



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

PRESS RELEASE

Brussels, 14 March 2014

EU to provide more funding to fight polio in Syria

The European Commission is providing additional funding of €1 million to UNICEF to ensure that a vaccination campaign against polio will continue inside Syria. It means that 2.5 million children under the age of five will be inoculated against polio in hard-to-reach areas as well as those who have been forced to move repeatedly because of the fighting.

Kristalina Georgieva, EU Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, who is visiting the region this week on the eve of the third anniversary of the start of the crisis, said: *"Syrians have experienced unbelievable hardship and deprivation over the past three year of this terrible conflict. The outbreak of polio last year was an additional blow, putting millions of children at risk. We are doing everything we can to protect children from this devastating disease.. I hope that this additional funding will prolong the outreach of the polio vaccination campaign sufficiently to eradicate this horrendous disease."*

The funding will go to UNICEF to enhance its contribution to the polio immunisation campaign in Syria. The campaign is a humanitarian priority because as many as 700 000 children under the age of five are currently estimated to live in hard-to-reach areas to which there has been little or no access for large-scale immunisation activities for the last two years. Many children (especially those under two years of age) in these areas have been covered by only one or two campaign rounds.

If and when the need arises, the Commission is ready to further increase its support and provide additional funding to the ongoing polio vaccination campaign.

Background

On 29 October 2013, the World Health Organisation announced that ten cases of polio had been diagnosed in Deir-ez-zur in Northern Syria. This was the first outbreak in Syria since 1999.

A regional response strategy to the polio outbreak was launched. Under the coordination of the Ministries of Health in countries hosting Syrians, WHO and UNICEF began synchronized vaccination campaigns targeting 23 million children under the age of five with an estimated total budget of \$ 39 million. These campaigns are ongoing in Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Turkey.

The Commission through its humanitarian budget allocated €29 million to water and sanitation projects inside Syria. These are especially relevant to the prevention and spread of diseases including polio. A further € 28 million was committed to healthcare, out of which €13.5 million was allocated to the World Health Organisation and €1 million to UNICEF, with part of the funding especially targeting the polio campaign.

Polio mainly affects children under the age of five. The virus is highly infectious and attacks the nervous system. Symptoms include fever, tiredness, headaches, vomiting, stiffness in the neck, and pain in limbs. One in 200 infections leads to irreversible paralysis. Between 5-10% of those who suffer paralysis die.

For more information

The European Commission's humanitarian aid and civil protection:

http://ec.europa.eu/echo/index_en.htm

Commissioner Georgieva's website:

http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/georgieva/index_en.htm

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