

New York, 5 May 2011 – United Nations officials today hailed the significant impact of midwives on the health of women and newborns, and called for greater investment to ensure their life-saving services are available to all who need them around the world.

“Midwives deliver – and not only babies,” said Babatunde Osotimehin, the Executive Director of the UN Population Fund ([UNFPA](#)). “They save lives and promote good health in societies as a whole. They are an essential workforce in an effective health-care system.”

In a [statement](#) to mark the [International Day of the Midwife](#) , Dr. Osotimehin noted that more than one in three women in developing countries give birth alone, and in some of the poorest countries, as few as 13 per cent of all deliveries are assisted by a midwife or a health worker with midwifery skills.

UNFPA estimates that 1,000 women die every day and 5,500 newborns die in the first week of life for lack of adequate medical care.

The Executive Director urged investing in human resources to tackle the current global shortage of some 350,000 of these “unsung heroes” of maternal and newborn health.

Flavia Bustreo, Assistant Director-General of Family and Community Health at the UN World Health Organization ([WHO](#)), noted in her [statement](#) that midwives are essential to the delivery of quality health services before, during and after childbirth for women and newborns.

“Despite this vital role in improving maternal and newborn health, recent analyses indicate that midwives and midwifery services are unequally distributed both between and within countries,” she said.

“Direct investment in midwifery education, regulation and association will create the necessary conditions for the midwifery profession to achieve its full potential.”

Both UNFPA and WHO, along with its partners, will release in June the first ever State of the World’s Midwifery report, which will address some of the critical issues surrounding the

profession.

Also in June, they will also join thousands of midwives at the Triennial Midwives Congress in Durban, South Africa, to discuss human resources for health and the way forward.

Source: [UN News Centre](#)