



Strengthening Health Systems for Mothers and Newborns

UNFPA Assessment of Lebanon's Maternal and Newborn Referral System (2015) – From Primary to Secondary Health Care, Including Emergency Obstetrics and Neonatal Care

Overview

In 2015, our team was commissioned as consultants by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to conduct a critical assessment of maternal and newborn referral systems in Lebanon.

Our contribution focused on evaluating the effectiveness of referral pathways between primary health care centers (PHCs) and public hospitals, particularly for emergency obstetric and neonatal care (EmOCNC), in a context of growing health needs and strained infrastructure.

Our Role

As collaborators on this assessment, we contributed to:

- Design and implement a field-based assessment protocol
- Conduct interviews, surveys, and on-site observations across selected PHCs and hospitals
- Analyze coordination gaps in the referral system, including documentation, protocols, and case tracking
- Provide UNFPA with a set of practical, evidence-based recommendations to support future programming and policy reform

Our Methodological Approach

Our work combined qualitative and quantitative tools, including:

- Semi-structured interviews with healthcare professionals and stakeholders
- Surveys with pregnant women and recent mothers
- Site visits to facilities across different regions
- Review of existing national health guidelines and coordination frameworks

This approach allowed us to map both the institutional and human dimensions of referral care in maternal health.

Key Areas of Impact

This assessment contributed to:

- Identifying systemic gaps in how women and newborns are referred in emergency cases
- Highlighting the need for standardized protocols and improved coordination between PHCs and hospitals
- Emphasizing the importance of respectful, timely, and safe maternal care — especially in resource-limited or crisis-affected settings

At a Glance

Partner: United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) – Lebanon

Role: Research contributors & field coordination

Lead contributor: Dr. Nagi Souaiby, MD, MPH, MHM

Location: Beirut, Lebanon

Timeline: November–December 2015

Report completed: January 2016

Want to know more about our expertise in health systems?

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