22 September 2019 – Providing access to health services for approximately 250,000 Syrian refugees in Iraq remains a major challenge for local health authorities, the World Health Organization (WHO), and humanitarian responders in Iraq.

The shortage of resources, resulting from the internal displacement crisis in 2014, coupled with conflict in many parts of the country, have burdened the already stretched health system and undermined efforts to ensure the availability of an accessible health package in 8 Syrian refugee camps and hosting communities in governorates of the northern Kurdistan Region of Iraq, mainly Erbil and Duhok.

In September 2018, WHO resumed a wide-scale health support programme covering health facilities in Syrian refugee camps in Iraq. The programme, which was funded by the US Department of States Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, succeeded in achieving record-time gains.

Nine primary health care centres in refugee camps in Erbil and Duhok were furnished and equipped with various medical devices and laboratory equipment to strengthen essential health services at the primary health care level.

The 3 secondary and tertiary level health care facilities of Reparin Paediatric Hospital in Erbil, Shiar Hospital in Sulaymaniyah, and Heevi Paediatric Teaching Hospital in Duhok were supported through the provision of furniture and various medical devices and life-saving equipment in service of the internally displaced population, Syrian refugees, and host community in governorates in the northern Kurdistan region of Iraq.
Darashakran refugee camp, about 50 kilometres to the north of Erbil, accommodates over 13,000 Syrian refugees, evacuated from areas affected by conflict in Syria.

"The clinic in Darashakran refugee camp receives between 150 to 160 patients a day, thanks to the supply of medicines and medical technologies provided by WHO," said Ms Khunaw Sarok, Darashakran health clinic manager.
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WHO supports primary health care centres in Syrian refugee camps with comprehensive packages of medical supplies and equipment.

"Two years ago, we struggled with an acute shortage of medicine, medical supplies, and equipment. We gratefully acknowledge the support of WHO and US Department of States Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration for enabling us to sufficiently respond to health needs in the camp again."
Darashakran camp clinic

Hiba Yousif, a 23 year-old Syrian refugee, fled the Syrian unrest in 2013. She is a mother of 5 children, 3 of whom were born in Darashakran camp; the last was only a few weeks old when we met with her at the camp clinic in June this year.

"The health services in the camp were poor and limited to the essentials in the past 2 years," Hiba said. "But we recently saw a significant improvement in the quality and quantity of health care delivery in the camp, including the referral services which saved me from a premature delivery less than a month ago."

"Today, I brought my newborn baby (Yahya) to the pediatrician to check his eyes; they are irritated and tear a lot," she explained.

Looking at her baby with a beautiful smile, Hiba expressed her thanks and appreciation to the health facility management and to WHO for providing a comprehensive package of health services and making emergency referrals possible.
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Hiba, a Syrian refugee visiting the primary health care centre in Darashakran camp to check her newborn baby

At the waiting area, we also met with Nahid Hassan, a 35-year-old woman, who came complaining of severe abdominal pain. The doctor recommended an ultrasound to identify the problem. “Fortunately, the centre has the device but is still waiting for a doctor to operate it,” she explained. “Having a sonar in the private sector is too costly, so thanks to WHO, donors and the camp management for trying to make this service available to us for free.”
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A Syrian refugee visiting the primary health care centre in Darashakran camp

The support covers other areas such as sexual-based violence, mental health and psychosocial support services. As of July this year, WHO trained more than 250 health care providers from different governorates on managing cases of women subjected to intimate partner sexual violence in Syrian refugee camps and host communities.

In addition, more than 50 health practitioners were also trained on the use of Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP) Intervention Guide to enhance and facilitate mental health service delivery in target governorates where displaced populations and Syrian refugees are accommodated.

All Syrian refugee camps were covered by the Early Warning Alert Response Network (EWARN) and WHO trained more than 128 staff in reporting sites in Erbil and Dohuk on the proper use of EWARN standardized reporting and disease definition.

"The demand is still immense and we have to address other health issues like the need for assistive technologies for those with physical disabilities. We do call upon local authorities, donors, and humanitarian partners to provide more support to minimize the health care cost for this vulnerable community," said the camp clinic manager.
Greater support needed to ensure accessible quality health services for a quarter of a million Syrian refugees in Iraq

In 2018, WHO received a generous contribution of US$ 2.5 million from the US Department of States Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration to increase the health security of Syrian refugees living in Iraq. The grant contributed to providing comprehensive primary health care services, referral services, and rehabilitation care for people with physical disabilities and mental health conditions in refugee camps and host communities in Erbil, Daohuk and Sulaymaniyah governorates.

The contribution also covered the procurement and distribution of essential medicines, and medical supplies and equipment to selected health facilities serving the refugees in target governorates.

WHO would like to express its gratitude to the US Department of States Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration for their generous support, which has enabled WHO and partners to resume quality health care delivery and ambulatory services to all Syrian refugees in Iraq.

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WHO is a specialized public health organization mandated to provide the most reliable and
evidence-based technical assistance, strategic and operational guidance to countries worldwide.

WHO works closely with the Ministry of Health of Iraq and related sectors on a daily bases to identify priorities and guide the health sector on preparedness, effective and efficient response to health and health care requirements.

For more information on WHO and its work in Iraq, please visit: http://www.emro.who.int/countries/irq/index.html

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