

Towards Better Maternal Health Outcomes: Making Pregnancy Safer

-Romania and Other Countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia



Romania's East European Institute for Reproductive Health provided key support in the needs assessment, training programme development and capacity development of participating agencies in the region.

Issue

The countries and territories in the Balkans faced common challenges related to the health of mothers and babies. Moreover, even though the rate of women dying from pregnancy or childbirth-related conditions had nearly halved in the region since 1990, the numbers were still unacceptably high. Much remained to be done if the health care that pregnant women and new mothers currently receive was to improve. Most of these deaths could be averted with basic and effective low-cost interventions, even where resources were limited and even more important if there was an understanding of why they happened and how they could be prevented.

Countries in the region recognised the importance of strengthening the capacity of health professionals, health care planners and managers working in the area of maternal and newborn health in order to improve the quality of care provided. Sharing of knowledge, including better understanding of maternal deaths and complications, between and among countries in the region was important to achieving better maternal health outcomes.

Towards a Solution

UNFPA, in collaboration with World Health Organization (WHO) and the Regional Development Center on Public Health Services in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, organised an inter-country workshop on maternal mortality and morbidity with focus on the principles and methodology espoused in the WHO guidance document, "Beyond the numbers: Reviewing maternal deaths and complications to make pregnancy safer." Eight countries and territories participated in this initiative: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia

and Herzegovina, Georgia, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Kosovo¹.

Based on the outcome of the workshop, UNFPA, in partnership with the East European Institute for Reproductive Health in Romania, embarked on an initiative to roll out the maternal death review exercise in the region. The objectives of the initiative were to develop a training curriculum and a training package on reviewing maternal deaths and complications, to conduct a training course for trainers and to assess the quality of maternal care mechanisms, implementation and clinical audits.

Results

Health care participants in the training of trainers course benefited from the lectures, exchange and sharing of knowledge specifically on methods in conducting an in-depth and systematic review of various cases of maternal death and complications, severe



maternal morbidity and “near misses,” the use of clinical guidelines and audits to improve quality of care.

The countries and territories in the Balkans recognise that much remains to be done if the health care that pregnant women and new mothers currently receive is to improve. Strengthening the capacity of and empowering health care professionals, especially those working in the area of maternal and newborn health, is an important step in the right direction. With the traditional system of audit of maternal deaths often not based on evidence in most countries in the region, there is a growing and concerted effort to undertake evaluation of current practices through evidence-based professional case reviews to improve the quality of maternal health.

Through lessons learned in the implementation of principles and practice of making pregnancy safer, countries have a deeper appreciation of the need to improve emergency care, national clinical guidelines on major obstetric complications, use of updated standards and facility-based protocols, teamwork around childbirth, as well as enhancing the role of midwives.

This transferable initiative contributes to the implementation of the United Nations Secretary-General’s “Global Strategy for Women’s, Children’s and Adolescents’ Health” in support of the Sustainable Development Goals framework; to the WHO Regional Office for Europe “Action Plan for Sexual and Reproductive Health: Towards Achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Europe – Leaving No One Behind”; and to the implementation of the new Antenatal Care Guidelines.

Lessons Learned

Maternal mortality is a common indicator on the status of women and their access to health care, and the adequacy of the health care system in responding to their needs. However, knowing the precise level of maternal mortality is not enough. Diagnostic tools that can shed light on the causes of maternal mortality and

how it can be averted are important.

Partners

East European Institute for Reproductive Health
World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe
University College London
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Institute for Public Health, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Agency for quality and accreditation in health care in Bosnia and Herzegovina (AKAZ)
University Clinical Center Banja Luka
Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Bosnia and Herzegovina
University Clinical Hospital Mostar
Public Health Institute of the RS
University Clinical Center Sarajevo
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
University Clinic for Gynecology and Obstetrics, Skopje
Specialized Obstetrics and Gynecology Hospital, Skopje
General Hospital, Struga
Serbia
Department for Public Health, Ministry of Health, Serbia
Department for Planning, Institute for Public Health, Serbia
Department for Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology, Family Planning Center, Mother and Child Health Care Institute - "Dr Vukan Čupić"
Kosovo
National Institute of Public Health, Kosovo
Obstetrics/Gynecology Clinic, Pristina
Ministry of Health

Contacts

Nigina Abaszade, Regional Technical Adviser on Gender, Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (EECARO) (abaszade@unfpa.org)
Tamar Khomasuridze, Sexual and Reproductive Health Regional Advisor - UNFPA (EECARO) (khomeuridze@unfpa.org)
Alanna Armitage, Regional Director - UNFPA (EECARO) (armitage@unfpa.org)