



Damascus – The Ministry of Health of the Syrian Arab Republic and the World Health Organization (WHO) collaborated during a 4-day workshop aimed at enhancing the country's health security through the self-assessment of International Health Regulations (IHR) 2005 core capacities under the Joint External Evaluation (JEE) Framework. Held from 12 to 15 March 2023, the workshop fostered multisectoral collaboration among stakeholders from national and sub-national levels to improve health security in Syria.

The JEE is a voluntary and collaborative process aimed at assessing a country's core capacities to prevent, detect, and respond to public health threats under the IHR 2005. This process helps countries identify critical gaps in their human and animal health systems, allowing them to prioritize opportunities to enhance preparedness and response to public health emergencies.

"The 2019 JEE session provided a crucial foundation for this workshop, which represents a significant step forward in developing a comprehensive roadmap for enhancing Syria's health response to the ongoing crisis. Through the collaborative efforts of WHO and the Ministry of Health, we aim to build capacity and strengthen preparedness to effectively manage public health emergencies. WHO is committed to working with all partners to ensure that the people of Syria have access to the health care services they need and deserve," said Dr Iman Shankiti, WHO Representative in Syria.

The workshop included technical presentations, group work, and plenary discussions covering the 19 technical areas of the JEE. Participants from various sectors, including food safety, zoonotic diseases, environmental health, and points of entry, attended the workshop.

"Facilitating the intermediation of IHR and JEE, this workshop identified strengths and gaps to ensure minimum capacity for early detection, investigation, and response to public health. The discussion was open, and all participants were keen to improve the health situation and pursue global health security," said Dr Dalia Samhuri, WHO Emergency Preparedness and International Health Regulations Regional Manager.

As a result of the self-assessment workshop, the Syrian Ministry of Health and WHO have identified several areas of improvement. These recommendations include reviewing and updating legislation, involving the private health care sector and civil society organizations in ensuring health security, accelerating the formation of the General Food Safety Authority and the National Food Safety Council, and adopting a comprehensive national plan for infection prevention and control, among others.

A major outcome of the self-assessment workshop is the planned Joint External Evaluation mission scheduled to take place in May 2023. This mission will assess the country's progress in addressing the identified gaps and implementing the recommendations made during the self-assessment workshop.

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