4 April 2024, Cairo, Egypt – The International Organization for Migration (IOM), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) today launched a joint programme to support the health system responses of the governments of Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon to climate change adaptation and risk reduction over the coming two years.

The programme, operating under the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund, aims to strengthen the resilience of health systems and migrant populations to climate change and disaster risks by incorporating an inclusive human mobility lens into national public health adaptation and risk reduction strategies of the target countries.

“Natural hazards that displace people, claim lives, damage property and impact health are strongly linked to climate change,” said Mr Othman Belbeisi, IOM Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa. “Thus, there is a strong need for a comprehensive approach that recognizes the linkages between climate change adaptation and risk reduction efforts in a manner that is inclusive of all impacted communities including migrants.”

“The escalating impacts of climate change globally and particularly in our region are leading to drastic health risks, especially among migrants who face difficulties in accessing adequate health services. This programme aims to create a coherent, multistakeholder approach to enhance resilience and preparedness within health systems, with a focus on the needs of migrants, who are often affected by climate change and its related risks,” said Dr Hanan Balkhy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

“The UNDRR Regional Office for Arab States is committed to supporting local authorities in Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon in disaster risk management and resilience-building efforts by developing local resilience action plans, which ensure that local authorities and communities are better equipped to handle disasters and emergencies and can respond effectively and efficiently,” said Mr Fadi Jannan, Deputy Chief of UNDRR Regional Office for Arab States.

The Middle East and North Africa region is among the world’s most vulnerable regions to climate change due to its mostly arid climate, coupled with serious water scarcity, continued population growth and urbanization.

Health impacts commonly identified in the region include cardiovascular and respiratory diseases caused by rising temperatures; resurgence and proliferation of vector-borne diseases; air pollution; and foodborne and waterborne diseases caused by degraded quality of water resources.

The programme thus seeks to integrate climate change adaptation and risk reduction strategies, with a specific focus on addressing the unique challenges faced by migrant populations in Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon.

Migrants often face challenges in accessing adequate health services due to factors such as their location, their legal status in transit and destination countries, the affordability of health services, and negative perceptions towards migrants in some host communities.

This integration is also crucial given the projected increase in climate-induced displacement and the associated health risks, particularly in regions with high exposure and low adaptive capacity, such as the Middle East and North Africa region.

The programme will address the information gap on the intersections between climate change, risk reduction, health and human mobility by producing and sharing relevant data. It will also hold capacity-building activities for government officials to improve the integration of an inclusive human mobility lens into local public health adaptation and resilience action plans.

A series of trainings will be organized to enable health professionals in the target countries to obtain the knowledge and skills to respond in an inclusive manner to health threats exacerbated by climate change and in disaster situations. Further, awareness-raising activities will target migrant communities in the involved countries.

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Sunday 7th of July 2024 05:28:49 AM