

His Excellency the Minister of Health of Iraq Dr Alaa AlwanBaghdad 22 January 2019 – Under the patronage of His Excellency the Minister of Health of Iraq Dr Alaa Alwan, and in cooperation with WHO, a series of field trips and meetings were conducted in Baghdad, Basra, Missan, Erbil and Kirkuk between 13 and 17 January 2019 to run a comprehensive health information system assessment in Iraq, and a workshop consolidating key issues arising from the assessment was held from 16 to 17 January in Baghdad.

The WHO team of experts accompanied by the Ministry of Health made field trips and visited hospitals, medical centres, Directorates of Health, Birth and Death Registration offices in Basra, Missan, Erbil and Kirkuk on 13 14 January. Similarly, trips were made in Baghdad on 14 15 January.

The objectives of the mission were to:

- review relevant background documents and assessment reports, publications and materials related to health information system in Iraq;
- conduct a critical evaluation of existing governance structures and capacities in order to translate stated government policy and international obligations into practice to standardize reporting of health situation and trends in Iraq at the regional and international level; and
- present results of the review to the Ministry of Health and other national stakeholders to ensure understanding and agreement on the findings.

The Minister of Health Dr Alaa Alwan sponsored and opened the 2-day workshop in Baghdad with the participation of key stakeholders to identify and consolidate key issues from the field visits related to the health information system and formulate recommendations for their mitigation, including identifying priorities. Seventy officials from the Ministries of Health, Planning and Interior, Central Bureau of Statistics, professors of medical schools and a number of representatives from UNICEF, the Korea International Cooperation Agency and the World Bank also attended.

"This workshop is being held to assess the situation of the health information system in Iraq and how to find the necessary means to develop this basic pillar in the provision of health services," said Dr Alwan. "We need solid health information for the development and evaluation of policies in the health system, and to assess health trends and indicators in Iraq in addition to assessing the performance of health institutions. This workshop focuses on two important issues \square to develop a special framework for the health information system in Iraq, which contains three components: monitoring health risks and social determinants of health; monitoring diseases, causes of mortality and life expectancy; and monitoring the performance of health institutions in Iraq," Dr Alwan added.

Dr Adham Ismail, acting WHO Representative to Iraq, said, "In order to ensure that Iraqi health information system responds to national, regional, and global demands for reliable and timely health information, a comprehensive assessment was planned to support Iraq's efforts to monitor its health development agenda, as well as enhance its reporting capacity on the 100 core health indicators (plus health-related Sustainable Development Goals) and the 75 regional core health indicators."

The role of health information systems, including civil registration and vital statistics systems, in generating health information data for programme and performance monitoring, quality of care, planning and policy-making is widely acknowledged. In line with WHO's Thirteenth General Programme of Work 2019 2023, WHO is collaborating with Member States to improve their health information systems, analytical capacity and reporting for universal health coverage. In particular, WHO is supporting Iraq to develop comprehensive and efficient systems to: monitor health risks and determinants; track health status and outcomes, including cause specific mortality; and assess health system performance. WHO is also providing support to Iraq in disaggregating data so that progress made on gender equality and health equity can be measured. Participants were equipped with the tools and knowledge required to assess health information systems and develop a priority action plan for strengthening the health information system in Iraq.