

ISLAMABAD- The UN refugee agency and the World Health Organization (WHO) today signed a Memorandum of Understanding agreeing to assimilate refugee health facilities into mainstream public health services. Under the new arrangement, Afghan refugees residing in refugee villages will have access to more sustainable health services supported by the WHO.

The WHO will support the refugee health services by training health workers and will procure medicines and supplies for the refugee programmes in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Punjab.

The UN refugee agency has been providing primary healthcare services to Afghan refugees living in camps across Pakistan for the past thirty years. While Afghans in urban settlements have had access to the WHO-supported public healthcare provided, primarily, for local Pakistani communities.

The WHO, as the lead UN health agency, is assisting the Pakistan government to improve the People's Health Programme. The agency has been providing technical support to the country, helping in resource mobilization, and working on human resource development for the Health Ministry.

Under the new arrangements, the existing parallel healthcare services by the UNHCR for refugees and WHO more focused on Pakistani communities will merge into one improving services and planning for local Pakistani and Afghan refugee communities alike.

"It is encouraging to see a development agency like WHO further integrate the basic healthcare for refugees into their public healthcare programme, especially for the Afghan refugees who have been in Pakistan for the past 30 years," said Mengesha Kebede, the UNHCR Pakistan Representative. He added that the UNHCR wishes to engage other UN agencies to include refugees in their development programmes for the host population.

"This partnership between WHO and UNHCR becomes even more important when the Afghan refugee health programme undergoes gradual transition to a more mainstreamed sustainable health model" said Dr. Guido Sabatinelli WHO representative in Pakistan.

Heads of various UN agencies witnessed the MOU signing ceremony that was held at the WHO office in Islamabad on Monday afternoon.

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