

SECURING THE FUTURE

SUSTAINING HIV MOMENTUM IN THE MENA REGION

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is on the brink of a significant resurgence of HIV. Hard won gains are at risk from a multitude of challenges – the hostile geopolitical and economic climate and rising anti-rights movements are compounding the crisis for vulnerable and key populations. Since 2019, the Nadoum programme has built a powerful community-led response, bringing the promise of real progress in meeting the needs of marginalised people. With sufficient resources and political will, the region could achieve a future free from AIDS.

The region is falling behind global targets to end AIDS by 2030. While global infection rates are in decline, MENA is seeing a rapid rise. Despite having the lowest HIV prevalence in the world (0.15%), infection rates among some key populations are alarmingly high. HIV treatment coverage stands at 50% - the lowest globally.

The huge funding gap left by the Global Fund transitioning out of certain countries in MENA poses a significant threat if not addressed. Across the region there is a serious lack of data, making policymaking and strategic planning particularly challenging.

➔ Development partners need to urgently step up investment to reverse these trends, and accelerate progress towards the global targets. A community-led approach like Nadoum, centred on the needs of key populations, will be the most effective HIV response.

MENA AT A GLANCE

HIV still on the rise



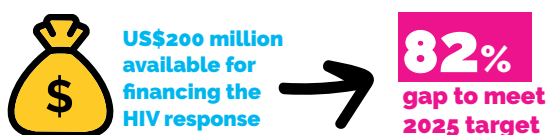
Not meeting targets



95% of new adult HIV infections are among key populations and their sexual partners, and HIV infection rates are high



Funding gap



NADOUM: TOGETHER FOR CHANGE

Nadoum is a catalytic investment by the Global Fund, led by the MENA H Coalition, the regional network of key population networks, in collaboration with Frontline AIDS. It is a multi-country programme (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia) designed to mobilise and empower communities, build networks and address human rights-related barriers to health care. Nadoum's aim is to increase the sustainability and quality of HIV prevention services for key populations and people living with HIV in those countries and across the region.

We spotlight here Nadoum's achievements in four areas that are critical to accelerating action to sustain and improve HIV services for people who are most vulnerable to HIV:

- Civil society **capacity strengthening** to enhance sustainability
- **Sensitising communities** to create a more favourable environment
- **Policy change** to address structural barriers
- **Innovating** to reach key populations more effectively.

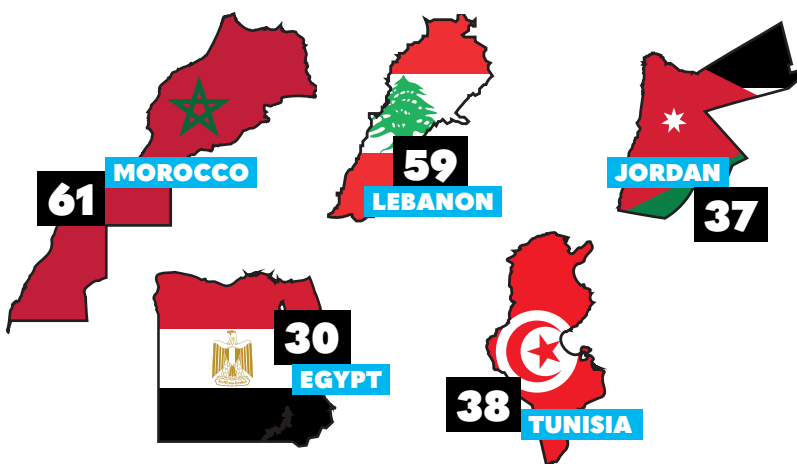
CAPACITY STRENGTHENING



→ Nadoum has spearheaded a transformative approach in the region leveraging the expertise and dedication of local organisations to accelerate the HIV response. By cultivating strong networks with stakeholders, they are ready to forge ahead, scaling up innovative, effective and sustainable programmes.

The programme has supported national partners to strengthen their organisational development and embed it in their country plans, making certain their interventions are always impactful and context-relevant. Trainings have equipped staff on critical areas including harm reduction; governance and financial management; and policy development and advocacy. Most importantly each country has developed robust plans to build the long-term sustainability of their HIV response efforts.

Organisations benefiting from capacity strengthening



“ We made resource mobilisation strategies as part of Nadoum. This strengthened us as an organisation. Plus, we were exposed to new partnerships which will help us secure funding for other projects at the national level. Additionally, Nadoum provided direct support for the execution of activities for fundraising. ”

SENSITISING COMMUNITIES



→ Communities are at the heart of the HIV response, with community leaders playing a crucial role in creating an enabling environment that is more favourable to vulnerable groups accessing services. Religious leaders can be powerful influencers within the HIV response when they are sensitised and engaged. As trusted members of society they play pivotal roles in influencing social norms and behaviours.

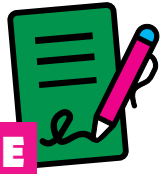
Nadoum actively engages diverse communities to shift mindsets, and reduce stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV. This includes outreach to young people, community leaders and health care providers.

Engaging religious leaders

In **Jordan**, Forearms of Change Center to Enable Community (FOCCEC) has sensitised religious leaders on human rights and HIV and trained them on awareness-raising on stigma and discrimination. These leaders are now so engaged, they run their own sessions in remote communities and reach out to new audiences – including medical students and Islamic religion teachers in public schools.

579

RELIGIOUS LEADERS HAVE BEEN TRAINED SINCE 2019



POLICY CHANGE

→ Structural barriers in the MENA region continue to hamper the HIV response. Escalating hostility towards key populations, especially LGBT+ communities, along with persisting stigma and discrimination, criminalisation and repressive laws continue to thwart progress on the rights of people living with HIV. Nadoum partners are actively engaging with decision-makers to make changes to discriminatory policies.

Harm reduction

The Middle East and North Africa Harm Reduction Association (MENAHRRA) has made impressive inroads into addressing harm reduction **across the region** through innovative activities in the five countries. A highlight was a regional meeting with parliamentarians to encourage them to adopt a harm reduction approach in their respective countries and support the rights of people who use drugs. The parliamentarians signed up to a position statement developed by MENAHRRA, which is being used for a major advocacy effort. Partners are holding national meetings bringing together civil society organisations (CSOs) and parliamentarians to promote the rights of people who use drugs.

Advocacy by Nadoum partners in **Morocco** has led the government to prioritise treatment for people who use drugs rather than punishing them and to reduce any punishments given to fines rather than prison sentences. Local partners have also been working to ensure the national harm reduction programme provides services that are more women- and trans-friendly.

Protecting workers' rights

With the support of lawyers, partners in **Egypt** worked with stakeholders to remove barriers to human rights for people living with HIV in the workplace. They succeeded in increasing opportunities for key populations to be hired and helped protect their rights. Some of these lawyers have committed to continue advocating for people living with HIV and other vulnerable groups.



MENAHRRA has spearheaded regional harm reduction policy change copyright - (c) Frontline AIDS/Diego Ibarra Sanchez 2023

“ Employers can no longer easily fire workers who become positive and positive people become more aware of their rights. ”



INNOVATING TO REACH KEY POPULATIONS

→ Working in increasingly challenging contexts, community organisations are finding new and smart ways to reach key populations that are adapted to their needs and their locations - through community-led monitoring, technology and other innovative programming.



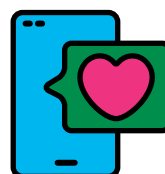
REACT

REAct: recording and responding to human rights violations

Partners in **Jordan, Lebanon** and **Tunisia**, are using the Rights-Evidence-ACTION (REAct) tool, a community-led monitoring and response system, to record and manage information about human rights violations impacting access to HIV services. Community members are trained as REActors to gather evidence for advocacy and make referrals to support - such as individual crisis responses and human rights-based HIV programmes. REAct has led to tangible progress in community systems strengthening and reduced human rights barriers. Involving community members as REActors has made the approach more effective.

“ We need to train, we need to work, we need to learn to deliver services for key populations at a higher scale and using new approaches like self-testing, using digital media, using networks, using new medicines. ”

Dating apps for outreach: Nadoum partners in **Lebanon** are using mobile dating apps to reach key populations including LGBT+, sex workers and refugees. Trained peer outreach workers create profiles that make it clear they work for an organisation providing information and support. This enables them to share information on topics related to sexual and reproductive health and rights, and signpost to relevant services and support.



524
ONLINE
SESSIONS VIA
DATING APPS



7,929
PEOPLE
REACHED
IN 2021

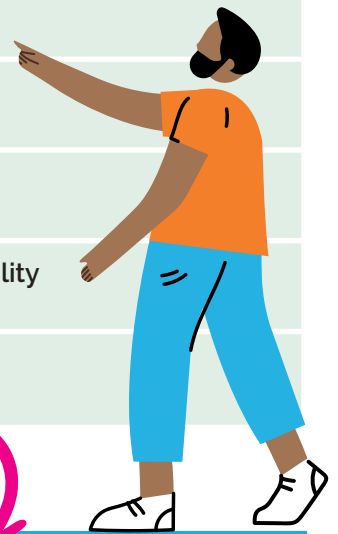
WAY FORWARD



Civil society organisations are poised to work with governments to make the final push towards ending AIDS by 2030. The momentum must be maintained to ensure the region is resilient against existing and future health threats. While Nadoum has built strong foundations and made big strides in all five countries and at regional level, change of this kind takes time. The region needs sustained and strategic support.

WE NEED DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS TO

- 1** Scale up direct HIV funding to support CSOs to ensure sustainable HIV programmes.
- 2** Adopt flexible funding models that accommodate the unique challenges of the region; more inclusive decision-making processes; and strategic partnerships.
- 3** Safeguard international commitment by facilitating systems, mechanisms, and collaborations.
- 4** Invest in collaborative work with governments in the region to bridge the domestic HIV funding gap.
- 5** Improve data collection and analysis to address the significant data gaps in the region.
- 6** Strengthen health systems to improve the quality of care and ensure full coverage for people living with HIV and key populations.
- 7** Promote community-led monitoring and programmes to ensure accountability and responsiveness to the needs of key populations.
- 8** Foster regional and cross-border collaboration and knowledge-sharing to leverage best practices and coordinate efforts in the HIV response.



By taking these steps, development partners will ensure that the region can move faster towards achieving the global goal to end AIDS by 2030.

The wider benefits of sustained investment in health and protecting rights make this an urgent and critical funding priority.



Together for change
Sustaining HIV services in MENA



on hiv & human rights



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