

MSF journal articles: What do we publish, where, and is it free to read?



Amelia Zhao¹, Camryn Lewis¹, Patricia Kahn¹

¹Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Science Portal Project, MSF, New York, NY, USA

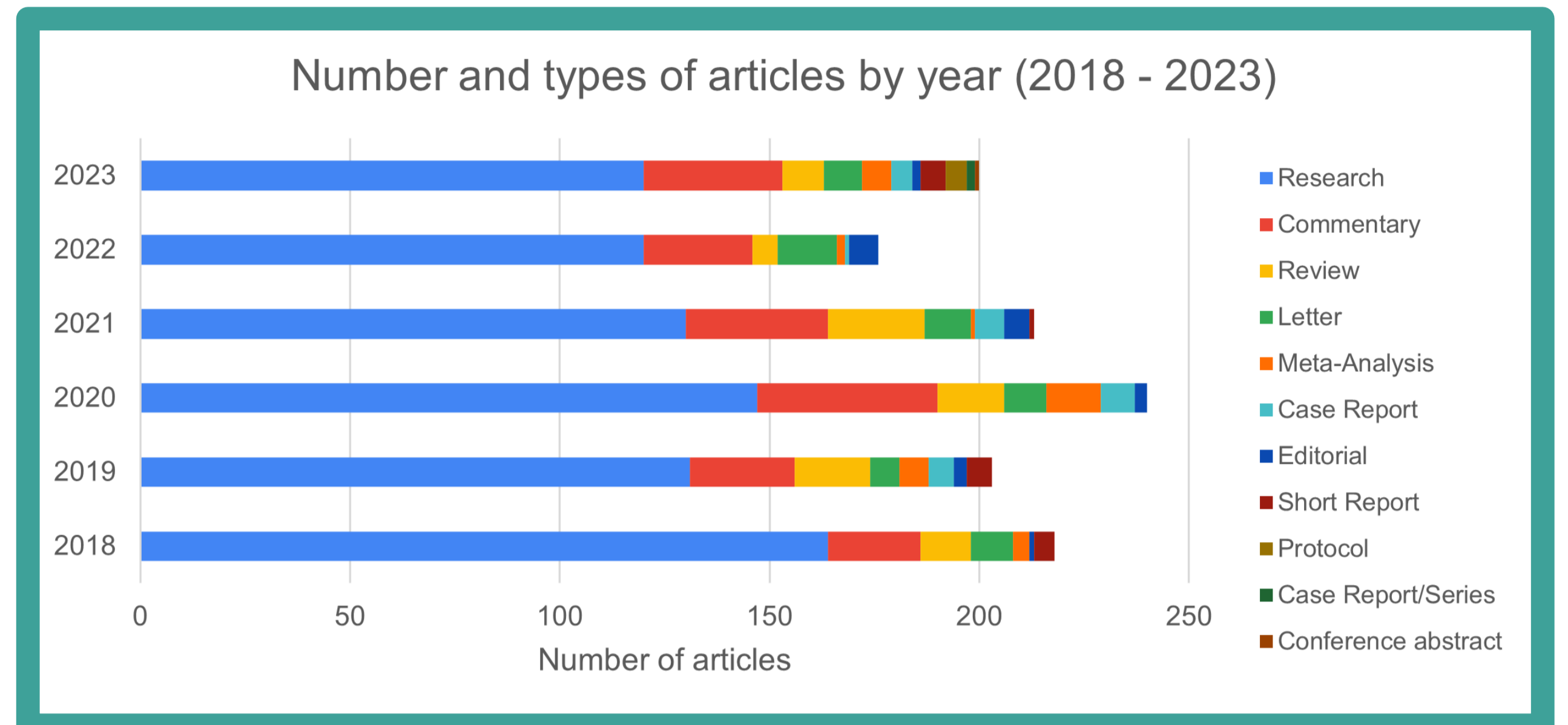
Topics, countries & article types

Introduction

Each year MSF staff co-author ~200 medical journal publications based on our operational research and on-the-ground perspectives. These articles help MSF share the data and knowledge gained, use it to improve care at our projects and beyond, and advocate for better global health practice and policy.

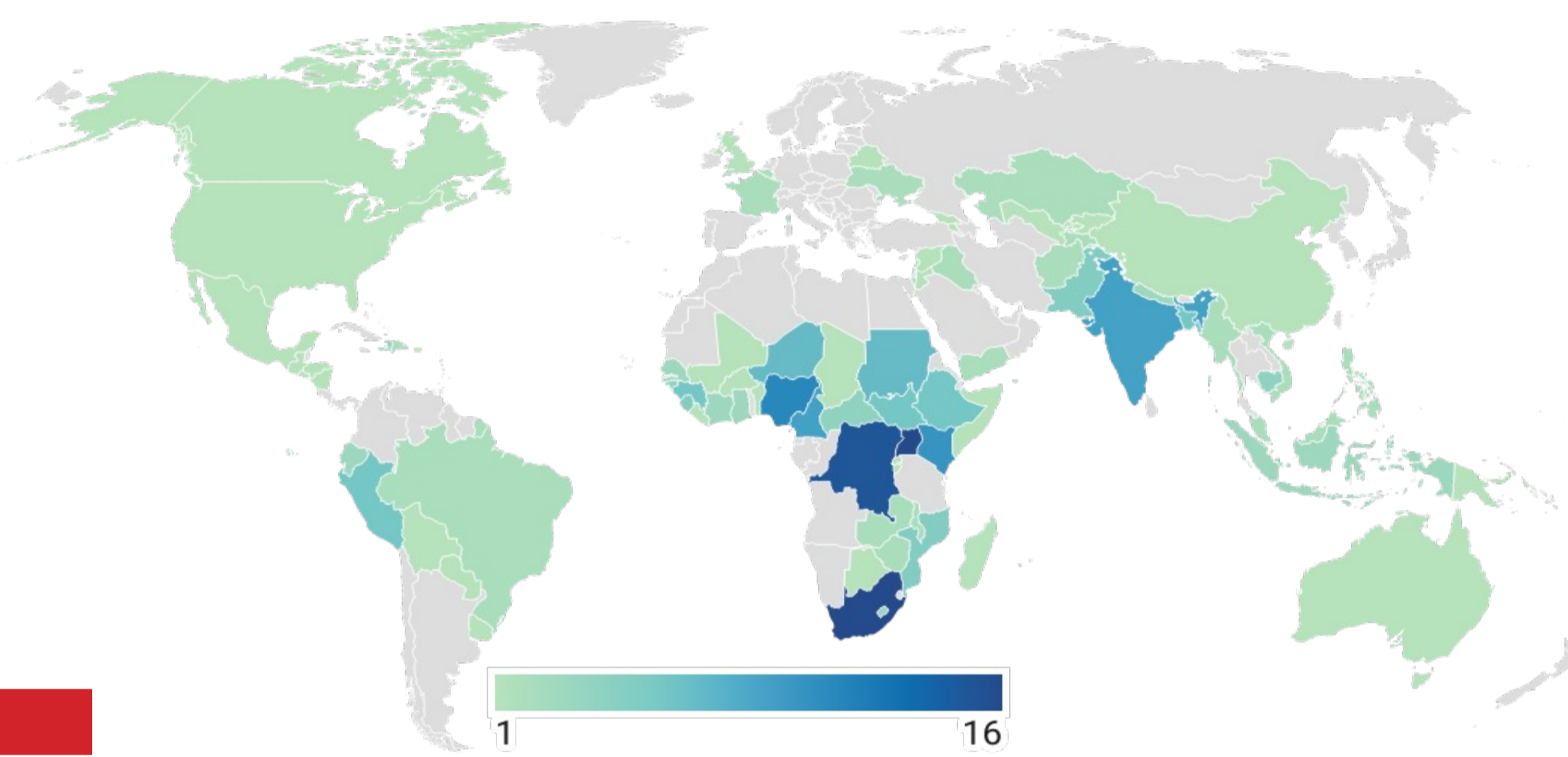
Analyzing these publications for key descriptive indicators supports tracking of our medical-operational knowledge outputs and aspects of their impact. Here we describe MSF publications in 2023 and some trends over the past 5 years. We also assess progress on publishing in ways that ensure free access to all readers, which became MSF policy in mid-2020.

In 2023, MSF published 201 articles in 105 journals.

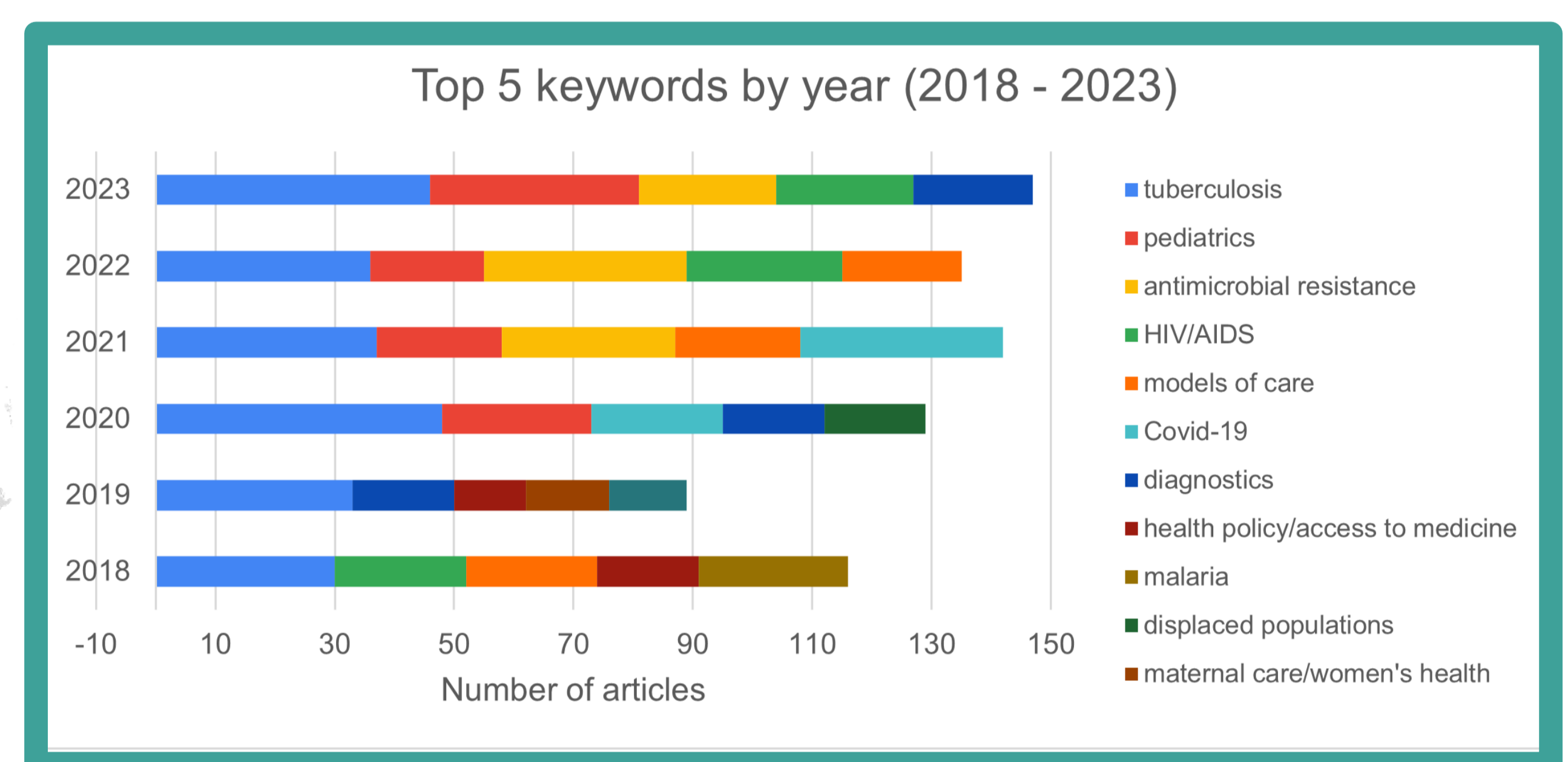


Number of peer-reviewed journal articles published each year, categorized by article type

Countries where published MSF research was done (2023)



Map shows the number of publications in 2023 with research or analysis from the indicated country. Created with Datawrapper



Number of articles each year that were assigned the indicated keyword

Methods

All MSF journal articles published in 2018-2023 and their associated metadata were extracted from the MSF Science Portal (a repository containing all identified peer-reviewed publications with at least one MSF co-author). Publication lists were verified with referents at MSF Operational Directorates and with PubMed. Indicators were selected for relevance to describing MSF research/dissemination and for alignment with a recent MSF-IO analysis of MSF research, where applicable, and analyzed in Excel.

Where and how we publish

PUBLISHING WITHOUT PAYWALLS

In July 2020 MSF adopted a policy that all "core" MSF articles (with data from our projects or other significant MSF contributions) should be free to readers anywhere.

- In the 3 years pre-policy, a persistent fraction (~10-26%) of our publications were behind paywalls.
- In 2023, *no* core articles were paywalled (caveat: 2 borderline cases) → **free access to all core publications last year**

Most common journals for MSF publications (2023)



For more info on these or other analyses of MSF publications, please reach out to us at: MSFSciencePortal@newyork.msf.org.

Authorships & collaborations

Affiliation of key authors* on MSF publications (2023)

Characteristic	Total (#)	MSF (%)	Non-MSF (%)
All unique authors	2,132	27%	73%
1 st authors	201	39%	61%
2 nd authors	201	41%	59%
Last authors	201	34%	66%
At least 1 key author is MSF	603	60%	--
At least 1 key author is non-MSF	603	--	78%

* Defined as first, second, and last authors

Key findings and 5-year trends

- New top-5 MSF topics: antimicrobial resistance, models of care
- Relative number of articles on HIV declined while TB stayed steady
- PLOS Global Public Health (launched in 2021) is now most-used journal for MSF publications
- MSF's "Publications Without Paywalls" policy is succeeding in making our work more widely accessible
- Authorship data show extensive collaboration with external partners in 2023

Conclusions

The MSF Science Portal can help assess MSF publication output and its alignment with research and transparency priorities. Enhancing existing tools will enable it to also monitor article dissemination and uptake, and trends on inclusion of local partners.

Access the MSF SCIENCE PORTAL here

