7 July 2021 – Almost a year and a half into the COVID-19 pandemic, Afghanistan is grappling with a substantial third wave with cases continuing to rise across the country. In response to mounting needs, the European Union (EU) Delegation in Kabul donated €15 million to support WHO's efforts to tackle and mitigate the health and socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic.

While the ongoing vaccination programme has brought new hope in the fight against COVID-19, testing remains a key tool for effectively detecting and containing cases, especially with the emergence of new variants. Through the EU funding, WHO has supported the Ministry of Public Health to establish 12 new COVID-19 testing laboratories and train 68 laboratory technicians, among other areas of response.

"Without the commitment and support of donors such as the generous EU donation we received earlier this year, the response would have been highly lagging," said Dr Dapeng Luo, WHO Representative in Afghanistan.

With support from various donors, to date Afghanistan has established 31 COVID-19 confirmatory public laboratories across 24 provinces, with a total testing capacity of 8700 tests every day. More than 300 laboratory technicians have also been trained on COVID-19 testing, and some trained as trainers to ensure continuous availability of services.

Scaling up epidemiological surveillance

Making testing accessible

The expansion of the laboratory network has been particularly beneficial for enabling people to get quickly tested without having to travel for long distances or to other provinces. This has significantly improved access to health for some of the most marginalised and vulnerable groups who may otherwise not have the means or ability to travel to other parts of the country for testing.

Supporting health workers through training

Long-term goals

WHO continues to closely collaborate with the Ministry of Public Health and partners to strengthen COVID-19 surveillance through establishing and equipping laboratories across Afghanistan to ensure ease of access for all people, even those in hard-to-reach and remote areas.

The investment in laboratories will have long-term payoffs beyond COVID-19 as they will contribute to improving access to tertiary health care at the provincial level.

A virologist busy performing COVID-19 confirmatory test

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