

10 February 2016 – The World Health Organization welcomes the unprecedented support shown by countries participating in the "Supporting Syrians and the Region Conference" in London on 4 February, during which more than US\$ 10 billion was pledged to provide humanitarian aid to people affected by the Syrian crisis over the coming 5 years.

“Countries have recognized the extent of this humanitarian catastrophe,” said Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. “This generous donor support will ensure life-saving activities for millions of people inside Syria. It will also provide much needed support to refugees and host communities in neighbouring countries, where the demand for health services is placing an enormous strain on public health infrastructure.”

Almost 6 years into the Syrian crisis, the health situation inside the country remains dire. Shortages of specialized medical staff, disrupted referral systems and limited medical supplies have led to growing numbers of preventable deaths. Large numbers of wounded Syrians continue to die or face permanent disabilities as a result of limited access to medical care. Increasing numbers of people are at risk of complications from chronic diseases that could be easily controlled with access to treatment. Childhood vaccination rates have dropped dramatically, leaving children at greater risk of life-threatening diseases, such as measles and polio.

In neighbouring countries, refugees and host communities are at increased risk of communicable diseases due to overcrowded living spaces, limited access to safe water, and limited access to primary health care services.

Overall, more than 17 million people inside Syria and neighbouring countries need urgent, life-saving support from WHO and health partners.

As part of the 2016 Humanitarian Response Plan, WHO and partners in Syria will focus on expanding the availability of health services across the country by ensuring of life-saving medicines and supplies; increasing the capacity of the health workforce and strengthening partnerships with national nongovernmental organizations; strengthening health sector coordination and health information systems for an enhanced response; and providing critical support to boost vaccination coverage up to required levels.

In neighbouring countries, health priorities in 2016 include increasing access to quality health care for refugees and host communities; strengthening disease early warning and surveillance systems; and boosting routine immunization coverage for measles, polio and other vaccine-preventable diseases.

“If children under the age of 5 are not vaccinated against life-threatening diseases, they may not live to reach school-age,” said Elizabeth Hoff, WHO Representative in Syria. “In 2015, we were able to successfully eradicate polio from Syria and the Middle East after an intensive 2-year campaign, and, with continued support, we aim to keep Syria and the Region polio-free and reduce the risk of all vaccine-preventable diseases.”

In 2016, WHO requires US\$ 141 million for its response operations inside Syria and US \$14 million to support refugees’ access to health services in Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq.

“Investing in the health of the Syrian population is critical, and is an investment in the future of Syria and the Region,” said Dr Alwan. “We need healthy children that can go to school, and a healthy workforce that is able to remain productive and rebuild the country when the conflict is over.”

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