Jerusalem, 26 June 2024, the European Union and the World Health Organization signed an agreement to strengthen the health financing system and rationalize medical referrals, while protecting the poor and vulnerable patients. The agreement was signed at the Palestinian Prime Minister Office in the presence of the Palestinian Minister of Health Dr Majed Abu Ramadan and Minister of Finance, Mr Omar al-Bitar.

The agreement aims to support the efforts of Ministry of Health in ensuring equitable access to quality health care services to all Palestinians, amid the challenging financial situation and the consequences of the war in Gaza.

The action will address the unsustainable financing of the health sector and the increasing financial burden of the medical referrals. It will foster policy dialogue on rationalizing health expenditures and improving efficiency of the health system. The action will also focus on strengthening the governance of the medical referral system to be more efficient, transparent and fairer to all patients, in addition to strengthening medical specializations at public hospitals to rationalize medical referrals.

“The European Union reiterates once again its commitment to support the Palestinian Authority in improving its public services. For years, the EU has worked towards ensuring access to quality health care services through direct financial support to the Palestinian Authority for the cost of medical referrals to East Jerusalem Hospitals. This new partnership with the World Health Organization will help the Palestinian Authority in its efforts to reform the health system towards a more sustainable, efficient and equitable system" said the **European Union Representative, Alexandre Stutzmann**

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“WHO is grateful to the European Union for its longstanding partnership. This project will support the Ministry of Health in implementing its health financing reform priorities, including improving the performance of the referral system. It will also assist in revising the essential health package to guide the investment in health services and strengthen economic analysis within the Ministry of Health to inform future prioritization and planning” said the **Representative for WHO in the occupied Palestinian territory**

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Richard Peeperkorn

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Background:

The project is funded by the EU and will be implemented by the World Health Organization. The project aims to strengthen the Palestinian health financing system and improve Outside Medical Referrals towards a more efficient and equitable system to contribute to universal health coverage, while preventing financial hardship for the poor and vulnerable population.

The project will address the unsustainable financing of the health sector and the increasing burden of the cost of medical referrals amid fiscal constraints. The project results will mainly focus on the following; a) evidence and strategy guidance made available for policy makers to make decisions for rationalizing health expenditures; b) the Outside Medical Referrals System will be strengthened through revised process, procedures and updated protocols adding more equity, efficiency and transparency to the referral process; c) the health benefit package will be revised and costed, which will support in redesigning the levels of care and organization of services leading eventually to meeting population needs in an efficient manner; d) capacities of health workforce will be developed in specific medical specializations, which shall help case treatment at public hospitals and reduce outside medical referrals; and e) capacity in data analytics and financial risk protection developed for informed health care policies and for better monitoring and transparency of the referral system.

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Saturday 13th of July 2024 02:59:58 PM