On 24 March, the world marks World TB Day with the theme “Reach the 3 Million: Reach, Treat, Cure Everyone.” TB is one of the world’s top health challenges with 9 million new cases and the deaths of nearly 1.5 million people each year. Approximately one third of these 9 million cases of TB are missed by the health system. Among those missed are those most vulnerable to TB such as people living with HIV/AIDS, migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons, miners, ethnic minorities and indigenous populations.

In 2014, the World Health Assembly adopted WHO’s “Global strategy and targets for tuberculosis prevention, care and control after 2015” which requests WHO and partners to promote cross-border collaboration to address the needs of vulnerable communities, including migrant populations.

Access to ‘continuity of care’ and prevention of communicable diseases such as TB, including Multidrug-resistant TB (MDR), as well as TB/HIV co-infection, commonly occur in states suffering from political turmoil and armed conflict. Crisis situations often result in disrupted capacity of the public health system to meet the health care needs of affected populations.
Therefore, on World TB Day, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) aims to raise awareness of the importance of addressing TB among migrants, displaced persons and other crisis affected populations in humanitarian emergencies, whether as a result of natural disasters or conflicts. In crisis or emergency settings, displaced persons and affected communities often live in overcrowded and confined spaces and lack access to TB services.

“Promoting the use of primary health care and early treatment for TB among crisis affected populations and including them in TB-control programmes will reduce the need for costly emergency care and related high costs for the health system.” states IOM Director General William Lacy Swing. IOM works, amongst others, with Ministries of Health, especially National TB Programmes (NTP), WHO, the Stop TB Partnership, and the Global Fund to improve the quality and capacity of TB prevention, care and treatment services for crisis affected populations.

**Community approach to TB prevention and Treatment Services in Lebanon**

As of March 2015, Lebanon is hosting 1.2 million Syrian refugees, as well as an estimated 50,000 Lebanese returnees and over 40,000 Palestinians newly displaced from Syria. The protracted nature of the Syrian crisis has increased the vulnerability of both the displaced and the often fragile communities hosting the majority of refugees. One of the recognized public health concerns, further heightened by the limited access to existing public health care services and overcrowded living conditions many Syrian refugees are exposed to, is the threat of tuberculosis (TB).

In Lebanon, IOM is the Principal Recipient of a project funded by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis’ Emergency Fund initiative that will contribute to the reduction of TB transmission, morbidity and mortality among Syrian refugees and local host communities. Interventions include supporting TB diagnostics and treatment services, improving knowledge of the TB epidemic and coordination of the TB response, enhancing service delivery and human resources, and raising awareness of TB among target populations. The interventions are based on needs assessments and were developed in close consultation with UNHCR, WHO and the National Tuberculosis Programme (NTP) under the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) of Lebanon.
The TB awareness activities focus on Syrian refugee communities residing in informal settlements (ISs) and collective shelters, where community health volunteers have been identified and trained on the basics of TB prevention and awareness. Directly Observed Therapy (DOT) for TB patients under treatment is being strengthened through recruitment of health outreach workers for the NTP. In addition to supporting treatment of TB patients through home visits, the health outreach workers provide regular TB awareness sessions in ISs and collective shelters with the help of the community health volunteers.

Leading to the World TB day, on 17th March 2015 Dr Hiam Yaacoub, manager of the NTP, joined IOM to visit three informal settlements in Bekaa. Dr. Yaacoub participated in an awareness session organized by community health volunteers on the signs and symptoms of TB, and available health services for TB diagnostics and care.

On 24th March, health outreach workers are conducting targeted TB awareness activities in and around of NTP’s eight TB centers across Lebanon with the aim of reaching both Syrian refugees and host community members with key awareness messages and TB information brochures.

“Moving towards a community health approach for tuberculosis that addresses vulnerable populations can improve both awareness and case detection simultaneously, thus shifting to a more proactive approach” said Dr. Hiam Yaacoub, Manager of the National Tuberculosis Programme in Lebanon.

For further information, please contact:
Dr. Kaisa Kontunen | Health Programme Coordinator | kkontunen@iom.int | +961 1 841 701