

WHO and Czechia sign new agreement to improve health for all



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During a 1-day visit to Czechia, WHO Regional Director for Europe Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge signed an agreement with the Ministry of Health cementing closer collaboration in priority areas. At a processing centre for refugees, the Regional Director also saw first-hand how the city of Prague has welcomed arrivals from Ukraine, providing essential health services and more.

The visit was an opportunity for Dr Kluge to recognize the dedication and professionalism of health workers in the country, who have responded over the past 2 years to the COVID-19 pandemic and are now providing care to people arriving from Ukraine.

“The Czech Republic has taken decisive action to make sure that every citizen can enjoy affordable, quality health care. Its position as a regional leader in equitable access to health services, with strong protection against out-of-pocket payments for health care, is a testament to this,” said Dr Kluge.

“With the new agreement, I look forward to strengthening our collaboration in priority areas including access to affordable medicines, using behavioural insights in policy-making, mental health services, post-pandemic recovery, digital transformation and immunization. These are the flagships of our European Programme of Work. This agreement will therefore not only improve health outcomes in the country, but also facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise with regional and global networks,” he added.

Minister of Health Dr Vlastimil Válek responded, “I am very pleased with the cooperation with WHO and the signing of a joint 2-year cooperation plan between the Ministry of Health and WHO. The Ministry is also looking forward to our Presidency. Our priorities will be, above all, oncology, rare diseases, vaccinations, the fight against

misinformation in health issues and building on the work of our French colleagues. I am very pleased that we have found consensus on helping Ukrainian citizens, because this situation deserves unity so that we can effectively help where it is most needed.”

The biennial plan of cooperation between WHO/Europe and the Ministry of Health for 2022–2023 is the result of a consultative process, and includes joint work on:

Over the past month, Czechia has welcomed almost 300 000 refugees from Ukraine. Health needs among arrivals include vaccination; maternal, newborn and child health services; care and treatment for NCDs, HIV and tuberculosis; and, not least, mental health and psychosocial support.

The Regional Director visited the refugee processing centre in Prague to see first-hand how municipalities, health workers and local people have been quick to integrate new arrivals from Ukraine and provide shelter, health care and other services.

“It is humbling to see the warm welcome that the Czech people have extended to their neighbours in need arriving from Ukraine. I would like to commend those working from local to national levels for their comprehensive approach, providing access to employment, social protection, health care and education – and in so doing not only tackling immediate health needs but offering refugees the framework for longer-term well-being,” added Dr Kluge.

Commenting on the visit and the response to the humanitarian emergency, Mr Zdeněk Hřib, Mayor of Prague, said: “I appreciate this attention from WHO currently focused on the capital city of Prague. About 88 000 people who have fled their homes because of the war have already arrived in Prague and the Central Bohemian Region, which are considered to be interconnected regions. I believe that setting up an effective system to integrate people who need our help into the Czech health-care system is a key part of their successful inclusion.”

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