New Delhi, 19 September 2017 - World Health Organization has released a first tranche of emergency funding from the South-East Asia Regional Health Emergency Fund to mobilize essential medicines and support mobile medical teams provide life-saving health care to vulnerable populations in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar area.

"Vulnerable populations require access to health services, including emergency and basic health care. Access for women to reproductive health services is especially important. The Ministry of Health's mobile medical teams will help deliver those services amid a highly challenging situation," Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh, Regional Director for WHO South-East Asia, said.

Since 25 August more than 410 000 people have arrived in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar area from Myanmar. More than 380 000 of them have gathered in makeshift or spontaneous settlements. Poor nutrition, communicable diseases (including vaccine-preventable and water-borne diseases), injuries and other concerns such as mental health provide immense public health challenges that the Ministry of Health, Bangladesh, WHO and other health partners are working to address.

The WHO South-East Asia Regional Health Emergency Fund (SEARHEF) grant of USD 175 000 will support 20 mobile medical teams to provide essential services for at least two months, and is also being used to procure essential medicines and medical supplies to be distributed to pre-existing health facilities in the Cox's Bazar area.

WHO is working closely with IOM, UNFPA, UNICEF and other health partners in ensuring adequate health services are provided to the vulnerable population.

In recent days WHO has raced against the clock to support the Ministry of Health plan and carry out a mass measles, rubella and polio immunization campaign to protect around 150 000 children aged 6 months to 15 years old.

"Mass immunization is one of the most powerful ways to keep vulnerable communities safe from communicable diseases, especially when overcrowding and inadequate access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene are present. By carrying out this campaign so rapidly the Ministry of Health has taken a critical step in defending the health and wellbeing of hundreds of thousands of vulnerable children," Dr Khetrapal Singh said.

The SEARHEF was created by WHO South-East Asia Member countries in 2008 to enhance emergency response across the Region. It has so far provided over USD 5 Million for 34 different events in nine Member countries.

http://www.searo.who.int/mediacentre/releases/2017/1664/en/