

## Leprosy Eradication

### Why in News?

Recently, Supreme Court has set aside an NGT verdict directing the removal of a centre for leprosy patients running since 1960 in Pune.

### What is leprosy?

- **Leprosy** - It is a chronic infectious disease ( Hansen's disease) caused by a type of bacteria, *Mycobacterium leprae*.
- **Infection** - The disease affects the skin, the peripheral nerves, mucosa of the upper respiratory tract, and the eyes.
- **Transmission** - The bacteria are transmitted via droplets from the nose and mouth during close and frequent contact with untreated cases.
- **Treatment** - Leprosy is curable with multidrug therapy (MDT) and treatment in the early stages can prevent disability.
- **Spread** - Leprosy is a neglected tropical disease (NTD) which still occurs in more than 120 countries, with more than 200 000 new cases reported every year.
- The majority of annual new case detections are from South-East Asia.
- **Global elimination status** - Elimination of leprosy as a public health problem globally was achieved in 2000.

*Elimination means prevalence of less than 1 per 10 000 population.*

- **Status of leprosy in India** -Leprosy, although largely eradicated in many parts of the world, still remains a public health concern in India.
- **India caseload** - India accounts for 52% of the world's new leprosy patients despite being declared "Leprosy Eliminated" in 2005.

*In 2022-23, more than 1,00,000 people were detected with leprosy in the country.*

### What are the challenges in eradicating leprosy?

- **Public perceptions** - The fear surrounding leprosy is compounded by its visible effects, making it harder to overcome.
- **Stigma** - Deep-rooted stigma associated with the disease discourages individuals from seeking treatment.
- **Social isolation** - Misunderstanding of the disease often leads to social ostracisation and the denial of basic human rights.

- **Discrimination** - In rural areas many individuals affected by leprosy hesitate to seek medical attention due to the fear of being ostracised which contributes to a delay in treatment.
- **Marginalization** - Individuals suffering from leprosy are denied access to basic human rights including education, healthcare and employment.
- **Inadequate capacity** - Limited laboratory services and diagnostic tool.

### What are the roles of NGOs in combating leprosy?

- **Combating the disease** - Many NGOs like NLR-India provide medicines for free through donations
- **Supporting NLEP** - NGOs support India's National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP) in its implementation.
- **Capacity building** - Training doctors and other healthcare workers for identification, diagnosis, treatment, management and prevention the disease effectively.

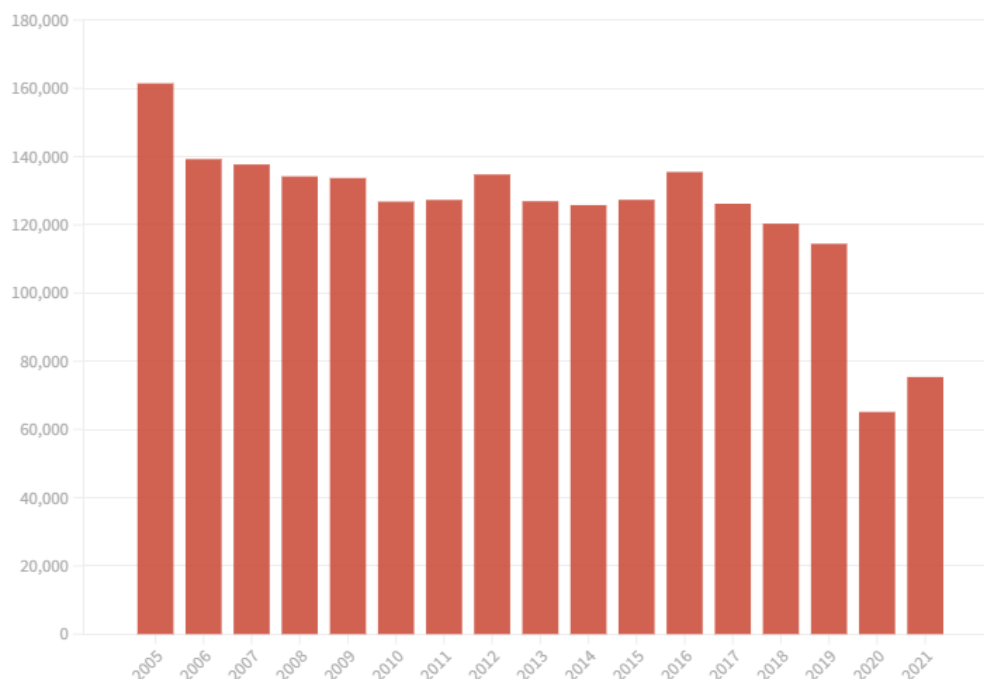
ASHAs play a vital role in identifying cases during home visits and referring them for diagnosis.

- **Offering rehabilitation services** - Programmes such as empowering the youth through vocational training, and healthcare camps.
- **Reintegration** - Ensuring that people affected by leprosy receive the help they need to reintegrate into the society
- **Raising awareness** - Educating the public, working on grassroot campaigns to raise awareness about the curable nature of the disease.
- **Fighting social stigma** - Educating the society about the disease to remove the prejudice about the disease and the patients.

### What is the progress of India in leprosy elimination?

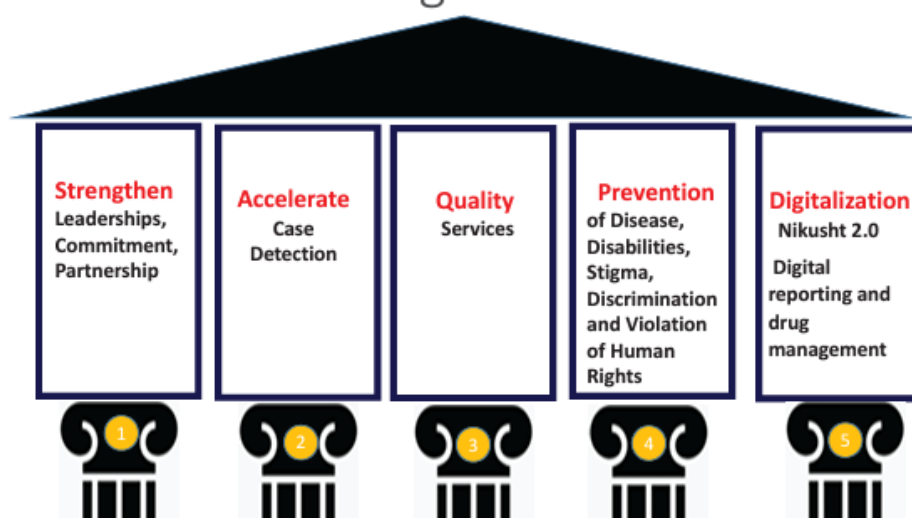
- **NLEP** - National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP) was launched in 1983 to eradicate leprosy through early detection and treatment.
- **Public health concern elimination** - India achieved the milestone of elimination of leprosy as a public health problem at country level in 2005.
- The same is yet to be achieved in a number of states and districts.
- **Decrease in prevalence** - The prevalence rate of leprosy in India has decreased from 57.8 per 10,000 population in 1983 to 0.40 per 10,000 population in 2022.
- **Decrease in new cases** - The number of new leprosy cases detected was dropped from 1,25,785 in 2014-15 to 75,394 in 2021-22.
- Alongside, the incidence of disabilities due to leprosy has also steadily decreased.

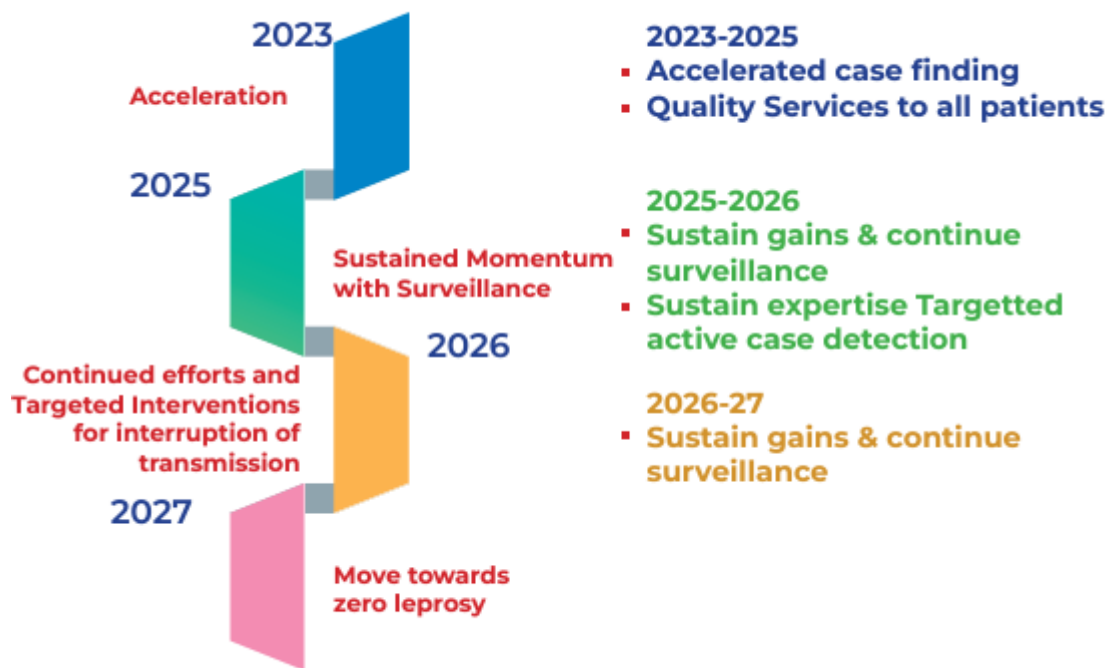
## New leprosy cases in India over the years



- **Target** - The government in 2023 set a goal to reduce the number of new cases of leprosy by 50% over five years.
- **New treatment regime** - The Central government has approved a [new treatment regimen for leprosy](#), aiming to stop its transmission at the sub-national level by 2027.
- **SPARSH Campaign** - Leprosy prevention awareness campaign is held from Jan 30 to Feb 13 while observing World Leprosy Day on January 30.
- **NSP 2023-27** - National Strategic Plan and Roadmap of Leprosy 2023-2027 (NSP), aims to achieve zero transmission of leprosy in India by 2027

## Strategic Pillars





### What lies ahead?

- Involvement of the private sector in detecting and reporting cases is very important, as many cases come directly to the private practitioners.
- To interrupt the disease transmission, it is important to understand the disease dynamics, strengthen the host immune response of those who are proven to be more prone in contracting the disease.

### Reference

[The Hindu | The leprosy story](#)