Baghdad, 27 October 2015 – Life-saving health programmes in Iraq have been given a cash lifeline allowing them to provide critical care to hundreds of thousands of Iraqis affected by the conflict in the governorates of Anbar, Kirkuk, Salah El-Din and Baghdad.

The delivery of health care services in both conflict-affected areas and areas hosting internally displaced persons (IDPs) has been severely impacted. Hospitals and primary health care clinics functioning in high-burden areas indicate a 50% increase in caseload. In Anbar, Ninewa, Salahudin and Kirkuk, 14 hospitals and over 160 health facilities have been damaged or destroyed and are either partially or completely non-functional.

The 7.5 million Euros in support provided by the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department (ECHO) will support humanitarian agencies to run emergency primary health care programmes in these conflict-torn governorates. These include actions framed under the current cholera outbreak response.

“We must do everything we can to provide life-saving health assistance where it is most needed. At a time when vital programmes are at risk in Iraq, support to coordinated emergency medical actions is a moral obligation,” said Javier Rio Navarro, head of office for ECHO in Iraq.

The World Health Organization will ensure, through ECHO’s funding, the continuous availability of essential medicines and medical supplies, as well as the functionality of main referral structures for complicated cases.

“Against the current funding constraints in Iraq, joint actions are needed more than ever in order to save lives,” said Mr Altaf Musani, WHO’s Acting Representative in Iraq.

The funds will also reinforce the epidemic detection and containment (EWARN) system, and the collection of data on attacks on health facilities, workers and patients.

Local and international nongovernmental organizations, such as International Medical Corps,
Relief International, MEDAIR and United Iraqi Medical Society, at the frontline of the response will provide a common package of emergency primary health care services. To ensure their effective implementation, WHO, in support of the Iraqi Ministry of Health, is closely coordinating efforts with other United Nations partners.

“We must bring critical medical services to those most in need. The supported medical clinics are providing many patients with access to free essential primary health care services,” said Dr Helen Brannam, MEDAIR Health Project Manager in Iraq.

Background

In 2015 alone, continuing conflict and instability in Al Anbar, Kirkuk, Salah El-Din and parts of Baghdad governorates, have forced an additional 565 000 people to flee their homes towards safer areas, within the same governorates. This has placed a huge burden on local health systems, which are functioning at dramatically reduced levels, with severe shortages of staff and supplies.

Epidemic risks are high in these areas, due to poor sanitary services and overcrowded conditions, endured by displaced people living in critical shelter arrangements, such as unfinished buildings and informal settlements. Chronic disease patients face serious difficulties in obtaining life-saving treatment and medications.

WHO is looking for continued support to provide health services to about 7 million people in need who do not have access to basic primary health care services, including essential medicines and medical equipment in addition to 5.7 million children aged 0–59 months and 9 months to 15 years who are at risk of polio and measles, respectively.

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WHO EMRO | ECHO increases support to health programmes in Iraq providing life-saving care to hundreds of thousands of people affected by the conflict.