

Activity  
Report  
2023

Because health  
is a human right

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

# Ethics and governance



By upholding **the right to health for all** at the centre of its project, Damien Foundation contributes to the **Sustainable Development Goals**, and aims to build a fairer society that leaves no one behind.

**To ensure our actions have an impact**, we believe in an approach based on participation and social emancipation, and thus make decisions that take into consideration those affected by disease as well as their communities.

In order to support national healthcare programmes, we share **our expertise** within a close collaboration with international cooperation key players.

Our managerial practices are grounded in **transparency and ethics**. As a result, strict procedures ensure that all expenditures are properly accounted for and systematically controlled. As a member of the non-profit association Récolte de Fonds Éthique - Ethische Fondsenwerving ([www.re-ef.be](http://www.re-ef.be)), Damien Foundation has its own code of ethics, and conducts regular audits in Belgium and in other countries where it is active. Furthermore, as mandated by the General Assembly, a financial committee meets every trimester to oversee financial and inheritance matters.

## Management team

- **Pascale Barnich**, General Manager
- **Lena Fiebig**, Head of Health Action & Global Impact
- **Samir Qassemi**, Head of Finance & Supply Chain
- **Christine Vandermeulen**, Head of People & Development
- **Greetje Wassenberg**, Head of Engaging & Funding

## Board of directors

- **Steven Osaer**, President
- **Jo Benoit**
- **Hans De Beenhouwer**
- **Alex Jaucot**
- **Gaëtan Leysen**
- **Jean-Pierre Schenkelaars**
- **Sarah Van Praet**
- **Dirk Vercruysse**

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

*Damien Foundation is an inclusive organisation that promotes gender equality (m/f/d) and respect for every individual, 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 can be substituted for any other gender and gender-neutral pronouns in every instance.*



# 60 years at the heart of the human experience

## Health is a human right

What if I told you that there is a way to wipe out infectious diseases by 2030? We still have a long way to go. For example, every year, more than 1.6 million people lose their lives to tuberculosis, **yet a preventable and curable disease**. Together, we can put an end to, or at least reduce, this burden our humanity.

**For 60 years, Damien Foundation** has acted against diseases affecting the most vulnerable populations in countries with limited resources. The strong bond between people is at the heart of what we do. Every time a caregiver takes care of a person, he builds a relationship based on trust and the will to heal. These **success stories bring us, time and time again, closer to reaching the global Sustainable Development Goals** as we strive to develop better prevention and care strategies.

Everyone at **Damien Foundation**, regardless of where they are in the world – people suffering from disease, medical staff, co-workers, volunteers, partners – share a profound humanity that drives our efforts and helps us to overcome adversity.

Although a rising number of emergencies continually draws the attention of the media, we work over the long term to **keep solidarity at the center of our priorities** and to making sure that the barely audible voices of those who suffer are heard.

I would like to take this time to thank each and every person who supports Damien Foundation. This past year has not been easy. Our financial results have forced us to rethink many things. However, despite numerous challenges, we have soldiered on, focusing on an **ambitious programme** that, every single day, grounds us further in our desire to build a world that is more just and equitable.

Health is a fundamental right. And we will never do enough to turn this commitment into reality.

**Pascale Barnich**  
General Manager



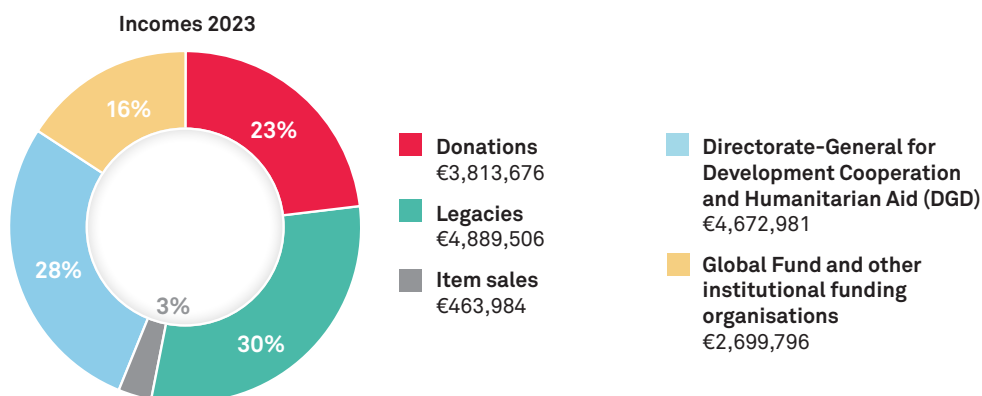
## Our impact in the world in 2023

- **310,000** early diagnoses of leprosy, tuberculosis or leishmaniasis
- **230,000** people received high-quality healthcare
- **22,000** people received socio-economic support
- **21** research projects
- **14** countries where we are active

# Funding our mission

**Damien Foundation**, a Belgian medical non-profit organisation employing around one thousand people and active in 14 countries, strives to help people suffering from leprosy, tuberculosis and leishmaniasis. These diseases mostly affect communities living in extreme poverty and suffering from malnutrition, poor sanitation, and overcrowding. In order to **advance public health**, Damien Foundation aims to offer **vital medical care** based on an integrative approach that places human dignity at the core of its activities.

## Where does the funding come from?



## Financial report highlights

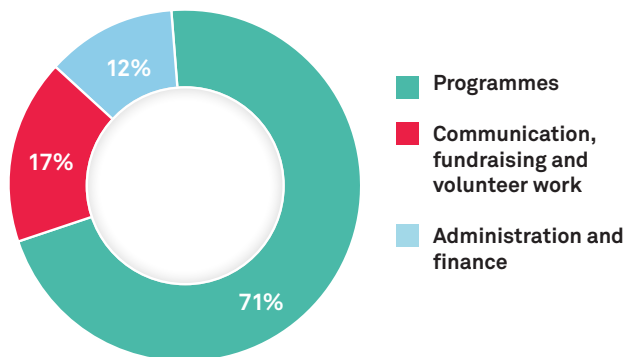
- Donor behaviour has changed in response to the rising number of humanitarian crises, and increased advocacy from numerous associations and organisations.
- Such a context, in addition to other factors such as poor exchange rates and Belgium's salary indexation, have adversely affected our financial results.
- During the 2023 financial year, Damien Foundation experienced an increase in income primarily due to greater legacy donations and institutional funding, which offset a decrease in donations and item sales.
- We nonetheless remain vigilant in light of the difficulties experienced by international solidarity stakeholders.
- Although we can plan for the future with confidence thanks to our good solvency ratio, we continue our efforts to maintain budget balance in the short, medium, and long term.
- Consult our full 2023 financial statement at <https://consult.cbso.nbb.be/consult-enterprise/0406694670> or at NGO-Openbook, a portal for Belgian NGOs: [www.ong-livreouvert.be](http://www.ong-livreouvert.be) - [www.ngo-openboek.be](http://www.ngo-openboek.be).

Two large fundraising campaigns were held on World Leprosy Day and World Tuberculosis Day. Thank you for your generous donations!

# Act for everyone's health

## What do we do with your donations?

Donation allocation 2023



- 3 million people live with disabilities caused by leprosy.
- Tuberculosis kills someone every 20 seconds.
- Every year, leishmaniasis affects between 600,000 and 1 million people worldwide.

## When you donate €100 to Damien Foundation

**€71** are used to properly carry out and monitor our health activities.

In addition to the development of prevention and care strategies, we focus on early diagnosis, medical treatment, and research and awareness in the 14 countries where we work. This entails buying medicine and high-quality equipment, staff training and remuneration, nutritional care of people suffering from illnesses, as well as initiatives that promote individual inclusion and help in returning to work.

**€17** are used on public fundraising.

In order to attract donors, we need to increase our visibility among the general public. This entails fundraising campaigns, prospect

research for institutional funding, and communication. Your donations also help to mobilise volunteers, and to promote inclusion and world citizenship in schools.

**€12** are used to adapt the organisation to sector requirements.

If we want to stay abreast of advancements in medical intervention and management, we need to adapt to the evolving standards of the NGO industry. This entails harmonisation of our IT, logistics and accounting systems, and the development of more agile practices.

- At Damien Foundation, all our activities are closely monitored in order to ensure that every invested euro generates maximum impact.
- Our expenditures are controlled by a financial committee, 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 submitted to our statutory auditor, the BDO firm.
- Damien Foundation is a member of the non-profit association Récolte de Fonds Éthique - Ethische Fondsenwerving (RE-EF) and complies with its code of ethics, which includes the right to information.

*Subject to the approval of our financial statements by the general assembly on June 1st, 2024.*

## Accelerating our impact

Combining expertise leads to increasingly effective action.

### A coordinated approach

Lack of resources, administrative burdens, and the involvement of diverse international stakeholders are but a few of the challenges facing countries affected by leprosy, tuberculosis and leishmaniasis. A coordinated approach is crucial to **the success of national healthcare programmes**. For the past 60 years, Damien Foundation has **closely tailored its care to the needs of populations** and has worked hand in hand with public healthcare structures, local authorities and civil society to reduce disease and mortality rates.

In 2023, we provided **quality medical care** and **expertise** in 14 countries around the world. In India, for example, we collaborated with the government to set up a standard system to diagnose leprosy and tuberculosis in the state of Bihar. Meanwhile in Nicaragua, we gave our support to the National Tuberculosis Control Programme by organising training for local doctors and nurses.

### Knowledge-sharing

We are proud of what we have achieved. But we know we can do better. Sharing knowledge and best practices **among stakeholders in affected countries** is vital to putting an end to leprosy, tuberculosis and leishmaniasis. That is why Damien Foundation invests in training and upskilling programmes across borders. Some examples include: sharing research data regarding the



- Since Damien Foundation was established, the number of people living with **disabilities** caused by leprosy has **decreased from 12 million to 3 million**.
- The **number of deaths** caused by tuberculosis in the 14 countries where we work **has fallen by 9%** in a year.

These figures are proof of the **effectiveness of a coordinated approach** sustained by everyone involved: health authorities, people affected by disease, civil society and Damien Foundation.

transmission of, and best preventive treatments for, leprosy in the Comoros; intercountry training on an accounting software program; and the setup of an international course on multidrug resistant tuberculosis. In Belgium, furthermore, several Damien Foundation doctors are enrolled in various courses at the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp.

In 2023, in addition to caring for **19,613** people affected by leprosy, Damien Foundation India trained **348** doctors, **69** National Leprosy Control Programme team members, and **1,248** nurses and community health agents.

Would you like to support Damien Foundation with your business?  
Please visit the webpage of companies that support us.

French



Dutch



## By and for communities

**Tuberculosis is very contagious. An untreated person can infect up to 10-15 other people over the course of a year.**

In order to increase the effectiveness of our work, Damien Foundation continually strives to **develop its local capabilities**. In countries where we operate, 99% of our staff – doctors, nurses, laboratory technicians, physiotherapists, accountants, chauffeurs – are local hires.

Being well acquainted with local needs and specificities enable them to provide concrete support to those affected by disease. We also work with civil society organisations to help make communities **more self-reliant**.

Throughout 2023, the Damien Foundation Centre for Excellence (CEDA) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo provided intensive treatment to **126** people affected by multidrug resistant and extensively drug resistant tuberculosis, the most severe forms of the disease. As part of World Tuberculosis Day, the CEDA organised a half-day science session focused on *Tuberculosis and pregnancy*, in order to shed light on specific treatment options that ensure the **health of mother and foetus**.

## Inclusion and awareness

The challenges faced by people affected by leprosy, tuberculosis or leishmaniasis are twofold: the need to undergo treatment, and the fears that these diseases cause to their loved ones. In order to address patients' overall needs, Damien Foundation ensures that **access to healthcare is based on a comprehensive approach**. This includes helping to overcome the isolation that people affected by disease often experience, as well as initiatives that promote community inclusion (academic support, games, sports, vocational training, revenue-generating activities). It also entails awareness and education campaigns to put an end to the stigma and discrimination surrounding these diseases.

**We strive to promote patient inclusion by encouraging people and communities affected by disease to systematically participate in activities.**



**“Through early diagnosis, our goal is to prevent people affected by leprosy from developing disabilities. To prevent the disease, we are currently conducting a field study that entails administering medicine to those in close contact with patients in order to protect them and the general population.**

Dr Younoussa Assoumani,  
Doctor and Damien Foundation  
representative in the Comoros.





At Damien Foundation, all healthcare services and initiatives are **free for patients and their families**. If needed, we also refund transport costs and provide **nutritional care**. This considerably increases treatment success rates and contributes to uninterrupted treatment.

- 95 % : tuberculosis treatment success rate in Nicaragua\* ;
- 96 % : tuberculosis treatment success rate in Guatemala\*.

\* Treatment success rates in areas where Damien Foundation uses an integrative approach are **higher than the 90% criterion** set by the World Health Organisation.

## Provide support to heal

Leprosy, tuberculosis and leishmaniasis particularly affect people in poor living conditions. This may sometimes lead to a downward spiral which prevents them from working and providing for their families. To counter this, we provide **social support, and material or financial assistance** during and after treatment.

### In 2023 :

- In India, **416** people were granted funds to start a small business or buy school supplies;
- In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, **13** adults received financial assistance to buy kitchen utensils or sewing machines they needed to start a business;
- In Nigeria, **77** children received scholarships or school supplies;
- In Belgium, Damien Foundation continues to collaborate with BELTA, an organisation in charge of screening and treating people affected by tuberculosis in Brussels. In partnership with Belgian non-profit Les Amis de la Petite Maison – Vrienden van het Huizeke, Damien Foundation provided shelter for **15** unhoused tuberculosis patients during their treatment.





## Resilience in adversity

In the past years, the world has experienced high geopolitical conflict and has faced numerous emergencies. 2023 was no different. Whether the July military coup in Niger, or severe flooding in the Equateur region in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, populations have suffered the brunt of the consequences: malnutrition, lack of security and public health issues. Although our efforts extend beyond emergency response, we nevertheless require resources to **provide national healthcare programmes with lasting support**. Thanks to the perseverance of our staff in every country, Damien Foundation can continue its work. It's a **human and logistical challenge**, but one that our organisation can overcome. Good news for people in need of medical assistance!



**“ Since the military coup in Niger last summer, the population is severely undernourished. Malnutrition affects treatment outcomes of tuberculosis patients, thus increasing mortality rates.**

Dr Alberto Piubello,  
Damien Foundation medical advisor  
and international expert on tuberculosis.

## Inform and prevent

**Every two minutes, someone is diagnosed with leprosy.**

When treated properly, people affected by leprosy, tuberculosis and leishmaniasis can be cured. Unfortunately, **many people may have the disease without knowing it.**

In order to encourage populations to seek treatment, we continuously carry out information and awareness-raising campaigns, even in geographically remote areas. **Educational initiatives** are often undertaken by community health agents who serve as a link between communities and healthcare systems. The *Ram Janaki Child Club*, a non-profit in Nepal, plays an important role. Established in collaboration with the NGO Partnership for New Life, it helps children from disadvantaged families to acquire new skills and knowledge, including information about screening.

## In the meantime, in Belgium?

In 2023, we released a new documentary called *De l'Histoire à l'Action – Van Oorsprong tot Actie*, about the life of **Father Damien**. In this documentary, including the intervention of Dr Michel Sawadogo (Burundi) and other Damien Foundation country representatives, emphasis is placed on perseverance, solidarity and respect of the individual. Values embodied also by Damien Foundation volunteers, who conducted a total of **187 school workshops** last year. This creative and fun way to **raise awareness among young people about international solidarity and access to healthcare**, sometimes sparks interest and enthusiasm: six students from Collège Saint-Étienne took a school trip to Senegal to learn about Damien Foundation's projects in the country. During their stay in Dakar, they helped educate the population about the symptoms of tuberculosis.



## Taking action against gender discrimination

Their names are Lourdes, María, Alejandra, Evelyn, Gloria... They work as doctors, surgeons, administrative managers, secretaries, social workers and nurses. Each and every one of them plays a key role in Damien Foundation in Guatemala. As gender inequality continues to **influence access to healthcare** in numerous countries, we believe it is vital to provide women with opportunities to find jobs and grow in their careers, and to make sure that our programmes systematically take gender into consideration.

In 2023, Dr Winye Ivy Mena Zaballa joined the organisation as Damien Foundation representative in Bolivia, following the example of Dr Rifat Mahfuza in Bangladesh. **Female country representatives** in our organisation now account for **over 30%**. We know, however, that gender inequality is not only a women's issue! To gain a better understanding of **healthcare dynamics** within families and communities, and with the objective to promote co-responsibility among women and men, we helped develop a learning tool called Carrés Genre Santé in collaboration with non-profit organisation Le Monde Selon les Femmes (The World According to Women).

Find out more about our health activities around the world or in a specific country:

French



Dutch





## Driving medical advancements

Scientific research is vital in the public health sector. **Every year, Damien Foundation participates in research projects that further the development** of curative and preventive treatments. In 2023, we continued our research study that aims to prevent the development of **leprosy** in people who have come in close contact with the bacteria that causes the disease. Carried out in the Comoros, in collaboration with the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp, the goal is a large-scale rollout of effective **preventive treatment**, in the absence of a vaccine (development is ongoing). By 2026, 124,000 people will benefit from a skin test and preventive treatment.

Leprosy is not the only disease that we treat. A substantial portion of our resources is devoted to researching reliable methods to diagnose and treat **tuberculosis**. In November 2023, Damien Foundation **experts** presented their findings at the Union World Conference on Lung Health. Dr Souleymane Hassane Harouna (Guinea) discussed oral swabs as a **diagnosis method** particularly suited to children and people with disabilities. Dr Bassirou Souleymane (Niger) conducted a clinical trial demonstrating a high rate of serious **side effects** from linezolid, a drug used to treat multidrug resistant tuberculosis. As a result of this research, tools and strategies are being examined to prevent the side effects. Finally, Dr Pierre Umba (Democratic Republic of the Congo) presented the results of his research on the prevention and treatment of skeletal tuberculosis in the Moba Territory.

In 2023, thermotherapy remained an effective **treatment** against cutaneous **leishmaniasis**. Previously implemented in Guatemala as part of a pilot project led by Damien Foundation, the heat-based treatment showed excellent results in Nicaragua, with a 96% treatment success rate in 2023.

### In 2023:

- Over **390,000** euros invested in research
- **21** research projects conducted by Damien Foundation
- **16** publications of study results



“ Leishmaniasis is a severe tropical parasitic disease that causes painful lesions. In Nicaragua, we have rolled out a new, practically painless and non-toxic treatment called thermotherapy. It is an effective option for infants and pregnant women.

Dr Manuel Bravo,  
Doctor and Damien Foundation  
representative in Nicaragua.





# None of our achievements would have been possible without your support!

We would like to thank our staff and the numerous volunteers from around the world, our one-off and regular donors, those who support us through their will, companies that provided contributions, as well as the research institutes, organisations and associations with whom we work.

This year, thanks to each and every one of you, Damien Foundation helped individuals in vulnerable circumstances to heal!

## Are you familiar with skills-based volunteering?

If you would like to donate your time or expertise to a good cause, contact us on **+32 2 422 59 13**. Your help would be greatly appreciated!



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 Damien Foundation

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