



**AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY
OF BEIRUT**

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

Beirut, July 21, 2025

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AUB's Global Health Institute, in Partnership with WHO, Convenes Regional Dialogue on Advancing Refugee Sexual and Reproductive Health in the MENA Region

The [Global Health Institute \(GHI\)](#) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) held the closing event of the Self-Efficacy and Knowledge (SEEK) project as part of its Refugee and Migrant Health Program (RHP) under the theme “*Advancing Refugee and Migrant Health in the MENA Region*”. The event brought together leading voices from local and international NGOs operating in Lebanon, alongside global and regional experts from the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the Lebanese Order of Midwives, the Ministry of Public Health of Lebanon, the Lebanese Association for Family Health (SALAMA), and AUB.

The Self-Efficacy and Knowledge (SEEK) project is a community-led intervention, developed in partnership with WHO and supported by *Elrha*, designed to improve sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and well-being among refugee girls and young women. This is achieved through culturally sensitive, evidence-based education and psychosocial support delivered by trained refugee paraprofessionals.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Fadlo Khuri, president of the American University of Beirut, described refugee health as one of the defining humanitarian crises of our time, requiring sustained, principled action. He emphasized that access to sexual and reproductive health is a right, not a privilege, especially for adolescent girls and young women displaced by conflict. Praising the SEEK project as a model of impactful, community-rooted intervention, he called for its lessons to be integrated into national strategies and long-term systems. Dr. Khuri also commended GHI for its leadership in refugee health through research, regional partnerships, and its commitment to collaboration grounded in trust and action. “At AUB,” he concluded, “we must continue to be active participants in shaping a healthier, more just future.”

Following this, Associate Director of the Global Health Institute at AUB Nour El Arnaout, underscored that this moment marks more than the close of a project—it represents the beginning of a long-term, community-driven commitment to inclusive health, built on collaboration,

American University of Beirut

PO Box 11-0236, Riad El Solh, Beirut 1107 2020, Lebanon
T +961 1 35 00 00 – Ext 2650 | communications@aub.edu.lb

aub.edu.lb

meaningful impact, and a shared dedication to sustainability. Highlighting the SEEK project as a clear example, she spoke about GHI's mission of translating evidence into action, developing inclusive, digital, and community-rooted tools that advocate for a regional health agenda.

Manager of the RHP program at GHI Rawad Malaeb, presented an overview of the Institute's portfolio of refugee health initiatives, including projects such as [Sijilli](#), [SEEK](#), [MUH](#), and [GAIN MHI](#), highlighting their commitment to high-impact, evidence-based interventions in partnership with local and international organizations. Research Consultant at GHI Hady Naal, then presented key findings from the SEEK project, which improved SRH and HIV knowledge, increased trust in healthcare providers, and enhanced well-being and coping skills among refugee girls and young women. The program's impact was sustained even in conflict settings, underscoring its potential for scaling and replication across fragile contexts.

The event featured two panel discussions that examined both the realities and the opportunities for advancing SRH among refugee communities. The first panel, *"Mapping Realities"*, was moderated by GHI Associate Director Nour El Arnaout, and featured Dr. Christine AlKady, obstetricians team leader at Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF); Dr. Michael Woodman, senior public health officer at UNHCR Lebanon; Dr. Rima Cheaito, president of the Lebanese Order of Midwives; and Wafa Kanaan, senior primary healthcare consultant at the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health. Panelists explored barriers to SRH access such as stigma, misinformation, legal insecurity, high costs, and service gaps, emphasizing the need for integrated care, antenatal support, and investment in equitable healthcare systems.

The second panel, *"From Implementation to Impact,"* moderated by Dr. Tania Bosqui, associate professor of clinical psychology at AUB, examined effective design and scale-up strategies for community-based SRH interventions, with a focus on the SEEK project. Panelists included Dr. Veloshnee Govender, WHO scientist; Dr. Hala Youssef, UNFPA regional SRH adviser; Dr. Gladys Honein, associate professor at the Hariri School of Nursing at AUB; and Lina Sabra, SALAMA executive director. Speakers highlighted co-creation with refugee communities, culturally sensitive delivery, and the importance of linking SRH to gender-based violence prevention services. They called for sustainable, government-led financing and stronger roles for local NGOs as co-leaders in health programming.

A key highlight of the event was a short video showcasing SEEK's implementation, featuring testimonials from refugee girls and young women, along with insights from trainers, psychologists, and field coordinators.

The event concluded with a call to carry SEEK's momentum beyond the project, emphasizing the need to embed its lessons into national strategies and policy.

About GHI

The Global Health Institute (GHI) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) addresses global health challenges with a focus on context and sustainable impact by employing an interdisciplinary approach. GHI is structured into three divisions: The Programs Division, which leads research, policy, and advocacy efforts; the Academy Division, which provides capacity-

building initiatives for diverse populations; and the ASSIST Division, which supports community-level actors, particularly non-governmental organizations, with a range of services and resources.

ENDS

For more information please contact:

Simon Kachar, PhD

Executive Director of Communications
Lecturer – Political Studies and Public Administration Department
Founding Director – Good Governance and Citizenship Observatory
Fellow – Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs
Member of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences Research, Innovation, and Creativity Hub

T +961 1 37 43 74 Ext: 2676 | M +961 3 42 70 24
sk158@aub.edu.lb

Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 790 full-time faculty members and a student body of over 9000 students. AUB currently offers more than 140 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 365-bed hospital.

Stay up to date on AUB news and events.

aub.edu.lb | [Facebook](#) | [X](#)

American University of Beirut

PO Box 11-0236, Riad El Solh, Beirut 1107 2020, Lebanon
T +961 1 35 00 00 – Ext 2650 | communications@aub.edu.lb

aub.edu.lb