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**A Thorny Issue: The Race to Vaccine Distribution in the MENA**

**10/03/2021**

**Notes**

**KEY POINTS:**

MENA region has states that are advancing in vaccination and others that are lagging behind, Israel, UAE, Morocco, Turkey and Bahrein are in good positioning.

Ahmed Al Mandhari, regional director for the Eastern Mediterranean, WHO:

* Key to share technical expertise, we need more collaboration and partnerships among countries. 100 countries in the world are at zero levels of vaccination.
* None will be safe until everyone is not vaccinated.
* MENA region, 15 countries started vaccination with bilateral agreements or donations with also COVAX facilities like Sudan and Gibuti. This is a success of the UN.
* We need more solidarity and unity values on resource sharing, enhance multilateral coordination.
* More resources for healthcare systems and risk communication and community engagement key for vaccination.

Yoko Akasaka, Senior Situation Coordinator, UNHCR MENA Regional Office:

* Coronavirus increased the need for social protection of refugees especially in MENA where there are more than 17 million people among refugees and IDPs.
* There is multiple crisis in the region. Migrants are among the social groups most impacted by COVID 19 crisis. Some asylum seekers have not been able to reach protection as most countries borders are closed. We see a high increase in poverty.
* We work with government and civil societies, we coordinated to provide support to quarantine centers with extra human resources and medical equipment and support government in providing services to refugees.

Eckart Woertz, Director GIGA Institute for the Middle East:

* Remarkable the success of Morocco and Turkey and the UAE in vaccinations, they were relying on vaccines coming mainly from China. They also started using the Russian vaccine.
* State capacity is key as well as palling and financial resources.
* COVID might reinforce trends we have seen in the past, it can make stronger populist movements.
* A potential risk is misinformation, lot of people are getting skeptical about vaccinations also for irrational reasons.
* MENA region will be very much influenced by foreign actors as it is not a producer of vaccines. Russia and China are now key players in the region when it comes to vaccination. The EU has less aggressive marketing but it is well position in the long run to be a key player in fighting COVID in the next years.
* In the long run, the main challenge would be related to the distribution of vaccines.