



MSD for mothers  
Committed to Saving Lives

A full-page photograph of a pregnant woman and her young daughter walking along a dirt path in a rural, hilly landscape. The woman is wearing a brown top under a white patterned vest and blue jeans. She is smiling and looking down at her daughter. The daughter is wearing a light blue t-shirt and jeans, and is smiling at the camera while hugging her mother's arm. The background shows green fields, trees, and hills under a blue sky with light clouds.

# MSD FOR MOTHERS IN EUROPE PROGRAM REPORT

MAKING PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH SAFER IN EUROPE



# LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

The ripple effects of a mother's death are enormous — devastating families and communities. But a healthy pregnancy and childbirth leads to a lifetime of benefits, both for a woman's own health and prosperity as well as that of her children, community and nation.

A positive experience during pregnancy and childbirth also builds a woman's trust in the healthcare system. Depending on the care she receives, this short period in a woman's life can be either life-threatening or empowering. Her experience will have an indelible influence on how — and whether — she seeks healthcare for herself, her newborn and her family.

We call this the Mom Effect.


Today, more needs to be done to ensure that the Mom Effect is a reality for mothers around the world, including here in Europe. However, many women do not have equitable access to high quality healthcare — even though this should be a fundamental right in a Europe of Universal Health Coverage. Throughout Europe, women who are poor, and young migrants, refugees or from minority ethnic groups are the most likely to suffer from low to no access and poor maternal healthcare.

This report highlights how maternity care in Europe must be tailored to meet the particular needs of women who come from vulnerable backgrounds and minority groups. It is critical to ensure all women across the region have access to quality maternal health and family planning services, regardless of their socio-economic status, ethnicity or nationality.

Together with our partners, we work with policy makers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), social workers, healthcare professionals and local governments to link women to quality maternal healthcare and to raise awareness of these issues throughout Europe. We're grateful for their continued collaboration and expertise, which has enabled us to help reduce the risks in pregnancy and childbirth for the estimated 5 million women who give birth in the European Union annually.

*MSD for Mothers* has initiated a number of partnership globally that make use of digital innovations to address maternal health issues. With the EU digital agenda become increasingly on top of policy priorities, we are committed to being part of the discussion and use our know-how and experience in other regions to find solutions to some of the challenges listed in this report.

While our results on the ground and at policy level are encouraging, there's still more work to be done to ensure all women in Europe and beyond have the ability to access quality maternal health services and to strengthen and sustain the Mom Effect for generations to come, and we remain committed.



**DR. MARY-ANN ETIEBET**  
Lead and Executive Director,  
*MSD for Mothers*

*MSD for Mothers* is known as *Merck for Mothers* inside the U.S. and Canada.

## MSD FOR MOTHERS: COMMITTED TO SAVING LIVES

*MSD for Mothers* is our \$500 million (USD) initiative to create a world where no woman dies giving life.

Contributing our scientific and business expertise, as well as our financial resources, we are working to ensure that women have access to two of the most powerful means to end preventable maternal deaths: quality maternity care and modern contraception.

To date, *MSD for Mothers* has contributed to improved access to quality maternal healthcare and family planning services for over 7 million women in more than 30 countries around the world, contributing to the global effort to save women's lives, strengthen health systems and meet the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. In Europe, we've supported nine programs that have reached more than 54,000 women living in Europe. In addition, we've supported

eleven European country programs developed in collaboration between our subsidiaries and local NGOs that reached more than 117,00 women outside of Europe in countries like Tanzania, Malawi, and Ethiopia.

### OUR APPROACH

Our efforts target three areas:



**Enable health providers:** equipping health providers with the skills, tools and technologies they need to deliver high-quality maternity and family planning services wherever women seek care



**Develop and deliver life-saving products:** placing life-saving maternal health products in the hands of women and their providers



**Empower women:** empowering women to make informed choices about contraception and get the quality care they need for a healthy pregnancy and safe childbirth.

Specifically in Europe, we are advocating to build awareness and action among policy makers to drive improvements in women's rights and ensure equitable access to quality maternal healthcare.

## OUR IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

OUR PARTNERSHIPS  
HAVE MADE IMPRESSIVE  
STRIDES TO HELP  
IMPROVE MATERNAL  
HEALTH WORLDWIDE



**126,400**  
PROVIDERS EQUIPPED  
TO OFFER QUALITY CARE



**7+ million**  
WOMEN HAVE IMPROVED ACCESS  
TO QUALITY MATERNAL HEALTHCARE  
AND MODERN CONTRACEPTIVES



**50+**  
PROGRAMS

**100+**  
PARTNERS

**30+**  
COUNTRIES





# MATERNAL HEALTH IN EUROPE

Equitable access to high-quality maternal healthcare should be a fundamental right for all women living in Europe. Unfortunately, the reality is different for millions of women who give birth in the E.U. each year. In a region characterized by free movement and differing health systems, the gaps in access to care result in health inequalities, including poor maternal health.



**MATERNAL MORTALITY RATE**  
16 DEATHS PER 100,000 LIVE BIRTHS

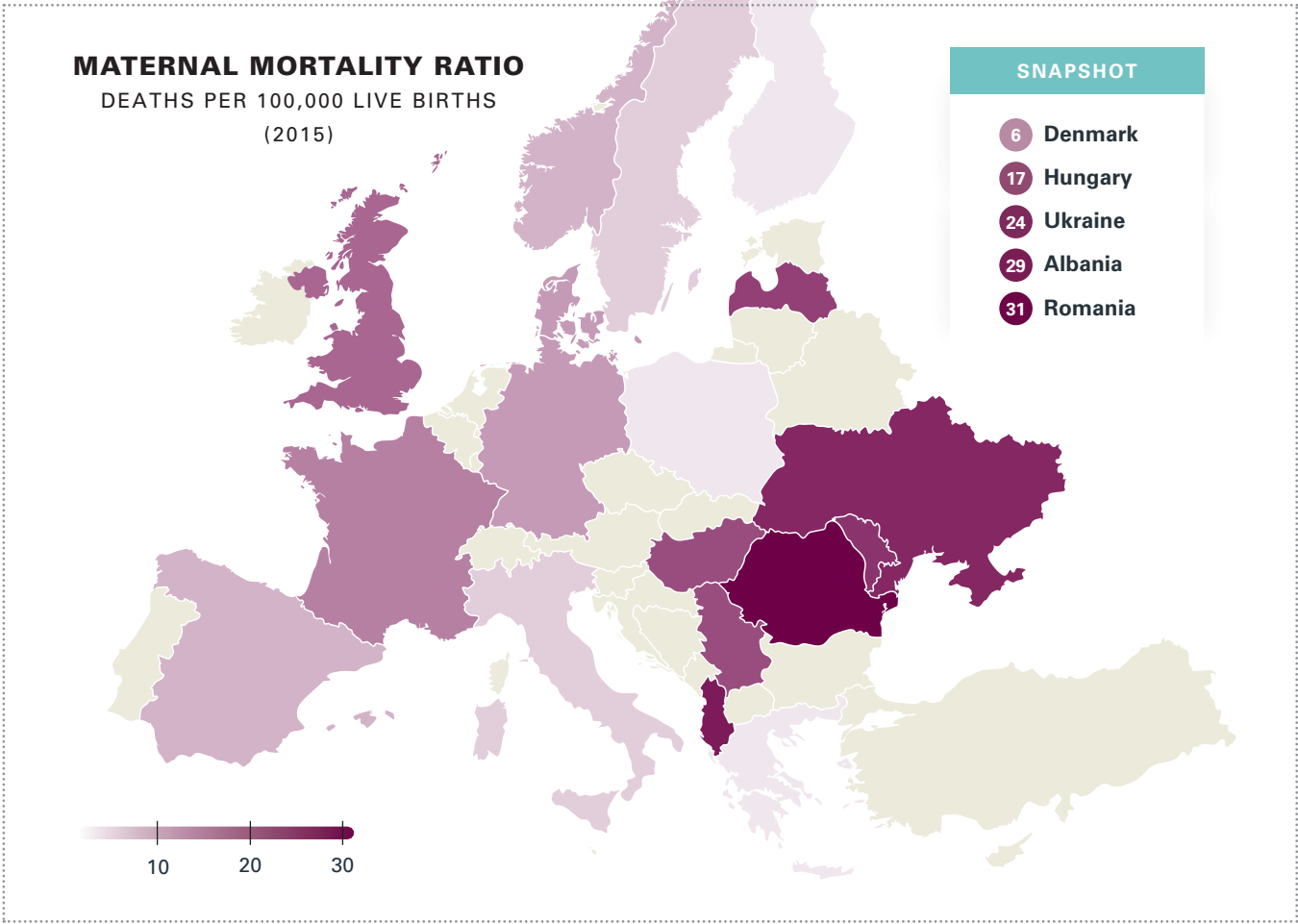


**NEARLY 1,800 MATERNAL DEATHS**  
OCCURED IN EUROPE DURING 2015



**EU COUNTRY MMR DISPARITY**  
HIGHEST RATES > 10x THE LOWEST  
RATES IN EASTERN REGION

## MATERNAL MORTALITY VARIES IN EUROPE



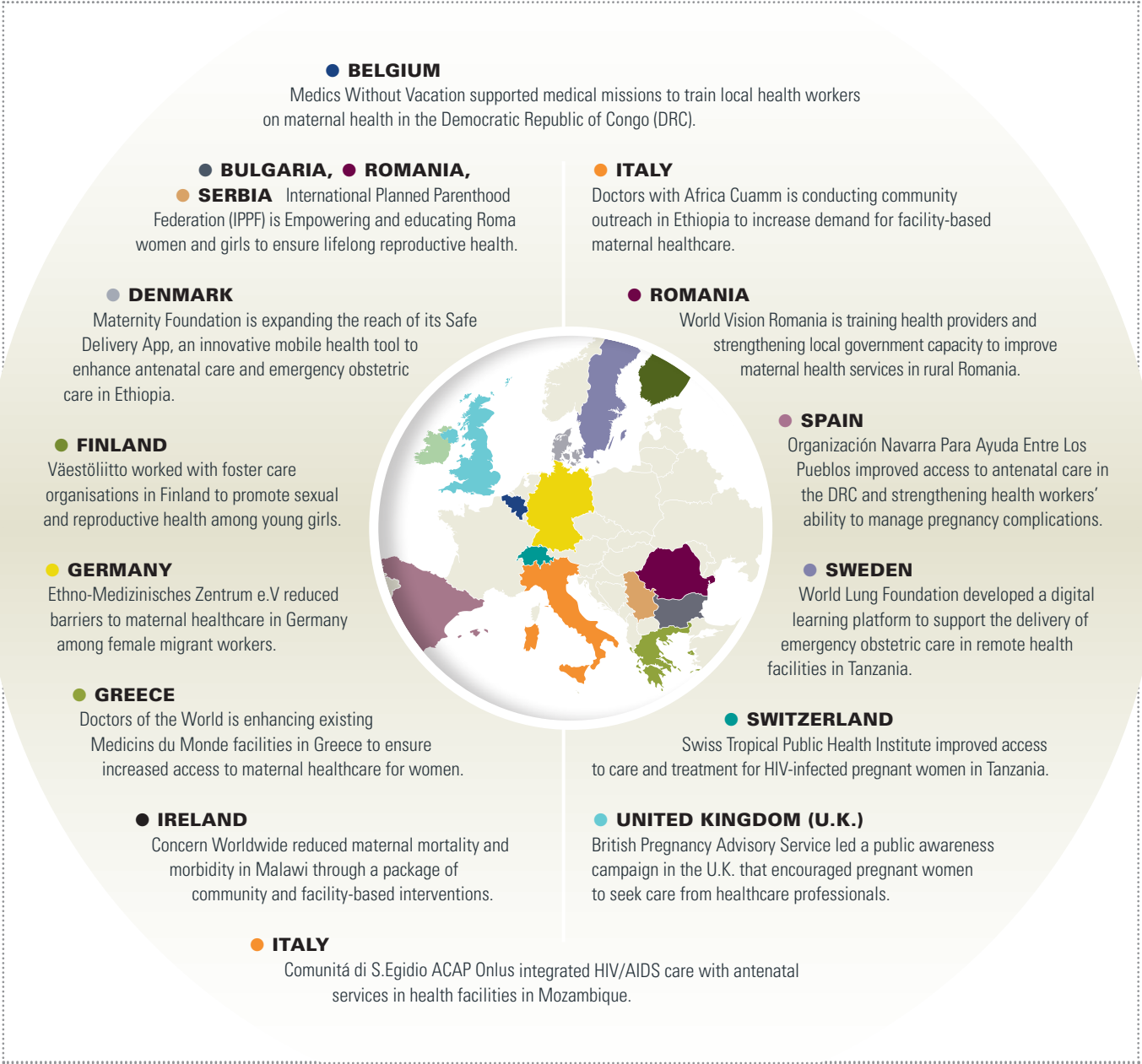




# MSD FOR MOTHERS' GLOBAL COMMITMENT

In collaboration with local MSD offices in Europe, *MSD for Mothers* is supporting maternal health organisations that connect pregnant women to quality care and raise awareness of safe motherhood practices. These projects are improving

maternal health in Europe and in other parts of the world, where access to quality maternal healthcare continues to be a challenge and rates of maternal mortality are the highest in the world.





# GREECE

## Providing quality, affordable care for vulnerable women

Greece recently experienced eight consecutive years of recession as well as increased poverty, widespread unemployment and an increase in unmet medical needs. These challenges, coupled with a surge in refugees and immigrants and the fact that nearly one-third of the population lacks healthcare coverage, have negatively affected women's access to maternal healthcare in the country.

Through the Mother & Child project, Doctors of the World's Greek delegation is deploying mobile health units so that more refugee women and women in remote regions are able to receive the maternal health services they need; strengthening the capacity of healthcare professionals to serve these women; and ensuring that antenatal and postnatal care is available to uninsured women. After 2 years of implementation, results show that the project offered primary healthcare services to nearly 43,000 women and nearly 8,000 babies and infants.



“Pregnant women and infants are a top priority for the Doctors of the World. They are the most vulnerable members of society, especially women without access to care, minority groups who live in remote areas of Greece and refugee and migrant populations. Our program, supported by MSD for Mothers, offers free healthcare services for about 51,000 pregnant women and newborns in need of quality care.”

Dr. Nikitas Kanakis, President, Doctors of the World Greece

# ROMANIA

## Increasing access to maternal health services for women in rural communities

Romania has one of the highest levels of poverty, with 42% of the population at risk of poverty and social exclusion. It's no surprise that the country's maternal mortality rates are more than double the average of other European countries.

World Vision's "Mothers for Life. Life for Mothers" 30-month program has worked to develop and implement an integrated model aimed at facilitating access to family planning and maternal healthcare services, training healthcare professionals, and empowering local authorities to reduce the unmet need for family planning services in rural areas. As a result of the program, over 22,000 women in three counties received counselling and information about family planning and birth spacing and their rights to access medical services during their pregnancy. Meanwhile, 235 medical staff members have held online courses dedicated to the care and the rights of pregnant women. Moreover, the program helped advocate for a legal framework to improve access to maternal care, and 30 action plans have been developed alongside local



authorities for women in disadvantaged environments to receive further support after the end of the project.

“For over 25 years, we've worked with our partners to improve the lives of children in the most disadvantaged communities. Through the 'Mothers for Life. Life for Mothers' program, we are using our resources to support specialists in delivering quality healthcare to current and future mothers, regardless of whether they live in urban or rural areas or are from rich or poor economic backgrounds.”

Daniela Buzducea, Executive Director, World Vision Romania Foundation

# TURKEY

NEW  
PROJECT

## Strengthening access to health services for women and children asylum seekers

There are over 5.6 million Syrian refugees registered in Turkey, and women and children constitute more than 70% of the total refugee population. Language barriers, low incomes, and poor living conditions pose significant health challenges to this vulnerable population, and very few refugee women and children have access to prenatal and postnatal care services.

The Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM) is implementing a program over the next two years to strengthen healthcare services for women and children asylum seekers. The project uses a holistic approach to reduce maternal and infant mortality and childbirth complications, increase preventive healthcare services, ensure mothers and babies have access to prenatal and postnatal care, and provide counselling on safe motherhood.



“We believe that this project will address the gaps and barriers in health services that Syrian refugees experience by increasing access to maternal health care and family planning for women, as well as raising awareness about safe motherhood, preventative health care, sexual reproductive health and newborn care. Now, ASAM will be able to reach women in two provinces with the greatest refugee populations through our Multi Service Centers.”

Ibrahim Vurgun KAVLAK, General Coordinator, ASAM

# BULGARIA, ROMANIA & SERBIA

NEW  
PROJECT

## Empowering and educating Roma women and girls to ensure lifelong reproductive health

The Roma are amongst the most impoverished and discriminated against minority groups in Europe. Women and girls suffer disproportionately due to poverty and an institutionalized patriarchal culture that promotes gender inequality. As a result, Roma women have challenges accessing sexual and reproductive health services, particularly contraception, which contributes to a cycle of teenage pregnancies, poor reproductive health and maternal deaths.

The three-year "My Body, My Rights" program, implemented by implemented by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) networks in Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, and Serbia, will focus on underserved women and girls living in large Roma settlements in these three countries.



The program will work with political leaders, primary health care providers, Roma communities, and young Roma people to improve maternal health outcomes and empower women to make their own healthcare decisions.

“We are delighted to partner with MSD for Mothers to tackle one of Europe's biggest maternal health challenges. Together we are working to ensure young Roma women can access their rights to reproductive healthcare and enjoy safe motherhood.”

Caroline Hickson, Regional Director, IPPF European Network



# THE EUROPEAN UNION

## Equipping female Parliamentarians with the information they need to improve access to maternal healthcare

Despite progress over the last 30 years, systemic challenges in the E.U. prevent equal access to quality maternal healthcare. Regrettably, maternal health issues are not a priority on healthcare agendas across the E.U. In order to address this, MSD for Mothers initiated a partnership in 2016 with Women Political Leaders (WPL), which led to a series of high level events and the adoption of the WPL Outcome Declaration outlining key recommendations for EU Member States and the European Commission to improve access to care for all mothers living in Europe. This collaboration reached another level with a research project conducted over the years 2017-2018 aimed at addressing the data gap, a critical factor to inform decision-making and pursue policy changes.

“WPL builds its work on strong partnerships. In the successful cooperation with MSD for Mothers, maternal mortality is put in focus. WPL and MSD work together to empower female political leaders to make this issue a priority in their respective countries. Access to maternal healthcare is a fundamental human right. It is a joint responsibility of decision makers in politics as well as the private sector to work towards ending maternal mortality.”

Silvana Koch-Mehrin, Founder & President of Women Political Leaders Global Forum

Key findings of the research study include:

- The number of vulnerable pregnant women is growing in every country of the EU, in part due to the rapid influx of migrants, but also because of growing numbers of disadvantaged and homeless people;
- The issue of rising maternal mortality rates is potentially significantly underreported across Europe and no useful data is currently being gathered to assess and address the challenge of increasing mortality of mothers and babies;

- The delivery of maternal health care often fails to be tailored to the cultural background of patients and many countries lack specific plans for action on migrant health;
- The Maternal Mortality Ratio in low-income countries can be up to 50 times higher than in high-income countries and unless decisive action is taken future mortality ratios among vulnerable pregnant women in Europe are likely to far exceed ratios currently witnessed in Europe.

In particular, the research project provides an overview and understanding of the political reality on issues vulnerable pregnant women are facing when accessing maternal healthcare, and the challenges governments face to provide it. The findings, coming from a mapping of maternal health indicators, interviews with health experts and survey among the WPL membership, have led to the development of key recommendations to EU member states which will act as a stepping stone to integrate into EU policies access to maternal healthcare for vulnerable pregnant women. The results will provide politicians and policymakers with an authoritative benchmark, facilitating better policymaking.

The following key recommendations have been identified:

- Design and implement mandatory training of health professionals in delivering culturally-sensitive care.
- Design and implement a basic maternal healthcare benefits package for vulnerable pregnant women that covers 1) Information/ advice on family planning, 2) Access to contraception and 3) Antenatal, delivery, neonatal and postnatal care.
- Ensure and make clear that using maternal healthcare services does not pose the threat of having to leave the country due to one’s immigration status.
- Develop specific indicators to measure maternal health and pregnancy outcomes for vulnerable pregnant women.

For the latest update on our programs and progress, visit [MSDforMothers.com](https://MSDforMothers.com).

Follow us on [@MSDforMothers](https://twitter.com/MSDforMothers)







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NOVEMBER 2018