

Within the context of the Brussels conference on Syria, WHO emphasizes that health is a human right that must be respected by all parties to the conflict, that attacks on health workers and facilities must stop, and that there must be adequate investments in the health sector



30 June 2020 – As the crisis in Syria enters its tenth year, WHO calls on parties to the conflict and the international donor community to put the health and well-being of the Syrian people first. Sustained access via all modalities and sufficient resources are required to enable WHO and partners to meet the health needs of all people across the country.

Syrians who survived a decade of war are now facing an unprecedented socioeconomic crisis and a potentially disastrous COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to other public health risks. More than 12 million people in Syria are in need of humanitarian aid, including over 6 million internally displaced people living in camps or in camp-like settlements.

Although there are relatively few cases of COVID-19 across the country – 269 cases as of June 30 – official figures likely represent a significant underestimate of the true number. Syria is at risk of a substantial acceleration of the outbreak, due to its weakened health system and the difficulties in applying “lockdown” measures in the context of an economic crisis. Nonetheless, there is still an opportunity to prevent and mitigate the impact of the outbreak, by further expanding preparedness and response measures, especially at subnational level.

Displaced Syrians, particularly in the northeast and northwest of the country, live under conditions making them particularly vulnerable to respiratory infections such as COVID-19. Many live in overcrowded living conditions, and also face physical and mental stress and deprivation due to lack of housing, food and clean water. The humanitarian situation in northwest Syria remains one of the most acute and severe in the world with over 2.8 million people dependent on humanitarian assistance supplied almost entirely via cross-border

operations from southern Turkey.

Across the country, deteriorating conditions continue to place significant stress on the Syrian population, including increased prevalence of chronic diseases and mental health conditions, and increased rates of malnutrition. Many people live below the poverty line, further increasing their health needs and risks. But it is challenging to meet the health needs of Syrians – especially the most vulnerable – when less than half of health facilities are fully functional and there are such major shortages of health care workers. Health workers are describing an immense strain on services with only the most urgent cases being treated.

Attacks on health care continue, and the risk of ongoing ceasefire violations are of great concern in the northwestern part of the country. This year alone, 16 attacks on health care have been reported, in which 10 people died and 36 were injured, including 6 health care workers.

WHO continues its lifesaving work with partners inside Syria and cross-border from Turkey to respond to urgent health needs, and repeats calls by the United Nations for an immediate ceasefire, easing of sanctions that impede the COVID-19 response, and for a political solution to the conflict, along with the increased investments in health and health system resilience to protect the lives of millions of vulnerable men, women and children. The people of Syria cannot have a future without proper health care.

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