

ECHO meeting with the WHO country office in Islamic Republic of Iran

Mission report

The European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) provides support to countries and populations affected by disasters or humanitarian emergencies. WHO and ECHO have established a partnership in a co-funded project to improve access to inclusive health care in nursing homes and enhance quality of life and dignity for the most vulnerable in Islamic Republic of Iran throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. A WHO team from Islamabad in Pakistan visited the country to get an overview of the refugee crisis and the status of current partnerships, which was co-funded by the European Commission. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Afghan refugee crisis and the resulting health complications of these emergencies requires international support to the country and people most in need.



Meeting on the Afghan refugee influx

An introductory meeting took place between ECHO mission members from the ECHO Islamabad office and WHO country office in the presence of Dr Syed Jaffar Hussain focusing on the Afghan refugee crisis.

ECHO mission members

Taheeni Thammannagoda, Head of Office, ECHO
Islamabad
Naeem Gul, Programme Assistant, ECHO
Islamabad

Meeting highlights

Following opening remarks, participants discussed the Afghan refugee influx. A strategic approach was presented by WHO and the need for international support was expressed.

Dr Syed Jaffar Hussain stated that in the past few months, around 300 000 Afghan refugees had arrived in Islamic Republic of Iran and settled in urban areas. The Governor of Khorasan Razavi (bordering province with Afghanistan) indicated that 100 000 new Afghan refugees had entered the province.

Challenges arising from the influx of refugees include increased risk of endemic communicable disease outbreaks, such as polio, measles and malaria, and the potential to reintroduce eliminated diseases, and drug shortages.

WHO priorities include supporting IHR core capacities (including points of entry), enhancing PHC facilities, strengthening diagnostic capacity, supporting vaccination programmes, strengthening referral systems and basic mental health survivors and supporting survivors of sexual violence.

Health sector budget needs and priority actions were also addressed.



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Meeting on the current co-funded project by ECHO with participation of the stakeholders

Meeting with implementing partners of the project to improve access to inclusive health care in nursing homes and enhance quality of life and dignity of the most vulnerable throughout the COVID-19 pandemic

Meeting highlights

The Directorates of Family, Populations and School Health (Elderly Programme) and Mental Health and Substance Abuse, (Office of Rehabilitation Affairs) and the State Welfare Organization of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education presented a brief introduction to programme areas and COVID-19 interventions, followed by discussion on potential priorities for future collaborations, as well as fund-raising activities in WHO.

The framework, progress and future steps of the co-funded project were presented by the project officer, highlighting project components and the status of each activity.

The current co-funded project has generated ideas and activities such as establishment of isolation rooms, COVID-19 risk reduction in long term care facilities, capacity-building and training with potential for future scale up. Implementing partners are interested in expanding current project activities to cover a higher number of beneficiaries.

WHO recommends further investment in additional interventions for capacity-building courses, improving quality of care and increasing service utilization.

WHO added that it was critical to extend the existing capacity of PHC facilities to provide service coverage for refugees, and to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry and State Welfare Organization and other service providers to help the incoming population. It was important to explore future collaboration and build on these platforms.

Departments of the Ministry and State Welfare Organization

Family, Population and School Health, (presented by Dr Hamed Barakati)
Mental Health and Substance Abuse, (presented by Dr Ahmad Hajebi)

Rehabilitation and Health Office, (presented by Dr Marzieh Shirazikhah)
Rehabilitation Care Department (presented by Ms Sharbanou Rayat)

Dr Syed Jaffar Hussain

“The current vulnerability of the people of the host community in, plus the three to four million incoming refugees would require services plus. A primary health care centre should be a primary health care centre plus. The mission is very timely. The refugees have needs, vulnerability and they have put a stress on an already struggling health system to keep the level of quality they have maintained but also to make it more sophisticated to the plus level”.



Taheeni Thammannagoda

“You have done more than what we would have expected from the proposal. The collaboration in itself which is immense and valuable but also the developing guidelines and capacity-building which will stay with one for much longer. Congratulations, a lot of hard work; you have achieved a lot because of the leadership of the Ministry of Health with different partners as well. My recommendation to you is to make sure to connect with our delegation and development colleagues. It is important to show a positive light despite context hardship, what you are already doing”



WHO in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Medical Education and other national partners are addressing the emergencies of COVID-19 and refugees with international support based on current opportunities and competencies for partnership.