

# Eradicating Polio

## IN-COUNTRY CASE STUDIES ON THE FINAL PHASE OF POLIO ERADICATION



The GPEI (Global Polio Eradication Initiative) has overseen tremendous progress towards eradicating polio. Widespread vaccination programs have led to a 99.9 percent decrease in the global polio burden, with wild poliovirus (WPV) now endemic in only two countries. In the last three decades, the number of annual cases has reduced from 350,000 cases to 23 cases of WPV and 292 cases of cVDPV (circulating variant poliovirus) as of September 2022.

Despite this progress, the existence of polio anywhere means the risk of polio everywhere. This has been felt viscerally in 2022, with the detection of isolates and cases in countries that have gone without either in decades. The GPEI is well placed to overcome these challenges. Its new five-year strategy (2022–2026) ramps up the integration of the polio program with other health services, supports the roll-out of new tools and innovations, tackles vaccine misinformation, further commits the GPEI to gender equity, strengthens partnerships with governments, and supports governments to improve vaccination campaigns.

The polio eradication network showed remarkable resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring polio surveillance continued largely uninterrupted and mobilizing to support the pandemic response. However, the pandemic has resulted in vast and varying disruptions to essential health services. As countries continue to shift their priorities to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare for future shocks, it is crucial that the goal of polio eradication remains a key priority.

In October 2022, Germany co-hosted a pledging moment for the GPEI's 2022–2026 Polio Eradication Strategy, securing US\$2.6 billion of the US\$4.8 billion investment case. This will cover immunization activity in the two endemic countries, large-scale response to polio outbreaks, and an appropriately sized stockpile of oral poliovirus vaccine. This funding will also benefit essential health system functions beyond polio eradication, such as disease surveillance and technical assistance. Without investment now, by 2032 the world would be spending more to control the virus than to eradicate it. A fully funded polio eradication effort will vaccinate 370 million children per year for the next five years and may cumulatively save an estimated \$33.1 billion by 2100.

# Case Study: Nigeria



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Nigeria was the last African country to be declared wild polio-free in 2016. However, an upsurge of circulating variant poliovirus type 2 (cVDPV2) has persisted since 2021. Investment in the polio program provides a strong foundation for the broader immunization system, as seen in the country's response to recent outbreaks of Ebola and COVID-19. To interrupt cVDPV2 transmission, Nigeria must overcome barriers such as widespread insecurity, environmental challenges, subpar RI coverage, and waning political and financial support. The GPEI provides technical support and funds outbreak response and surveillance. Programs are also being established to provide surge workforces and deploy epidemiologists for planning and implementation.

The polio network has tapped into a diverse set of advocates, including Misbahu Lawan Didi from Kano State. He was diagnosed with polio at age two, which caused him to be unable to walk, and he now leads 2000 polio survivors in raising awareness and improving vaccination rates: "Our advocacy is simple and effective because we are polio survivors."

The GPEI is working to interrupt the upsurge of cVDPV2 by providing technical support and funds for outbreak response and surveillance. Programs are also being established to provide surge workforces and deploy epidemiologists for planning and implementation.

# Case Study: Pakistan



Afghanistan and Pakistan remain the final holdouts for WPV. Since the launch of Pakistan's Polio Eradication Programme in 1994, cases on both sides of the border have declined massively: Pakistan went from thousands every year in the 1990s, to one in 2021. Starting in April 2022, however, a localized outbreak began in North Waziristan, with environmental isolates of WPV type 1 detected in 10 additional districts.

Despite tremendous progress, massive vaccination campaigns are still not reaching every child in Pakistan, mainly due to community resistance and operational challenges. Reaching high-risk, mobile communities is particularly difficult. Vaccine hesitancy in some communities is another barrier, worsened by false rumors and politicization of polio and vaccinations.

Notwithstanding complex challenges, Pakistan's polio story is one of hope. With increased political will, partnerships with marginalized communities, a motivated and appropriately staffed frontline workforce, and an integrated service delivery approach, polio can be eradicated. Pakistan currently has the largest environmental surveillance network in the world and is working to expand this further. The GPEI's new plan to eradicate WPV will employ all opportunities to vaccinate children and build collective ownership and accountability around the eradication effort.

# Case Study: Papua New Guinea

In April 2018, a polio diagnosis in a six-year-old child from Morobe marked the beginning of a circulating variant poliovirus type 1 (cVDPV1) outbreak in Papua New Guinea (PNG), more than 20 years after the last case of WPV was detected. With low vaccination rates and poor sanitation, PNG had a high risk of polio importation. To overcome challenges caused by gaps in health infrastructure and a high rural population, a national response was launched, including several rounds of supplementary immunization activities, a house-to-house campaign, and intensified surveillance efforts.

The GPEI played a crucial role in the PNG outbreak response, mobilizing resources, deploying experts, and providing technical advice. They also facilitated collaboration with core partners and governments. Despite enormous challenges in accessing remote communities, national immunization programs reported administrative coverage rates between 93 and 97 percent. In 2020, PNG was declared vulnerable to reinfection, but no longer infected by cVDPV1.



The cost of implementing the Global Polio Eradication Initiatives (GPEI) 2022-2026 strategy to eradicate polio is

**\$4.8 billion**



A fully funded polio eradication effort means

**370 million children**

will be vaccinated each year for the next five years

**Funding the End of Polio**

Investing in polio now, many cumulatively save an estimated

**\$33.1 billion by 2100**



Figures from the GPEI's *Investment Case 2022-2026: Investing in the Promise of a Polio-Free World*.

Although there have been setbacks, countries and the polio network have stepped up to address the challenges. “Eradicating polio has been a marathon. The finishing line is in sight.” — *Investment Case 2022–2026: Investing in the Promise of a Polio-Free World*

Let’s give it our all to fulfill our promise to eradicate polio and ensure GPEI’s strategy is fully resourced through US\$4.8 billion of collaborative, global commitment.



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