

2025
Activity
Report

Providing care
with expertise
and humanity

damien 
let's act now.
it's contagious **foundation**

Ethics and governance



Damien Foundation closely monitors and rigorously assesses the quality and impact of its activities through **strict procedures** that ensure responsible management. This approach reflects an unwavering commitment to **transparency** and **integrity**.

As a member of the non-profit association Récolte de Fonds Éthique – Ethische Fondsenwerving (www.re-ef.be), we act in line with its code of ethics.



This is supplemented by our own code of ethics, which sets out the behaviour expected of our stakeholders. Anyone can report any ethical breaches of which they are a victim or witness via the email address ethics@damienfoundation.be. In 2025, we received an alert regarding one of our projects. This was addressed through the implementation of a well-defined process validated by the organisation.

This activity report reflects our commitment to transparency regarding the way we raise and use our financial resources (see pp. 4–7), based on rigorous procedures and systematic checks.

Management team

- **Pascale Barnich**, General Manager
- **Alberto Roggi**, Head of Health Action & Global Impact
- **Samir Qassemi**, Head of Finance & Supply Chain
- **Greetje Wassenberg**, Head of Engaging & Funding

Members of our Board of Directors (31/12/2025)

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| • Steven Osaer , President | • Fabienne Bryskere | • Stephan Mercier |
| • Wim Beernaert | • Laurence Festraets | • Jean-Pierre Schenkelaars |
| • Jo Benoit | • Gaëtan Leysen | • Sarah Van Praet |

Damien Foundation, under the patronage of HRH Princess Astrid of Belgium

Damien Foundation is an inclusive organisation that promotes gender equality (m/f/u) and respect for all gender identities, and believes in the importance of diversity and non-discrimination. For the purpose of readability, we have chosen to systematically use the pronouns 'he' and 'his' in this document. These should be viewed as equivalent to any other gender and gender-neutral pronoun in every instance.

Taking action means remaining profoundly human

In a challenging context, 2025 was a particularly intense year for Damien Foundation. Our main challenges included declining public funding, growing geopolitical pressures and the tensions that exist in some countries. Although 4.5 billion people still lack access to essential healthcare services and 2 billion face financial hardship due to healthcare costs, the right to health has been deliberately sidelined by many global policies. 2025 was “**the year we cut spending on humanity!**”

This situation is a cause for concern. However, what strikes me most is that, thanks to the dedication of our teams, Damien Foundation is continuing to make progress in the diagnosis, treatment and follow-up of people affected by tuberculosis or neglected tropical skin diseases (such as leprosy and leishmaniasis), by strengthening our academic partnerships but above all through the connection we maintain with each patient and their community. At a time when wars are tearing apart the fabric of society, we are working with seven other Belgian NGOs to reinvent collaboration in international cooperation through the Health Impact Coalition. **Acting to ensure equitable access to resilient health systems** throughout the world, including in Belgium, is the urgent priority we have chosen to address by proposing practical, positive and effective solutions, in collaboration with our partners, to promote everyone’s health.

In 2026 we will stay true to our mission as we continue to **refine our intervention strategies** so that no one suffers or dies from diseases that can be prevented and cured. This means looking at their real impact in the countries where we operate, so that the resources allocated can be used as efficiently as possible.

The ties we forge on a daily basis with all those involved in our action are key to our progress and our impact. They are the national authorities, public health facilities, the academic sector, foundations and businesses, and the national and international NGOs with which we collaborate. Beyond the organisations themselves, however, they are the men and women who, like us, choose every day to contribute positively to humanity and to act for a fairer world where every human being can live with dignity.

Thank you so much!

Pascale Barnich
General Manager

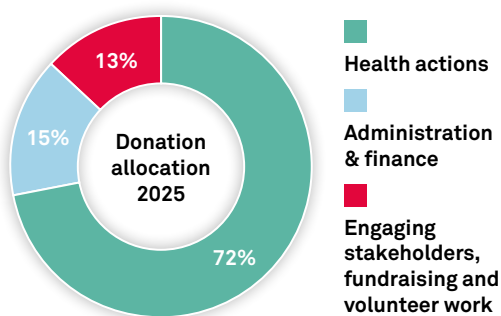


Our impact in the world in 2025

- **294,000** early diagnoses of tuberculosis or neglected skin diseases such as leprosy and leishmaniasis
- **284,000** people received high-quality healthcare
- **7,000** people received socio-economic support
- **23** research & operations projects
- **21** publications presenting the findings of our research
- **13** countries where we are active

Enabling sustainable change in public health

We want everyone to have access to quality healthcare. To achieve this, we are committed to working more **efficiently and effectively** to maximise the impact of our interventions and significantly reduce mortality and disease.



How do we use your donations?

- **72%** goes to all of our **health actions** intended to give many people as possible a chance of recovery (see our intervention model opposite);
- **15%** is used to ensure the **responsible management** of the organisation, in line with changing standards within the non-profit sector;
- **13%** are committed to public fundraising appeals, developing partnerships with institutional funding organisations, raising awareness among the general public, mobilising volunteers, and promoting inclusion and global citizenship in schools.

Subject to the approval of our financial statements by the General Assembly on 30 May 2026.



- All our activities are closely monitored in order to ensure that **every euro invested generates maximum impact.**
- Our expenditures are controlled by a financial committee and by institutional funding organisations, the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD) and the Federal Public Service Finance of Belgium.
- Our accounts are reviewed by an administrative body and approved by the General Assembly. They are also audited by the accountancy firm BDO.

Our vision

We believe in a world where everyone has access to robust health systems; a world free from tuberculosis, leprosy, leishmaniasis and other neglected tropical skin diseases, all of which are closely linked to poverty.

Our intervention model

Because health is a fundamental right, we operate in 13 countries to make healthcare equally accessible to the most vulnerable, working closely with individuals and their communities to reduce mortality and disease with the aim of achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

- 1** We work to **structurally strengthen health systems** by putting our medical expertise at the service of the health authorities in the countries where we operate.
- 2** We **diagnose illnesses earlier** by reaching out to people within their communities and removing barriers to accessing care.
- 3** We **improve the chances of recovery** and socio-economic reintegration through integrated care and continuity of care in a way that takes each individual's reality into account.
- 4** We **accelerate access to innovation** through research that translates scientific knowledge into tools that can be put to immediate use in the field.
- 5** We **strengthen the skills of healthcare professionals** by organising training courses and conducting technical support missions where needed.
- 6** We **help shape global health policies** to improve prevention, early diagnosis of disease and comprehensive patient care.

Faced with growing pressure on health systems - demographic shifts, environmental challenges, inequalities in access, and chronic underinvestment - eight Belgian NGOs, (Damien Foundation, Chaîne de l'Espoir, Handicap International, JustSee (Light for the World), Médecins du Monde, Médecins Sans Vacances, Memisa and Viva Salud) are joining forces within the Health Impact Coalition. This coalition works alongside public authorities, civil society, and local communities to promote inclusive, sustainable, and resilient health systems. By pooling their expertise, members strengthen the impact and efficiency of their actions, serving the most vulnerable populations.
HealthImpactCoalition.org

“ Wherever we work, we practise humane and humanitarian medicine that goes beyond mere medical care to take each person's individuality into account.

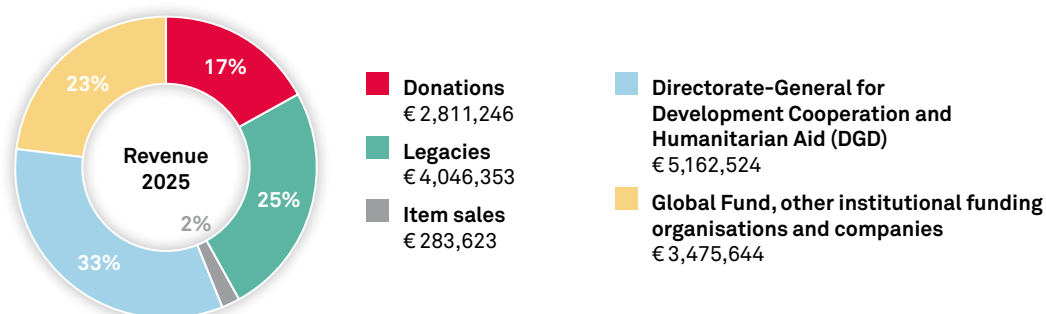
Pascale Barnich,
General Manager of Damien Foundation

health impact
coalition 

Funding our work

Health systems are under pressure from epidemics, climate change, conflicts and political instability. Antibiotic resistance also threatens the effectiveness of healthcare worldwide. Added to this are structural challenges in the health sector: fragmentation of services, lack of resources and declining public funding, including in Belgium, where a 25% cut in international cooperation was announced as part of the latest federal budget agreement. In this context, Damien Foundation is securing stable financial resources that are essential to the continuity of its health activities.

Where does our funding come from?



Financial report highlights

- For the third consecutive year, our organisation has delivered **positive results**, confirming its strong **financial position**. This performance reflects rigorous resource management, which has allowed us to maintain a balanced budget despite a challenging environment. Our financial stability is further reinforced by **robust reserves**, providing several months of operational continuity and strengthening our resilience amid sector uncertainties.
- We are seeing a **decline in funding** from the generosity of the **Belgian public**, particularly individual donations. This reflects a lasting shift in solidarity behaviours and prompting us to keep rethinking how we foster citizen engagement. This drop is partially offset by **income from legacies** which, despite falling by 5.3% compared with previous year, still makes a significant **contribution** to our **financial balance**. However, because this income remains volatile, we must continue to remain cautious.
- At the same time, our **institutional funding** rose by nearly 7%, driven mainly by two strategic grants: one in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where we have become a Global Fund grant recipient (through UNDP - United Nations Development Programme) for tuberculosis control, and another in Bangladesh, where Stop TB Partnership is supporting a project aimed at facilitating access to innovative approaches for TB and Lung Health closer to the point of need. This growth reflects our partners' **confidence** and recognition of our **technical expertise**.
- In response to these **evolutions**, we are continuing our efforts to **diversify funding sources** and **manage costs** to strengthen our economic model and sustain our work. As pressure on international cooperation funding increases, the vigilance, agility, and commitment of our teams remain essential to maintaining our financial balance and **advancing our mission**.

You can find the full version of our 2025 financial statement at <https://consult.cbso.nbb.be/consult-enterprise/0406694670> or at NGOOpenbook, a portal for Belgian NGOs: <https://ngo-openbook.be/overview>.

An ongoing commitment to health through legacies

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to those who chose to include Damien Foundation in their wills in 2025. **Beyond providing an immediate response to emergency crises**, their decision demonstrates a commitment to the communities we serve, while ensuring the long-term sustainability of our health activities.

Do you see it as important to ensure access to healthcare and create a fairer world? If you would like more information, please contact our legal advisors for impartial guidance legs@damienfoundation.be

“ Deciding what you wish to leave behind, even after you are gone, is a significant responsibility. Damien Foundation ensures that the wishes of the deceased are respected and fulfilled, and handles every bequest with professionalism, confidentiality, and empathy.

Pascale Decoene,
legal advisor at Damien Foundation



Reinforce your company's societal priorities

In a world where health issues have taken on a global dimension, we are grateful for the close ties we maintain with the private sector. Coming together around shared values of humanism and solidarity, with a desire to make a positive contribution to society, is an excellent way to improve public health. And **the benefits are far-reaching**: not just for the communities we serve, but also for our partner companies and their employees, who are making decisions that will embody a societal choice and contribute to meeting their ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) commitments.

“ We've been supporting Damien Foundation since 2023, helping children from families affected by leprosy in Nigeria to continue their education. That is because education is a key driver of better health for individuals and communities.

Généreux Oushoorn,
Director of AKSIS
Interieur en Bouw bv



Are you looking to find out more about opportunities to work with Damien Foundation? **Visit our website dedicated page!**

Some highlights

World Leprosy Day

Across **Belgium**, volunteers are mobilising to remind people that leprosy still affects two-thirds of the world's countries and remains a public health issue.

New representative in Guatemala

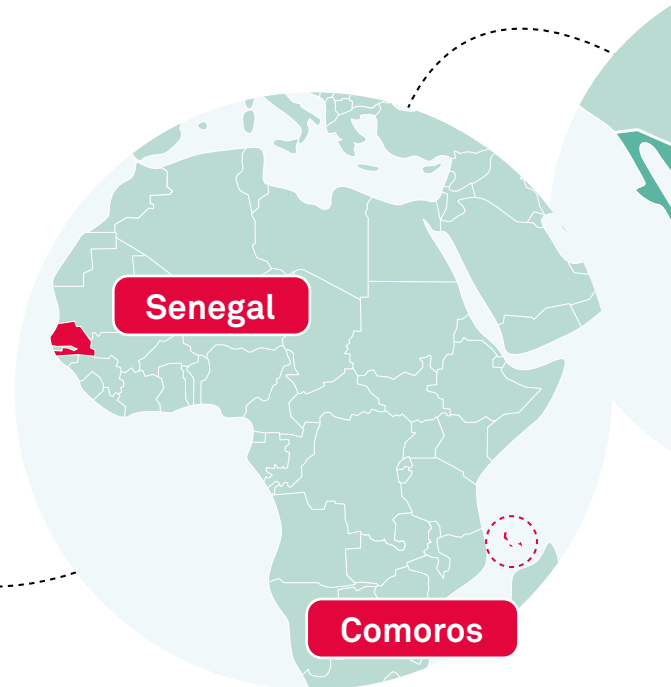
Maria Eugenia Alquijay Pirir, former financial director at Damien Foundation in **Guatemala**, is appointed country director.

Belgian trade mission to India

Country representative Dr Shivakumar, speaks at the round-table discussion on partnerships between NGOs and businesses to maximise social impact.

World TB Day

Damien Foundation highlights the fact that tuberculosis is the world's deadliest infectious disease and calls for coordinated international action.



Expert meeting at WHO headquarters

Dr Pierre Umba, Damien Foundation representative in the DRC, attends the global meeting on neglected tropical skin diseases in **Geneva**.

International course on tuberculosis in Mexico

Dr Alberto Piubello speaks on the effective treatment and care of multidrug-resistant tuberculosis.

Diplomatic visit to India

Frank Geerkens, the Belgian consul in Mumbai, visits hospitals in Nellore and Chennai to meet the staff and see their work.

Belgian trade mission to Senegal

The teams take part in discussions on strengthening health infrastructure in **Senegal**.

A new face for research

Dr Juan Espinosa-Pereiro joins Damien Foundation's medical team and becomes the organisation's research focal point.

International Leprosy Congress in Indonesia

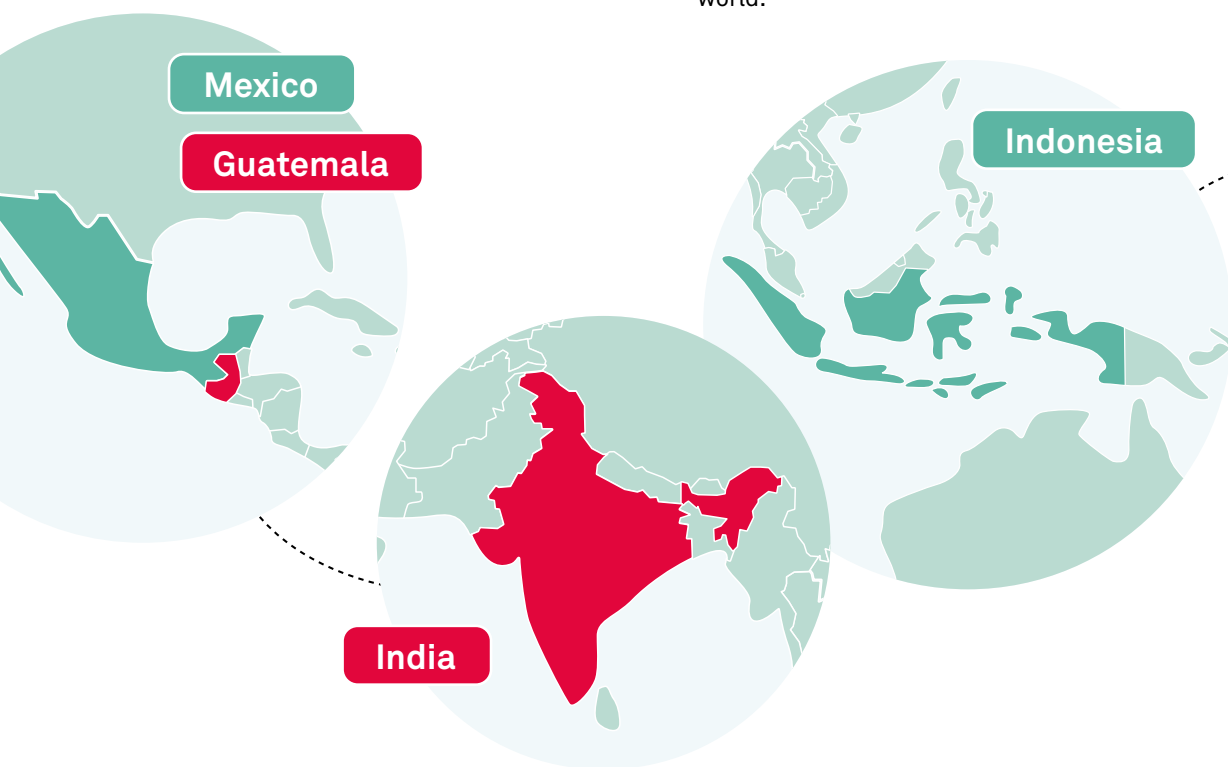
Medical experts from Damien Foundation in India, Comoros and Senegal present the findings of their recent research into leprosy.

Enhanced expertise

Dr Ignacio Monedero joins the medical team at Damien Foundation, bringing expertise in the fields of TB and HIV and experience of work in complex and unstable environments around the world.

World Conference on Lung Health

In **Copenhagen**, three experts from Damien Foundation share the latest findings from their research into tuberculosis.



Damien Foundation marker pens at Colruyt

Colruyt Laagste Prijzen - Meilleurs Prix supports Damien Foundation and sells the iconic markers in 193 of its stores across **Belgium**.

New representative in Comoros

Building on his experience with the WHO immunisation programme in **Comoros**, Dr Azhar Salim Mohamed now heads Damien Foundation's team.

Health Impact Coalition

To strengthen their joint efforts in support of global health, eight Belgian NGOs – including Damien Foundation – join forces to set up the Health Impact Coalition.

MeritCom Award 2025

Dr Younoussa, former Damien Foundation representative in Comoros, is awarded the Hazi Haki Foundation's MeritCom 2025 Award for his outstanding work in public health.

Preventing health risks

In an interconnected world, infectious diseases represent a **major public health challenge**. **Tuberculosis**, for example, is among the top ten causes of death worldwide. Every year, 10.7 million people develop the disease and 1.2 million people die from it. At the same time, **neglected tropical diseases** such as leprosy and leishmaniasis are still present in many countries. Every two minutes, someone finds out they have leprosy. Meanwhile, leishmaniasis affects between 600,000 and 1 million people every year.

To ensure that everyone has access to care, regardless of their circumstances, Damien Foundation works on the structural **strengthening of health systems** in many parts of the world. Drawing on recognised medical expertise, strong community ties and solid partnerships with Ministry of Health teams, we promote the sharing of knowledge, data and best practices. These measures help to improve the quality of our operations, improve the capacity in each country and prevent health crises more effectively.

What is tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis is the world's deadliest infectious disease. It mainly affects the lungs and is still a threat to public health, particularly in its antibiotic-resistant form. Nearly 90% of those affected live in low-income or middle-income countries.

What is a neglected tropical disease?

Neglected tropical diseases are a diverse group of conditions that occur mainly in tropical regions, where they spread within communities living in poverty. According to the WHO, more than half of them present skin symptoms and they are often associated with long-term disabilities. They are described as 'neglected' because they receive less attention, fewer resources and less research than other diseases, despite their significant health, social and economic impacts. Leprosy and leishmaniasis are both examples.



So that the right to health becomes a reality, Damien Foundation adopts a human-centred and humanitarian approach to medicine. In addition to research and the development of prevention and care strategies, we prioritise a community-based approach wherever we work. We carry out awareness-raising activities in the field and help reduce prejudice; we provide early diagnosis and high-quality medical care; and we support patients' socio-economic reintegration, while ensuring that communities have access to the latest scientific advances.



Protecting communities

Leprosy, tuberculosis and leishmaniasis are diseases that can be cured. Despite this, they continue to affect **vulnerable populations** living in environments where poverty, malnutrition and overcrowding weaken people's immune systems and facilitate **transmission**. Breaking the chain of transmission requires early diagnosis and treatment. Consequently, to protect the immediate family and friends of people suffering from tuberculosis or leprosy, Damien Foundation is focusing on innovative prevention strategies.

In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, for example, we are working as part of the **TIFA project** (Tuberculosis Implementation Framework Agreement), which relies on identifying direct contacts of patients with **tuberculosis** in order to protect these at-risk contacts through preventive treatment, as well as stepping up active screening to reduce delays in treatment.

In **Comoros**, we are implementing a **similar approach centred on the immediate circle** around individuals affected by **leprosy**. Thanks to a study conducted in collaboration with the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp, we have demonstrated that preventive treatment reduces the risk of developing the disease by 44%. The results of a second study are expected in 2027. This method, which is also used in **Senegal**, the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** and **Bolivia**, significantly reduces the incidence of leprosy in the hardest-hit areas. Every year, the teams return to the villages to assess the effectiveness of the treatments. Combined with a study of social interactions among local residents (entitled "Social Network Analysis of Leprosy"), the **health surveillance** that we carry out helps us to better understand how leprosy spreads and to continuously strengthen our prevention efforts.



Limit drug resistance

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown that disease knows no borders. On top of this, there is another major challenge: antibiotic resistance. When patients self-medicate or stop before completing a course of treatment due to a lack of resources, certain bacteria develop resistance to the drugs normally used to eliminate them. Doctors are then forced to resort to more complex and lengthy protocols. In order to **prevent treatment dropouts**, Damien Foundation prioritises personalised support for patients with multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB).

In **Burundi**, 44 people with multidrug-resistant tuberculosis received intensive support in 2025. The objective was to **eliminate the everyday barriers** that people face during their recovery. This is a method that has proven its worth: it results in a 92% recovery rate. By way of comparison, the global figure stands at just 71%.

Maintaining health programmes despite crises

In some countries, **political and security instability make populations even more vulnerable**. As malnutrition becomes more widespread and health systems come under strain, the risk of developing an infectious disease increases, as does the difficulty accessing care.

In **Niger**, where the economic and humanitarian situation has deteriorated since the military coup in July 2023, Damien Foundation continues to work with referral health facilities to ensure that people with tuberculosis receive treatment and to **guarantee continuity of care**.

When movement is restricted, weekly video surveillance are held with health centre managers to discuss patient care. This initiative has helped to reduce the number of tuberculosis-related deaths by nearly 60% over the past eight years – despite an unstable environment.



Ensuring access to healthcare for all

Although health is a fundamental right, it remains out of reach for millions of people. Numerous social factors linked to poverty hinder **access to care**, while living conditions associated with poverty weaken people's immune systems. Tuberculosis and neglected tropical diseases such as leprosy and leishmaniasis continue to spread in these conditions. This happens all the more in communities where access to care is hindered by a lack of information, prejudice, distance from health facilities and a lack of financial resources.

Educational and gender-related inequality raise these barriers further, limiting some people's ability to access information, make informed decisions and seek treatment.

Through a **community-based approach** that focuses on individuals and their community, we develop **solutions tailored to local contexts** so that everyone can benefit from high-quality care. In practice this means going beyond medical care and taking the reality of every individual into account in order to optimise their likelihood of recovery and social and economic reintegration.

Operating in remote areas

In Europe, 83% of people live within a fifteen-minute drive of a hospital. This is in stark contrast to the situation in many low-income countries, where health facilities are sometimes several hours or even days away by road. For people living in remote villages, this isolation can have serious consequences for their health.

In order to **bridge the gap between them and care**, Damien Foundation deploys **health mobility strategies**. In **Nicaragua**, for example, health workers cross mountains and rivers to treat patients with **leishmaniasis**. In **Nigeria**, we are setting up mobile clinics in rural areas, and couriers deliver tuberculosis test samples to laboratories by motorbike. In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, teams carry out door-to-door visits or travel up and down the Congo River by boat to actively seek out cases of leprosy in remote villages. In Koba, **Guinea**, we have opened a centre dedicated to the screening and treatment of tuberculosis, in an area where traditional fish landing sites are easily accessible to the population.



What is leishmaniasis?

Leishmaniasis is a serious parasitic disease transmitted by a small sand fly. It causes extremely painful skin ulcers. In the past it was confined to tropical regions, but it is now found in several countries across Europe and the Mediterranean basin.



Reducing prejudice

Tuberculosis and neglected tropical skin diseases are very often associated with deeply held beliefs that can lead to discrimination, resulting in the social isolation of those affected. Despite effective treatments, the diseases and their visible after-effects continue to stoke fear.

This **lack of understanding** of the condition and the stigma surrounding it discourage many people from seeking medical advice or undergoing treatment. Damien Foundation is therefore focusing on raising public awareness and training community health workers, particularly in identifying the early symptoms.

In **Guatemala**, for example, Damien Foundation organises information campaigns in villages, sets up support networks for former patients and runs training sessions for **health workers** on empathetic communication and data protection. This helps to improve prevention and dispel misconceptions.

“ During an awareness-raising and active screening campaign, I discovered that I had leprosy. I received something far more important than a diagnosis and treatment: a chance to live with dignity.

Brigitte,
treated for leprosy in Kinshasa



Removing financial barriers

The poorest people continue to bear the brunt of **exorbitant health costs**, including 1.6 billion people who live in poverty or are being pushed further into poverty by healthcare-related expenses.

People with tuberculosis or neglected tropical skin diseases like leprosy or leishmaniasis, are no exception. The World Health Organisation is calling for free access to essential healthcare to be guaranteed for people who live in extremely precarious conditions.

To ensure equal access to health, the medical care provided is free of charge in all the countries where we operate. In some countries, financial assistance is also available to cover the costs of travelling to health facilities. The main purpose of this is to **prevent the disastrous costs** associated with illness, namely families having to pay health costs so high that they jeopardise their ability to meet their basic needs.

In **Kinshasa**, Damien Foundation Centre of Excellence (CEDA) also provides free specialised care for the most severe forms of tuberculosis, with the aim of giving patients the best chances of recovery and ensuring that communities have access to the latest medical advances.



Enabling a fresh start

When a person becomes ill, the financial stability of the entire family often comes under threat. Damien Foundation therefore ensures that those who have recovered return to work. It supports the development of income-generating activities that empower people and enable them to provide for themselves without relying on others.

These **income-generating activities** can take the form of start-up capital to open a small shop or vegetable stall, such as in **Guatemala**, **Senegal** or **India**. Another example is a **fish farming project** like the one in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**. Launched in Kwilu Province in 2025, this project has enabled people with leprosy to improve their food security and develop a sustainable source of income.

Support is also often provided for the education of children in families affected by disease, which includes the provision of scholarships. This is particularly the case in **Burundi**, the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** and **Nigeria**. Access to education plays a direct role in improving the health of individuals and communities. After all, understanding about illness and how to treat it, basic hygiene practices and learn to challenge prejudice are all lessons we gain at school, and they lay the foundations for a fairer world.

The perseverance and solidarity values of Father Damien (1840-1889) still inspire our actions today.

A differentiated and inclusive approach

Vulnerable groups face the most barriers to accessing care. A tailored and inclusive approach aims to meet their specific needs more effectively. In addition to medical care, **taking people's individuality into account** is vital to their recovery. Damien Foundation works at the heart of communities to break the vicious cycle that still persists between illness and poverty.

This approach is fully in line with the recommendations of the World Health Organisation, which emphasises that recovery depends not only on the **quality of diagnosis, prevention and access to care**, but also on the social support provided to those affected throughout their treatment, which is a key factor in success. If it is not available, there is a real risk of their treatment being interrupted. This not only increases mortality, but also puts patients at risk of unwittingly causing the spread of more resistant forms of the disease.

In light of disease transmission patterns, community-based support is also vital to ensure appropriate diagnoses.



Involving communities

In order to accept and adhere to their care, people affected by disease need their families and communities to be involved. Their **acceptance of the disease** is part of the treatment process. For these reasons, we **raise awareness among family members and friends** about the importance of their support role in the healing process.

In several countries, we draw on groups of **patients who have recovered** to provide support to those still undergoing treatment. This is being done in **Niger**, where Damien Foundation works with an organisation consisting of people who have recovered from tuberculosis and draw on their experience to contribute to the national health programme.



Working closely with at-risk communities

Diseases such as tuberculosis, leprosy and leishmaniasis do not affect all populations in the same way. Certain risk factors and environments contribute to the spread or development of the disease. We therefore ensure that our actions are tailored to these specific contexts.

Given these realities, interactions between diseases can be an aggravating factor. The link between HIV and tuberculosis is particularly strong: HIV weakens the **immune system**, which significantly increases the risk of developing tuberculosis. This is, in fact, still one of the leading causes of death among people living with HIV. The two conditions thus exacerbate one another, making their management all the more complex. In **Nicaragua**, for example, particular attention is paid to communities linked to **the sex industry** that are more vulnerable to HIV and tuberculosis.

In **Bolivia** and the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, **prisons** and **mining sites** are also high-risk environments due to the overcrowding inherent to these places. To provide an appropriate response for each specific group, Damien Foundation adopts a tailored and inclusive approach.

In **Bangladesh**, for example, health workers trained by Damien Foundation organise **awareness-raising and active screening campaigns** at public gatherings such as festivals and markets. This strategy makes it possible to reach out to people who would not spontaneously go to a health centre. The approach is proving successful: in some regions, 43% of the tuberculosis cases diagnosed were identified during these community events.

Addressing specific vulnerabilities

To improve **the chances of recovery**, Damien Foundation's medical teams take a community-based approach, focusing on each person's actual needs throughout their journey to recovery. This **integrated approach** enables the effectiveness of treatment to be monitored closely, with a view to preventing relapses and minimising side effects. It also involves the provision of **nutritional support** for people at risk of malnutrition, as well as appropriate **psychological support** for those affected by illness.

In **Guatemala**, for instance, we provide essential food aid to patients who are being treated for tuberculosis while suffering from severe malnutrition, to boost their immune systems. The recovery rate among patients who have received nutritional support stands at around 98%.

Another example is **Brussels**, where those affected by tuberculosis are mainly young adults living under very poor circumstances and facing multiple barriers to accessing care. The accommodation and social support provided to them with the help of Damien Foundation have resulted in recovery rates of up to 100%.

“ Without that support, I would have had to survive on the streets. I probably wouldn't be here today.

—
Diallo,
a patient treated for tuberculosis
in Brussels



Supporting a return to independence



Despite medical advances, the disease and its **visible after-effects** still place a heavy burden on people suffering from leprosy. Even after they have recovered, those who are left with a disability caused by the illness often have difficulty reintegrating into their community.

Faced with these challenges, we carry out **reconstructive surgery** to help them regain the use of their hands or feet or their sight, thereby **supporting their rehabilitation process**. They are then able to **regain their autonomy**, so they are no longer dependent on others for their livelihood.

Furthermore, in regions where there is no data on the number of people living with disabilities caused by leprosy, we advocate for the collection of reliable data in order to restore access to medical and social services. This is because the after-effects of leprosy often require a tailored, long-term continuum of care. Filling gaps in the data improves the quality of care for those affected, thereby promoting social inclusion. In **India**, Damien Foundation team has therefore undertaken a thorough update of the **registers of people with disabilities**. This initiative has helped to identify thousands of people with disabilities so that tailored support can be provided: training in self-care, distribution of protective footwear, prevention of complications, and so on.



What is leprosy?

Leprosy is an infectious disease that affects the skin and nervous system. It is still present in more than two-thirds of the world's countries and affects 200,000 people a year. If not treated in time, the disease can have irreversible after-effects. Today, 3 million people live with a disability caused by leprosy. This is simply due to a lack of early intervention.

Advancing health through research

Against a backdrop of evolving infectious diseases and increasing antibiotic resistance, communities affected by tuberculosis or leprosy face a heightened risk of complications and disease transmission.

To promote access to innovative solutions and improve the effectiveness of interventions we run research projects closely aligned with field realities. By advancing prevention, diagnosis and treatment strategies, we help sustainably improve care and shape health policies at both national and international levels.

A team dedicated to **Research and Innovation**, ensures a structured, rigorous approach aligned with real-world needs. In particular, it ensures the methodological quality of research, compliance with ethical standards, data analysis and the dissemination of findings through the publication of scientific papers and the sharing of knowledge.

This team also coordinates an international research working group, bringing together **focal points in the various countries where the organisation operates**. This coordination ensures that research priorities are consistent and aligned with local needs.

More than half of this work focuses on drug-resistant tuberculosis, given the significant challenges this poses to global public health. Around 20% of the studies focus on leprosy, as in Comoros, with the aim of improving our understanding of its transmission, management and long-term elimination strategies.

The four priorities of the Research and Innovation team

- 1 Developing research projects that improve health interventions and inform the development of health policy;
- 2 Strengthening local and internal research capacity;
- 3 Promoting the dissemination of scientific evidence (publications, conferences, research networks);
- 4 Contributing to international research through partnerships that support innovation in interventions.



Coordinating health responses

In regions where tuberculosis is endemic, certain conditions complicate diagnosis and management. This is the case with **diabetes**, which makes tuberculosis harder to detect and treat. People with this condition are two to three times more likely to develop the disease. Conversely, tuberculosis can reveal previously undiagnosed diabetes. These interactions highlight the need for integrated approaches, including two-way screening and enhanced coordination of care.

Damien Foundation incorporates this reality into its research. A study conducted in **Burundi** has demonstrated the feasibility and value of systematic diabetes screening among people with tuberculosis, enabling the identification of a significant number of previously undiagnosed cases. The achievements underline the importance of improving the integration of combined tuberculosis and diabetes screening. Such an approach helps to improve overall care and treatment outcomes.



Strengthening the response to antibiotic resistance

Health is interconnected on a global scale, so a disease in a vulnerable setting has implications for the whole international community. Multidrug-resistant tuberculosis is a specific example of this. For the patients affected, the prospects of recovery are also poorer and the treatment process often harder to cope with.

Damien Foundation focuses more than half of its research on multidrug-resistant tuberculosis. In the many countries in which we operate, we are conducting research to improve efficiency and **treatment tolerance**. We are examining treatment regimens that are shorter and have fewer side effects.

Limiting side effects helps reduce treatment interruptions, which in turn often lead to the development of even more resistant strains. These studies therefore help **strengthen antimicrobial resistance** surveillance and limit the spread of the most serious forms of the disease.

This is the case in **Niger**, where we are investigating a shorter, better-tolerated treatment regimen in collaboration with the national health authorities and the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp. In **Guinea** we are conducting research into linezolid in collaboration with the University of Milan. During treatment, we measure the concentration of this antibiotic in patients' blood. This monitoring enables us to optimise the dosage to minimise side effects. A similar study is being carried out in Niger.

In **Nigeria**, Damien Foundation is partnering with the University of Ibadan to set up a clinical trial aimed at evaluating a new treatment protocol for tuberculosis that is highly resistant to bedaquiline. The aim is to be able to offer alternatives to patients who are considered to "have no treatment options".

Mitigating long-term effects on the lungs

Around half of patients treated for tuberculosis continue to suffer from **respiratory problems** after they have recovered. Their quality of life is significantly reduced, limiting their ability to support themselves, and their risk of dying within ten years is three to four times higher than that of the rest of the population.

Damien Foundation is leading a pioneering initiative in **Bangladesh** in this context. The preliminary results of this 18-month pilot project are promising.

The objective was to assess the effectiveness of programmes combining physical exercise and therapeutic patient education. This **post-treatment medical follow-up** for tuberculosis is an innovative initiative in the field of public health.

In **Senegal**, Damien Foundation teams have identified people who have recovered from tuberculosis in areas where the disease is endemic. This approach has made it possible to assess the presence of post-tuberculosis sequelae, to better identify people's needs and to refer them to appropriate rehabilitation services.

“ Research and innovation are only meaningful if they address people's real needs and reflect the priorities of health systems. Introducing new tools or strategies that are not aligned with national plans has no lasting impact – and it may even undermine existing efforts. It is by grounding every advance in field realities and health policies that we can truly improve care and strengthen health systems.

Dr Alberto Roggi,
Head of Health Action & Global Impact

Deploy innovations that serve communities

Putting innovations at the service of communities is a key driver for improving the quality of care and enhancing the effectiveness of health systems on a long-term basis. With this in mind, Damien Foundation ensures that the tools it implements are innovative and tailored to the realities on the ground and national priorities.

For example, the use of geolocation tools in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, **Senegal** and **Comoros** makes it possible to map those affected more accurately, identify areas of high prevalence and target interventions more effectively. This approach helps us to refine the understanding of transmission dynamics and to tailor prevention and management strategies to local communities' specific needs.

At the same time, the organisation is at the forefront of international developments in patient-centred diagnostics. For instance, there are plans in **Bangladesh** to trial point-of-care diagnostic tools for tuberculosis, enabling rapid, accessible and decentralised screening, in line with recent recommendations from the World Health Organisation.

Similarly, tools such as the use of artificial intelligence for interpretation of X-ray images are being used to improve the accuracy and speed of diagnosis.

In addition, Damien Foundation is stepping up its support for paediatric tuberculosis screening, a major public health issue. Promoting the Xpert molecular test, which uses stool samples – a simple, non-invasive method suitable for children – eliminates diagnostic barriers and improves early detection. This approach is helping to reduce mortality and ensure that affected children receive treatment more quickly.

By combining technological innovations, community-based approaches and a strong presence within health systems, Damien Foundation is working to ensure that medical advances are made accessible to those who need them most.

Capacity building

Given the health challenges in the countries where we operate, developing the skills of health professionals is essential. In order to help improve practices, Damien Foundation has chosen to invest in the long-term development of national and international scientific and medical capacity. In practical terms, this involves:

- supporting young researchers and doctoral students from the countries where we operate;
- organising specialised training, particularly in the area of clinical decision-making regarding multidrug-resistant tuberculosis;
- supporting health authorities in developing national strategies, including in countries outside the areas where we usually operate, such as **Mali**, where we carried out a **technical support mission**.

As part of this mission, we helped carry out a national epidemiological review and drawing up the national strategic plan for tuberculosis, HIV and hepatitis for the next five years. This collaboration focuses especially on paediatric tuberculosis, the decentralisation of care services and the management of multidrug-resistant tuberculosis.

Several doctors from our national teams have recently obtained PhDs in science at the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp. **Dr Bassirou Souleymane**'s research has focused specifically on the management of rifampicin-resistant tuberculosis in **Niger**, while that of **Dr Souleymane Hassane Harouna** has led to the development of innovative approaches to improve the diagnosis and treatment of multidrug-resistant tuberculosis in **Guinea**.

Drug-resistant tuberculosis is a growing problem and it poses a major challenge. Dr Alberto Piubello acted as a trainer during the **Clinical Decision-Making for Drug-Resistant Tuberculosis** training course, which brought together 26 tuberculosis experts, including three of our own doctors based in Niger, Nigeria and Comoros. This interactive programme, focusing on the diagnosis and management of these drug-resistant forms, was organised by our partner, the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp.

We form **close partnerships** in order to share our public health expertise **across the communities we support** and wherever we can **advance research**. These collaborations are part of a process of knowledge co-creation, in close partnership with universities, research institutes and health authorities. To improve prevention and management strategies, we work closely with the academic community.

The research carried out by Damien Foundation has an impact beyond the countries where it operates, helping to shape national guidelines and influencing health policies at both national and international levels.





Your support is essential!

We would like to thank all our staff and the many volunteers who work with us all over the world, our one-off and regular donors, those who support us through their legacies, and the companies and partner foundations and institutions, research institutes, organisations and associations with which we work.

Thanks to you and to them, Damien Foundation has again been able to support vulnerable individuals and communities, help curb the disease and advance research this year.



Boulevard Léopold II 263
1081 Brussels
www.actiondamien.be
info@actiondamien.be
+32 2 422 59 11

Follow us on social media



Health is a fundamental right

To keep supporting our health actions, please send your donation to this account: BE05 0000 0000 7575. Please specify the following structured banking message +++000/0000/50924+++.