

Research of 14,000 refugee women in Greece shows major inequalities in access to vital maternal healthcare

- *Stakeholder roundtable discusses how Ireland can ensure equitable access to vital maternal healthcare for vulnerable refugee women*

Dublin, 27th October, 2017 – Securing equitable access to primary healthcare and maternal health for pregnant migrant and refugee women remains a great challenge across Europe according to research conducted amongst almost 14,000 refugee women who received care from Doctors of the World (Médecins du Monde) in refugee camps in Greece. The findings were presented at a stakeholder roundtable in Dublin hosted by MSD for Mothers, where attendees, discussed the findings as well as the policy recommendations developed as a result of this research.

Participants in the event included including representatives from the Irish Naval service who outlined their experience in providing emergency healthcare to female refugees rescued in the Mediterranean, Barnardo's who currently work in a number of locations with female refugees, and key NGOs currently working directly with refugees in Ireland across a range of areas. As Ireland has a stated commitment to resettle 4,000 refugees under the Irish Refugee Resettlement Programme between 2015 and 2017, more than a quarter of whom will come from Greece*, the discussion also focussed on how Ireland can ensure equitable access for these women when they arrive in Ireland.

The Doctors of the World research revealed significant challenges refugee and migrant women across Europe face in accessing maternal healthcare, and the implications this is having on the health and mortality rates of mothers and their babies. The research identified a range of barriers these vulnerable women face in getting care including:

- Prohibitive costs, which in most cases includes 100% of the total cost of their medical care.
- Lack of awareness of their rights and poor understanding of the workings of the healthcare system due to different cultures, expectations, languages and beliefs with a significant number of mothers who are entitled to insurance coverage not being aware of it.
- The complexity of the healthcare and/or insurance system.
- Fear of complaint, arrest, discrimination or denial of medical care.
- Limitations on the free maternal care mothers are entitled to receive and cumbersome administrative requirements involved in accessing this care.
- Fear due to history of previous abuse before, during and after migration.

In response to the findings, Doctors of the World has outlined a set of policy recommendations entitled, “**Refugee Health Policy Recommendations for European Governments and EU Institutions**” (see attached) which it is calling on all EU Member States to support.

Ger Brennan, Managing Director of MSD Human Health said: “Access to maternal healthcare for every mother, especially the most vulnerable, has to be a priority for us all. We are committed to engaging with health authorities and policy makers to work towards the removal of the barriers and challenges to this vital care. We are very proud to support today's unique event which brought together key organisations working in this area, to discuss the research findings and policy recommendations, give an insight into what is already in place in Ireland and identify the additional areas we should focus on to ensure we meet the needs of this group.”

Dr. Nikitas Kanakis, President of Doctors of the World Greece, said “Every mother deserves good care before, during and post pregnancy, their residential status should not affect this basic right, and our research and the experience from our programmes shows providing equal access will improve and save lives, whilst also reducing pressures on hard-pressed healthcare systems around Europe. We hope our Refugee Health Policy Recommendations will spur EU and national decision-makers to join together to tackle the barriers vulnerable mothers and other migrant women face in trying to get good care. We believe all EU Member States, as well as the EU institutions, should put this issue higher on their political agendas. With rising rates of migration, it makes economic sense to act soon.”

Doctors of the World Greece, an international humanitarian movement, surveyed over 14,000 women who received care through the Mother & Child Programme which was funded by a grant from MSD for

Mothers, a \$500 million global initiative aimed at working with partners to reduce maternal mortality at worldwide and improve equity of access to maternal healthcare across Europe.

For more information visit www.msdformothers.com

**Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration (OPMI), September 2016*

Notes to editors

Research methodology

“Access to primary healthcare for Third-Country Nationals in Greece – April 2017”:

Evidence and data from over 14,000 vulnerable women, including migrants and refugees, was collected from Doctors of the World clinics in Greece over a three-year period. Interviews were held with medical staff, social workers, primary healthcare researchers, practitioners, policy makers and stakeholders.

Doctors of the World (Médecins du Monde) Greece

Doctors of the World Greece was established in 1990 and they constitute a unique Greek Organization. At the same time, however, they remain part of the International Network of MDM which consists of 15 chapters. The guiding principle underlying MDM's activities is that every human being has a right to humanitarian assistance, irrespective of their ethnic origin, religion, ideology or political persuasion. MDM are, therefore, guided by the principles of neutrality and impartiality. Being neutral, however, does not preclude MDM from speaking out. MDM fight injustice in all its forms. Constant defenders of human rights MDM object decisively to social exclusion and the marginalization of vulnerable groups. MDM Greece rely on the commitment of volunteers and the financial support of its donors. Completing 27 years of continuous action, in 2017, MDM have been recognized to the conscience of the citizens as a reliable and effective organization which promotes the feelings of solidarity

The Mother & Child Project

The need for free access to healthcare for women and children is supported by MSD via the MSD for Mothers global initiative. The Mother & Child programme reinforces the existing activities of MDM Greece and it is implemented for two years commencing in May 2016.

After one year of project implementation, the key project outputs are as follows:

- Provision of gynaecological services to 28,572 women
- Provision of pre-natal care to 2,511 pregnant women
- Providing paediatric services to 4,814 newborns and infants
- Distribution of 4,291 baby kits
- Implementation of 199 visits of the mobile medical unit to refugee camps
- Development of educational content for health professionals in six different thematic areas: Breastfeeding, Infant care, STDs, Emergency contraception, Family planning and Smear Test
- Training of 705 Healthcare professionals in face-to-face seminars and through the e-learning platform at: <http://mdmelearning.gr>
- Distribution of information material in 5 languages: Greek, English, French, Arabic and Farsi
- Development of a Survey on TCN access to Primary Healthcare, based on data provided from 14,000 women beneficiaries of the project
- Provision of gynaecological services to women in Kara Tepe open refugee camp in Lesbos
- Coverage of prenatal gynaecological examinations for women refugees
- Establishment of an emergency shelter for women just after giving birth
- Development of an Antenatal Guidelines Booklet in Greek and English for HCP's

The MSD For Mothers global initiative

MSD for Mothers is a 10-year, \$500 million initiative that applies MSD's scientific and business expertise – as well as its financial resources and experience in taking on tough global healthcare challenges – to end preventable maternal mortality worldwide.



MSD for Mothers focuses on helping countries reduce maternal mortality and improve maternal health with the overall aim of supporting United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3.1, which calls for a global reduction in the maternal mortality ratio to fewer than 70 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births by 2030. Since its announcement in 2011 the MSD for Mothers global programme has partnered with 75 organisations in 30 countries to deliver programmes which have reached more than 6 million women worldwide. The grant provided to Doctors of the World's Mother & Child programme is provided as part of the MSD for Mothers Global Giving programme.

For more information visit www.msdformothers.com