

Polio Eradication in the African Region





African Region

Highlights (January - March 2025)

In the first quarter of 2025, the WHO African Region made significant strides toward polio eradication. Nine countries mounted high-quality vaccination campaigns, protecting nearly 54 million children with at least one dose of polio vaccine.

In January, WHOAFRO hosted its Geographic Information System (GIS) Summit, setting the stage for a digital transformation of public health in Africa through advanced mapping and data tools. In February, a high-level delegation from the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) visited Nigeria to galvanize political commitment and tackle challenges such as insecurity and misinformation.

Importantly, new training sessions on advanced sequencing techniques boosted laboratory capacity in both Southern and West Africa. In Zimbabwe, laboratory capabilities were further strengthened with the commissioning of a state-of-the-art Environmental Surveillance (ES) laboratory unit within the National Polio Laboratory — enhancing the country's ability to detect and respond to poliovirus outbreaks. Meanwhile, Malawi advanced efforts to sustain polio assets and integrate them into stronger, more resilient health systems by holding its National Polio Transition Planning Meeting on April 2025.

With GPEI support, rapid and synchronized outbreak responses in the Horn of Africa reached nearly 18 million children in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia with lifesaving polio vaccines — despite complex challenges. Strong cross-border coordination remains vital to stopping the virus in key transmission corridors like the Horn of Africa and Lake Chad Basin. Encouragingly, the Region saw a 93% drop in variant type 1 detections and a 65% decrease in type 2 cases from 2023 to 2024.

Our impact in the African Region (Q1, 2025)



54 million children vaccinated in 2025 (as of end of March)



9 countries conducted vaccination rounds against polio (as of end of March)



2 million polio frontline workers paid with digital finance solutions in 22 African countries



11 WHO-trained labs expanded genomic sequencing, with 6 of them pilot-testing techniques



98% (46/47) of countries have established environmental surveillance systems



800+ health professionals trained in GIS, ODK, GTS, data analysis, and visualization in 2024

We support countries



Maintaining high-quality surveillance systems to ensure that polio is detected quickly and effectively. In 2024, the African Region recorded a Non-polio Acute Flaccid Paralysis (AFP) rate of 7.2 per 100,000 children under 15 years of age—well above the global target of 2— showing strong case detection. The stool adequacy rate reached 91%, indicating most samples met the standards for reliable lab testing.



Detecting 94 polioviruses in 12 countries in 2025 (as of end of March, 2025). Circulating variant type 1, 2, and 3 cases were confirmed. 51% (24/47) of countries in the African Region reported polio cases in the past year.



Responding to polio outbreaks by implementing supplementary immunization activities (SIAs) in 9 African countries from January to end of March, 2025. In total, more than 54 million children were vaccinated with at least one dose of polio vaccine in Q1, 2025.



Enabling 98% (46/47) of countries in the African Region to have functional Environmental Surveillance Systems. All countries have been visited and 47 new environmental surveillance sites were set up in 2023, resulting in enhanced detection activities. More than 7,300 environmental isolates were collected from wastewater and tested in the past year.



Enhancing country capacities through the AFRO Geographic Information Systems Centre to map cross-border communities, migratory routes, border crossings and transit routes using key electronic data tools (eSURV, ODK). Over 800 health professionals were trained in GIS, ODK, GTS, data analysis, and visualization tools in the first half of 2024.



Reaching over 2 million frontline workers with timely payments in 22 African countries. WHO's Mobile Money digital payment system has been able to pay 95% of health workers within 10 days following the end of each vaccination campaign. In 2024, three additional countries are implementing this system: Benin, Guinea, and Mozambique. The system serves as a model for improved campaigns in resource-challenged settings.



Enhancing Africa's polio surveillance, anchored by a network of 16 labs that trace poliovirus from stool and wastewater. In 2025, WHO trained regional lab teams, health workers, and data managers in genetic sequencing, with six of 11 labs piloting advanced techniques like Sanger and MinION. Bioinformatics and data training supported faster, informed outbreak response. Notably, Uganda's Sanger capacity was accredited in early 2025 — a key step in boosting detection efforts.

Challenges

- Resource challenges lead to decreased supplementary immunization activities.
- The decline in routine immunization coverage and the interruption of preventive bOPV Supplementary Immunization Activities (SIAs) have left significant populations vulnerable to type 1 and type 3 poliovirus outbreaks.
- Conflict and insecurity disrupt services and complicate the difficult jobs of health workers.
- Health systems in Africa are strained by competing health priorities and emergencies, which negatively impact efforts to address health challenges, including polio, resulting in delayed vaccination campaigns and variable quality of those.
- Vaccination refusal continues due to misinformation and community fatigue.

Way forward

- Strengthen cross border coordination, communication and collaboration.
- Improve population immunity focusing on reaching zero dose, under-immunized children in hard-to- reach and/or security-affected areas.
- Enhance and expand Acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) and environmental surveillance for rapid detection.
- Strengthen laboratory sequencing capacity for direct detection and timely response.
- Advance gender equality and the empowerment of women to eradicate polio.
- Intensify vaccination campaigns, leveraging technology and innovative solutions.

Find out more: SCAN ME



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