The WHO Regional Office for Europe today announced the delivery of five mobile clinics to meet the health needs of sick and injured people in northern Syria. Each unit can provide first aid and emergency care for up to 1000 people per month. WHO/Europe made the announcement during an awards ceremony held near its field office in Gaziantep, Turkey, attended by representatives of Turkey's Ministry of Health. The event honoured the achievements of health partners, as well as the support of the Turkish Government, in providing medical care to the people of northern Syria in 2016.

The mobile clinics will support the operations of WHO's health partners in northern Syria. "Given the fact that many of northern Syria's health facilities have been destroyed and so many people have been displaced, these mobile clinics are the only way to bring health services to Syrians in need," said Dr Nedret Emiroglu, Director of Health Emergencies and Communicable Diseases at WHO/Europe, who attended the event.
Each mobile primary health care unit is equipped with essential medical equipment and technology, along with essential medicines. The mobile clinics were provided with the support of European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Operations (ECHO) and the Government of Norway.

WHO also launched a package of essential primary health care services that will be rolled out in the coming months. The package provides a roadmap for the provision of comprehensive integrated care according to WHO protocols and guidelines. It will guide delivery of high-quality services in child health, reproductive health, nutrition and management of communicable and noncommunicable diseases.

Honouring the lifesaving work of health partners

At the awards ceremony WHO recognized the accomplishments of health teams providing immunization, medical evacuation and delivery of other health services over the last year. "2016 was a challenging year for medical groups working on the ground in Syria, but these teams achieved so much," said Dr Pavel Ursu, WHO Representative in Turkey. "They reached more than 1 million children with lifesaving vaccines. They provided primary health care and advanced trauma care to thousands of people. We're so grateful for their dedication in the midst of this conflict."

Health partners received certificates for vaccinating Syrian children under immensely difficult conditions, including in hard-to-reach areas. In 2016, WHO partners in northern Syria administered over 2 million vaccines against polio, over 1.2 million vaccines against measles and rubella, and over 1.7 million doses to protect against five other vaccine-preventable diseases. "These people work hard to protect children from serious diseases, putting their own lives at risk," said Dr Emiroglu.

Partners were also recognized for their roles in evacuating seriously ill patients from eastern

Aleppo. During 15–23 December 2016, over 36 000 people were successfully evacuated from eastern Aleppo, with 811 patients referred to hospitals in west Aleppo, Idleb and Turkey. WHO and health partners mobilized more than 156 ambulances for patient transportation.

"The Government of Turkey is committed to continuing humanitarian support for Syrians in dire need," said Dr Öner Güner, Director-General of European Union and Foreign Relations for the Turkish Ministry of Health, in a speech at the event. "We hope this conflict will be resolved soon and people will be able to enjoy safe, healthy lives."