



Tripoli, 4 January 2021– The World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have received more than € 3.3 million from the European Union (EU) to support an 18-month project to strengthen the management of tuberculosis (TB) in Libya.

The incidence of TB in Libya is on the rise. The country’s health system has been severely disrupted during the decade-long conflict, and its National Tuberculosis Programme has acute shortages of trained staff, specialized equipment and medical supplies.

Libya is particularly vulnerable to the risk of infectious diseases such as TB. The country is hosting more than 570,000 migrants; a recent IOM study showed that 39% of them were living in unsanitary and severely overcrowded conditions (i.e., more than six people per habitable room) and had limited access to health care, creating conditions ripe for the spread of the disease. Other migrants are being held in similarly overcrowded detention centres.

Using the generous contribution from the EU, WHO and IOM will work together to strengthen TB screening, laboratory diagnosis, referral and treatment services for migrants, refugees, internally displaced people and other vulnerable populations.

“TB is the world’s top infectious killer. However, with proper treatment, the vast majority of people can be cured of the disease. The EU’s timely contribution will help us enhance TB services throughout the country”, said Ms Elizabeth Hoff, Head of Mission and WHO Representative in Libya. “The project will allow WHO to support national efforts to combat TB by training health staff and strengthening TB surveillance and laboratory services. We plan to deliver equipment, medicines and supplies to TB centres across the country. To help reduce the

spread of infection, we will support systematic screening and contact tracing in detention centres and communities hosting high numbers of migrants. Lastly, we will work with communities to help them understand the signs and symptoms of TB, the steps they can take to prevent its spread and how, when and where they should seek health care.”

“Migrants and internally displaced populations are often vulnerable to TB due to low immunity caused by lack of adequate nutrition, unhygienic living conditions and lack of access to early detection services. According to IOM assessments, accessing food remains a major constraint for many migrants in Libya,” said Federico Soda, IOM Libya Chief of Mission. “Since the COVID-19 pandemic has caused enormous health, social and economic impacts, which are likely to continue in 2021 and beyond, this funding from the EU to address the burden of TB in Libya comes at a critical time. In partnership with WHO and other humanitarian partners, IOM medical teams will reach migrants and vulnerable host community members, especially in areas heavily affected by armed conflict and displacement, through the provision of nutrient supplements and health promotion sessions to identify and refer suspected TB cases for treatment.”

IOM’s Displacement Tracking Matrix shows that more than 316,000 Libyans remain displaced, while over 567,000 others have returned to their areas of origin. Most returnees are reported to need food assistance and health services.

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