

Regional Director pledges WHO support to help Ukraine's health system build back better during visit to Lviv



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On World Health Day in Lviv, Ukraine, WHO Regional Director for Europe Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge visited health facilities and heard first-hand from health workers and patients who have faced some of the most testing circumstances imaginable amid the ongoing war that erupted on 24 February.

Speaking during the visit, the Regional Director explained, “This year I decided to commemorate World Health Day in Ukraine as an act of solidarity – with Minister of Health Dr Viktor Liashko, with all front-line workers and with the people of the country during these very tough times.”

Following meetings with health workers, Dr Kluge highlighted the resilience, heroism and dedication of the country's health workforce.

Since the start of the war in Ukraine, millions of people have been displaced, with many moving to the country's west as well as neighbouring countries. The health system has also been severely disrupted, with around 300 health facilities situated in conflict areas and 1000 health facilities in changed areas of control.

To date, over 100 health facilities have been attacked, killing and injuring civilians, and obstructing delivery of and access to health care for those in need. The war in Ukraine is a humanitarian emergency, and many require health care for both acute and chronic conditions.

During a meeting with Dr Liashko, Dr Kluge reiterated WHO's continued support for the country to address immediate health challenges and sustain long-term reconstruction efforts. The Regional Director emphasized WHO's pledge to help the country's health

system recover from the serious damage by working with national authorities and partners to “build back better”.

The Health Minister praised the support shown by the WHO Country Office in Ukraine, which has been in close contact with the Ministry throughout the war. The Country Office has set up a fully operational office in Lviv and is working to establish a future operational base in Dnipro.

In addition, both parties spoke about the need for a decentralized WHO footprint across the country to provide agile support wherever it is needed.

Following a virtual press briefing, Dr Kluge had the opportunity to visit 3 health facilities – a field hospital, a children’s hospital and an emergency hospital.

The Regional Director thanked and expressed his admiration for the health workers who continue to work and deliver care despite the continued hardships and fear they must overcome on a regular basis.

The children’s hospital visited by the Regional Director has been able to provide cancer care to children while facilitating the transport of the most serious patients to hospitals around the world, ensuring they receive the vital care they need.

Prior to the outbreak of war, Ukraine had made significant progress on a number of health matters. Since 2015, the Government of Ukraine has been reforming the health system to move towards universal health coverage. Furthermore, the country had begun to turn the corner in its fight against tuberculosis and HIV.

Dr Kluge strongly criticized continued attacks on health in the country, which are a violation of international humanitarian law, and reiterated the United Nations Secretary-General’s call for the Russian Federation to commit to a cease-fire.

WHO has delivered hundreds of tonnes of medical aid, including to cities on the front line. Central to this effort has been the distribution of life-saving supplies, many originating from the WHO warehouse in Lviv.

Speaking with staff at the warehouse, the Regional Director thanked

them for their work to provide crucial supplies to health facilities and health workers across the country.

However, despite their efforts, Dr Kluge underlined the continued challenge of ensuring safe passage for medical supplies, warning that places such as Mariupol and Donbas have proven difficult to supply.

WHO's response continues to take place in collaboration with over 100 partners. Recently, the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) financed the procurement and facilitated the supply of antiretroviral drugs, helping WHO and partners to cover the needs of every person known to be living with HIV in Ukraine for the next 12 months.

Thanks to recent donations, WHO's Emergency Appeal for Ukraine has reached its funding targets. However, amid the ongoing war, WHO is set to launch a new Emergency Appeal for Ukraine in the coming days, requesting donations to treat urgent health needs in Ukraine and support neighbouring countries that continue to provide care to refugees.

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