

"Host countries have demonstrated outstanding generosity to Syrian refugees for many years despite the huge pressure on national services and infrastructure," said Achim Steiner, the Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

Host countries have demonstrated outstanding generosity to Syrian refugees for many years despite the huge pressure on national services and infrastructure – *UNDP chief Achim Steiner*

"The international community must enhance their support for longer term development efforts to these countries on the front line who have been providing a global public good," he said.

Conference programme

The [two-day conference](#) in Brussels is expected to draw ministerial-level participation from over 85 countries.

On the first day, more than 200 non-governmental organizations from Syria and the region discussed ways to improve services with ministers and top UN and EU officials. Separately, Staffan de Mistura, the UN Special Envoy for Syria and Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, met with Syrian civil society leaders.

[Speaking to the press following](#) the meeting, they called on all parties to the negotiating table.

“They [the civil society] were sitting around the table together today, many of them did not agree with each other, in fact we noticed it, but they were able to sit around the table, that’s exactly what we want at the political level,” said Mr. de Mistura.

Results from the first day of discussions will feed into the plenary sessions on Wednesday, which will cover all key aspects of the conflict, including the political process. Also on day 2, the total amount of aid pledges received will be announced. The co-chairs plan to release a declaration at the closing of the meeting.

[Vaccines are protecting more children than ever, but millions still miss out on routine immunizations – UN](#)

Kicking off World Immunization Week, the United Nations today said that while vaccines are protecting more children than ever, more countries need to make immunization a priority, because more than one million children still die every year from vaccine-preventable diseases.

“Last year, it is estimated that vaccines [saved the lives](#) of as many as three million children,” said Robin Nandy, the [UN Children’s Fund](#) (UNICEF) Chief of Immunization.

That’s three million future doctors, teachers, artists, community leaders, mothers and fathers alive today, “thanks to millions of frontline health workers who walk for hundreds of miles to remote locations, through jungles and across seas to reach every child,” he added.

But despite this solid progress, UNICEF points out that in 2016,

approximately one-fourth of deaths among children under five were from pneumonia, diarrhoea and measles, and could have been mostly prevented by vaccines.

Also troubling is that more than 19 million children round the world miss routine vaccinations, including 13 million who have never been inoculated.

Low immunization coverage compromises health gains throughout communities at risk, for mothers, children and the poorest – all of whom need it most.

Two-thirds of unvaccinated children live in fragile or conflict-affected countries, including Syria, which saw the sharpest decline in inoculated children between 2010 and 2016.

According to UNICEF, in 2016 vaccine-preventable diseases were responsible for about a quarter of an estimated 1.4 million deaths among those under age five – with Nigeria, India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) accounting for half of the world's unimmunized children.

A brighter future

These vaccine-preventable diseases do not need to be deadly killers, and numerous countries have seen a significant increase in the number of children vaccinated since 2010.

Sudan, Philippines, Mexico and Vietnam were among those driving most of this decade's immunization coverage gains. Moreover, the number of unvaccinated children in India dropped from 5.3 million in 2010 to 2.9 million in 2016.

The top 10 countries where vaccination coverage has increased between 2010 and 2016 are Palau, Malta, DRC, Comoros, Azerbaijan, Ethiopia, Timor-Leste, Barbados, Costa Rica and India.

Additionally, thanks to vaccines, maternal and neonatal tetanus have been eliminated in all but 15 countries – with Ethiopia, Haiti and Philippines having eradicated the disease just last year.

"We continue to work with governments on the ground, including in places affected by conflict, in support of these unsung heroes who take on this extremely dangerous work to save lives," Dr. Nandy said.

The UN [World Health Organization](#) meanwhile pointed out that vaccines protect people from more than deadly diseases, saying: "If we increase vaccine coverage in low- and middle-income countries by 2030, we could [prevent 24 million people](#) from falling into poverty due to health expenses."

World Immunization Week, which runs from 24-30 April, shines a spotlight on global public health to increase rates of immunization against vaccine-preventable diseases around the world.