



**Joint press release
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

MENA-H coalition urges urgent action to combat tuberculosis in the region, with emphasis on innovation and universal health coverage

2025, March 24 – On World Tuberculosis Day, the MENA-H Coalition issues an urgent call to intensify efforts to eliminate tuberculosis (TB) in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Despite significant progress, TB remains a major public health problem, exacerbated by region-specific challenges such as conflict, displacement, and unequal access to healthcare.

Epidemiological situation in the MENA region:

The MENA region has made notable progress in reducing the incidence of tuberculosis. In 2020, the tuberculosis incidence rate in the MENA region decreased to approximately 28 cases per 100,000 population, compared to 46 cases per 100,000 population in 2000. However, significant disparities remain between countries. In 2023, WHO estimated the tuberculosis incidence rate to be 112 cases per 100,000 population in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region. In 2018, the average incidence rate in the MENA region was approximately 31 cases per 100,000 population.

The urgency of integrating new anti-tuberculosis treatments:

The emergence of multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) poses a growing threat to public health in the MENA region. ***"It is imperative to improve access to new drugs and treatment regimens to effectively combat these resistant forms of the disease and to remove all barriers that block access to them," says Othmane Marrakchi, advocacy officer at ITPC-MENA.*** New treatment regimens allow for faster, safer, and more effective treatment of tuberculosis. In 2022, WHO published new guidelines recommending a six-month course of all-oral therapy (BPaLM/BPaL) for eligible patients. ***Medicines such as bedaquiline, delamanid and pretomanid, although revolutionary, are not always available in the MENA region.***

Tuberculosis infection in children and adolescents:

Tuberculosis infection in children and adolescents is a major concern in the MENA region. Children, especially young children (0-4 years), are particularly vulnerable to severe forms of the disease and mortality. A systematic review reveals a high prevalence of latent tuberculosis (LTBI) in the MENA region. "Countries facing political and security instability face additional challenges in providing adequate pediatric TB treatment. It is essential to intensify efforts to improve the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of TB in children in these fragile settings," said Elie Aaraj, Executive Director of MENAHRA. 96% of deaths occur among children and young adolescents who have not had access to TB treatment. Vaccination is a way to prevent TB deaths and protect children from severe forms of TB.

Universal Health Coverage (UHC): A necessity for the elimination of tuberculosis:

The MENA-H Coalition emphasizes that integrating TB services into UHC systems is essential to ensure everyone has access to the health services they need without financial hardship. Expanding UHC in the MENA region remains a challenge, with coverage levels varying across countries. By 2023, nearly one in two households affected by TB faces catastrophic costs.



According to Ms. Taline Torikian, Project Coordinator at MENAROSA, “Refugees and migrants, especially women, in the MENA region face an increased risk of tuberculosis due to precarious living conditions, limited access to healthcare and displacement.” In 2021, the prevalence of latent tuberculosis (LTBI) in the MENA region was approximately 40% of the population. The MENA-H Coalition calls for targeted efforts to reach these vulnerable populations and provide them with TB prevention, diagnosis, and treatment services.

The MENA-H Coalition calls on governments, international organizations, civil society and the private sector to join forces to:

- *Accelerating the adoption and scale-up of new tuberculosis diagnostic and treatment tools in the MENA region.*
- *Fully integrate TB services into UHC systems to ensure equitable access to care for all.*
- *Strengthen cross-border collaborative efforts to address the challenges posed by population mobility and cross-border tuberculosis epidemics.*
- *Address the social determinants of tuberculosis, such as poverty, malnutrition and poor housing, to reduce the incidence of the disease.*
- *Involve affected communities and civil society organizations in the planning, implementation and monitoring of tuberculosis control programs.*

“Eliminating tuberculosis in the MENA region is within our grasp, but it requires renewed commitment, increased resources and multi-sectoral collaboration,” said Dr. Mohamed El Khammas, spokesperson for the MENA-H Coalition., and he continues, “By prioritizing innovation, universal health coverage, and people-centered approaches, we can save lives, protect communities, and build a healthier future for all.”

About the MENA-H Coalition:

In summary, the MENA H Coalition is a strategic alliance aimed at improving the health and rights of vulnerable populations in the Middle East and North Africa. It draws on the collective strength of its members to address complex issues and promote positive change. It includes networks such as the Arab Regional Network Against AIDS (RANAA), and the MENA Harm Reduction Association (MENAHR), The International Treatment Preparedness Coalition-MENA (ITPC-MENA), MENARosa, the MENA Network for People who Use Drugs (MENANPUD), Coalition Plus MENA and SIBA Network.

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