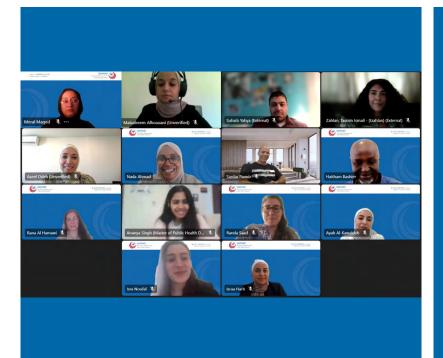


ENGAGE INTERNSHIP

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Editor's Letter

This edition of the Engage Bulletin celebrates growth, connection, and the people who make our program thrive.

We highlight the power of internships in shaping the next generation of public health professionals and celebrate the graduation of Cycles 1 and 2 of 2025. You'll also meet Aseel Odeh and Rana Alhamawi, whose inspiring journeys from intern to employee and mentor show what it means to come full circle in learning and leadership.

We're also excited to launch the Engage Alumni Network, a new space for our graduates to stay connected, share opportunities, and continue their journey of growth and collaboration. And we spotlight the fieldwork, presentations, and events our community has recently been part of.

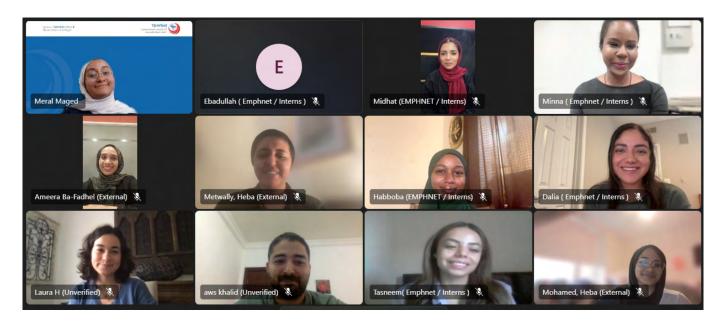
Thank you to all our mentors, interns, and alumni for keeping the Engage spirit alive, one story and one achievement at a time.

Happy reading!



Feature Story

The Importance of Internships in Public Health: Building Skills, Experience, and the Workforce of Tomorrow



Internships have long been recognized as a cornerstone of higher education (Gerding et al., 2020). They represent the moment when learning leaves the classroom and enters the real world where theory meets practice, and curiosity transforms into competence.

Internships allow students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-life situations, a process essential for preparing graduates to enter the workforce with confidence (Adams et al., 2001). They bridge academic learning and professional practice, offering hands-on experience, mentorship, and exposure to the inner workings of an organization.

For students and young professionals, internships are not simply temporary roles; they are laboratories of learning, exposure, self-discovery, and growth. For institutions, they are mutually beneficial: host organizations gain motivated and skilled individuals eager to contribute to meaningful work, while shaping future professionals equipped to carry the mission forward (Krinn, 1996).



Internships in Public Health: Turning Knowledge into Practice

In the field of public health, a discipline that blends science, policy, and community engagement, the importance of experiential learning cannot be overstated. While universities provide the theoretical foundation, public health practice demands additional competencies: the ability to generate and interpret data, communicate effectively with communities, and make ethical, evidence-based decisions under pressure (Brooks et al., 2019; Gerding et al., 2020).

Internships bridge the gap between academia and real-world public health action. They provide trainees with a working understanding of how health systems function, how decisions are made, and how research is translated into policy and intervention (Hamelin et al., 2018). Through mentorship and collaboration, students learn not only what works but also how and why which are key questions for designing effective and sustainable health programs.

Guided supervision helps interns interpret complex realities, develop leadership skills, and build the confidence to operate in multidisciplinary teams. Successful internships align the interests of trainees, mentors, and host organizations, ensuring that learning objectives meet both educational and institutional needs (Hamelin et al., 2018).

Additionally, internships foster reflection; a practice strongly encouraged by the UK Faculty of Public Health (FPH, 2023) that transforms internship experiences into lifelong learning. Reflective practice encourages students to examine their experiences critically, extract lessons, and apply them to future challenges (Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1995).

Why They Matter: Benefits for Students, Professionals, and Institutions

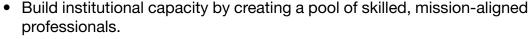
Internships in public health create measurable benefits on three levels:



- Gain practical skills in research, communication, data analysis, and program management.
- Learn to work in culturally diverse and resource-limited contexts, strengthening adaptability and critical thinking.
- Build professional networks and identify mentors who guide their career paths.
- Enhance employability as many go on to secure jobs in their host institutions or related fields.



- Cultivate leadership, reflection, and the ability to translate expertise into teaching.
- Exchange ideas with younger generations, gaining fresh perspectives and innovative approaches.



• Strengthen partnerships with academia and support workforce development strategies essential for national and regional health systems.



As universities and public health agencies strive for better integration between education and service delivery, internships remain one of the most effective mechanisms to align learning with real-world needs (Hamelin et al., 2018).

In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, where the demand for skilled public health professionals continues to grow, EMPHNET has taken proactive steps to address this need through structured internship and mentorship opportunities.

The Engage Internship Program: EMPHNET's Model for Building the Future Workforce

Recognizing the value of practical training, EMPHNET established the **Engage Internship Program** to bridge the gap between academic learning and professional practice in the region.

Engage offers structured, mentored, and accredited internship opportunities across key public health disciplines, including Polio and Immunization, Research and Policy, Public Health Emergency Management, One Health, and Communication for Health Promotion, among others.



The program is accredited by the Agency for Public Health Education Accreditation (APHEA), adding internationally recognized value to interns' experience. Since its inception, Engage has supported over 111 interns from more than 10 countries, providing them with hands-on experience, mentorship, and networking opportunities within EMPHNET and its regional partners.

GG

Public health demands professionals who can translate theory into impactful action. This internship program prepares a new generation of skilled individuals who can tackle pressing health issues and contribute to healthier communities.

Dr. Mohannad Al NsourEMPHNET's Executive Director



Stories of Impact: Learning, Resilience, and Growth

The Engage Program's impact extends beyond technical skills, it transforms lives and careers.

Abeer Ismail, from Gaza, joined the program during the war and worked on emergency response plans under the Public Health Emergency Management Center. Despite the dangers surrounding her, she remained committed to her work:

"The internship made me focus more on the future and the change I can make. It gave me hope and resilience."



Read more about Abeer's success story



Mogahed Halaly, a medical doctor from Sudan displaced by conflict, found purpose and direction through Engage:

"This internship was not just about fulfilling objectives; it was about finding hope in the middle of crisis. It helped me transform my field experience into structured learning and gave me confidence to keep serving my community."

Tasnim Ibrahim, an MPH candidate from Washington University, described her practicum with EMPHNET as a rare blend of technical learning and cultural insight:

"I witnessed firsthand the dedication of EMPHNET's staff and their ability to adapt evidence-based frameworks to local realities. It strengthened my research and program design skills and deepened my understanding of implementation science."





Rana Sulieman, interning remotely from the U.S., found valuable lessons in global health work within complex political environments:

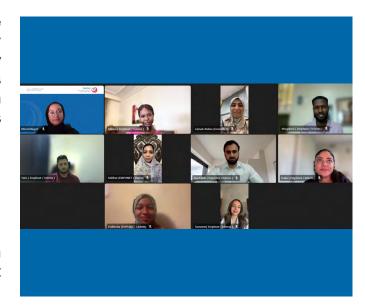
"My time at EMPHNET helped me grow in resilience and reaffirmed my commitment to supporting communities facing instability."

Since its inception, several Engage alumni have transitioned into full-time roles within EMPHNET or other public health organizations, demonstrating the program's success in translating training into employability and regional workforce development.

A Platform for the Next Generation

Public health internship programs like Engage are more than training opportunities, they are investments in the future of health. They prepare students to meet real-world challenges with skill and empathy, equip professionals with mentorship experience, and provide institutions with the workforce needed to sustain and strengthen health systems.

For funders and partners, supporting such programs means contributing to the long-term stability of the regional public health workforce. For students and young professionals, it is an opportunity to step confidently into a field that changes lives, including their own.





"Joining EMPHNET is a choice of heart and conviction: to learn, share, and act in the face of health and humanitarian emergencies through the One Health approach.

Nisreen Abukashawa

- Public Health Emergency Management Intern



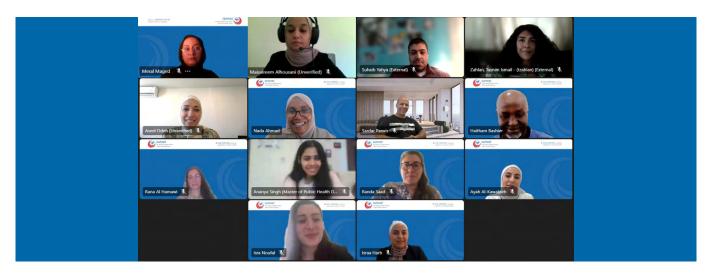
Hear from Our Community!

Listen to our alumni, employees, and current interns as they share how Engage is shaping the next generation of public health leaders.



Celebrations

Engage Internship Program Celebrates the Graduation of Cycles 1 and 2 of 2025



EMPHNET celebrated the graduation of Cycles 1 and 2 of 2025 from its Engage Internship Program on August 28, 2025, held online. The ceremony brought together interns, mentors, and EMPHNET's team to highlight the achievements and experiences of this new group of public health professionals.

Learning Beyond the Classroom

The ceremony opened with welcoming words from Dr. Nada Ahmad, Director of the Center of Communication and Health Promotion (CCHP), who congratulated the graduates and reflected on the program's growth since its launch.

"It is always inspiring to see new faces at the start of their journey," she said. "What makes this program stand out is its ability to bridge classroom learning with real-world public health practice. Many of our alumni are now working in health systems and NGOs across the region, while others have joined EMPHNET itself."

Dr. Nada thanked the mentors for their commitment and encouraged the graduates to carry forward the values and skills they gained through the program, describing the internship as "a platform, a network, and a community that grows stronger with every new cycle."

Engage in Numbers and Impact

Providing an overview of the cycles, Ms. Meral Al-Gunaid, Engage Program Coordinator and Senior Communication Officer, highlighted the diversity of this round. From over 400 applications, eight interns were selected to join EMPHNET's technical teams, working across Polio and Routine Immunization, One Health, Research and Policy, Project Management, Workforce Capacity, and the Public Health Emergency Management Center.

Throughout their internships, the interns contributed to literature reviews, data analysis, research papers, webinars, and reports, gaining practical experience in public health.

Intern Voices: Experiences that Shape Futures

The highlight of the ceremony was the interns' reflections and presentations, where they shared their key learnings, challenges, and proudest achievements.



Aseel Odeh, who interned at the Public Health Emergency Management Center, described her experience as a "deep dive into real-world public health." She supported the drafting a proposal for Afghanistan, developed a research paper on humanitarian aid and emergency response, and contributed to EMPHNET's One Health webinar series.

"This internship enhanced my understanding of emergency management planning and strengthened my applied research skills," she said. "It taught me how to balance multiple responsibilities within tight deadlines and adapt quickly to new research frameworks."



Maisalreem Alhousani, One Health Intern, contributed to the EPHERGE Report Project and developed a scoping review guide on One Health surveillance.

"I gained new knowledge about the One Health field and developed skills in data visualization using R and Power BI," she shared. "It was a great opportunity to broaden my perspective in epidemiological research and learn from real-world data."



Nour Obeidat, interning with Project Management Office, supported the Women's Cancer in Iraq project and some polio projects, contributing to report writing, work plan updates, and proposal development.

"I strengthened my project management skills and learned to coordinate with different stakeholders," she said. "Using new tools like Microsoft Project was challenging at first, but with guidance and practice, it became a valuable learning experience."



Ananya Singh, interning with the Polio and Routine Immunization team, conducted a qualitative literature review on migration and vaccination challenges among mobile populations in Afghanistan, contributing to policy-relevant insights.

"The internship helped me connect theory with real-world policy," she said. "It strengthened my ability to analyze complex health problems in low-resource settings."



Suhaib Yehya, who interned with the Research and Policy team, collaborated with his mentor on a manuscript that was later published in Frontiers in Public Health, titled Multisectoral Coordination in Public Health: Insights from the 8th EMPHNET Regional Conference.

"Being part of a published paper was a remarkable experience," he said. "This internship improved my data analysis and communication skills and gave me confidence to pursue academic research further."



Tasnim Ibrahim, also a Research and Policy intern, contributed to the MARIA Project on integrating mental health and reproductive health services.

"I learned how to conduct public health research in Arabic and how to strengthen mental health resources for postpartum women," she shared. "It was challenging but deeply meaningful to contribute to such an important topic."

Mentorship, Reflection, and the Path Forward

Following the presentations, participants discussed lessons learned and shared recommendations to enhance the internship experience such as increasing peer learning opportunities and more interactive sessions among interns.

In her closing remarks, Dr. Nada congratulated the graduates and thanked mentors for their continued support. She encouraged the interns to remain connected through the Engage Alumni Network, emphasizing that each of them is now part of a growing community of young professionals driving public health action across the region.

"You are not only graduates of this program," she said, "you are ambassadors of EMPHNET and of the values we stand for...commitment, collaboration, and impact."

A Program that Continues to Grow

With the graduation of Cycles 1 and 2 of 2025, EMPHNET continues to strengthen the Engage Internship Program as an accredited and mentorship-driven platform. Each cycle adds new stories of learning, collaboration, and professional growth, stories that reflect EMPHNET's mission to build a skilled and connected public health workforce for the region and beyond.

Spotlight

From Intern to Employee

Aseel Odeh's Journey of Growth and Purpose

As part of our ongoing effort to highlight the success of Engage Internship Program alumni, we spoke with Aseel Odeh, a former intern who is now part of EMPHNET's team. Her story reflects how the program empowers young professionals to transform learning into impactful public health careers.

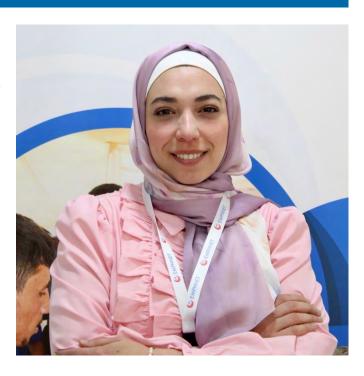
When Aseel Odeh joined the Public Health Emergency Management Center (PHEMC) at EMPHNET as an intern in early 2025, she described her experience as "a deep dive into real-world public health." What began as a learning opportunity soon became a turning point, one that shaped her professional identity and opened a path toward meaningful impact.

A Dynamic Start

"When I first joined EMPHNET, I was impressed by how dynamic and multidisciplinary the environment was," Aseel recalls. "There was a strong sense of collaboration, and I could see how theory constantly translated into real-world action."

At first, Aseel felt both excited and challenged. Working on projects such as the Pandemic Fund proposal and a research paper on the decolonization of humanitarian aid introduced her to the complex realities of public health, from emergency response to strategic coordination. These experiences gave her a deeper understanding of how evidence-based planning supports national preparedness and how fairness, inclusion, and local representation are essential to effective global health.

"As I became more involved, my confidence grew," she said. "EMPHNET evolved from



being just a learning platform to a place that empowers young professionals to contribute meaningfully to public health systems."

A Mentor's Guidance

Aseel credits her mentor, Dr. Haitham Bashier, Director of PHEMC, with helping her develop a more analytical mindset. "He taught me to think beyond the task itself," she said. "He challenged me to justify my ideas and look at the bigger picture, while his trust gave me the confidence to take ownership of my work."

One defining moment for Aseel was working on the Decolonizing of the Humanitarian Aid project. "As someone from the Global South, the topic resonated deeply, it wasn't just academic, it was personal. Realizing that my contribution could help highlight the need for more inclusive global health discussions made me feel empowered and proud to represent my region."

Transitioning into a New Role

After completing her internship, Aseel joined EMPHNET's Public Health Programs Department, continuing to build on the skills and insights she gained. "The transition was both exciting and challenging," she reflected. "It pushed me to take on greater responsibility and make independent decisions."

She believes the internship prepared her for this shift by teaching her essential professional values such as strategic thinking, adaptability, and teamwork. "Public health is fast-moving," she said. "You need to be flexible and proactive while maintaining focus on your goals."

Aseel also describes her journey as one of finding her voice. "It means learning to speak up with confidence, to contribute ideas even when surrounded by people with more experience," she shared. "At EMPHNET, I found an environment that listens, encourages, and challenges you to grow."

Looking Ahead

Now, Aseel's work in disease control continues to expand her understanding of the link between preparedness and prevention. "Every number, every case represents a person, a family, and a community," she said. "Real preparedness begins with awareness, care, and prevention."

By the Numbers

To date, **16%** of Engage Alumni, that's **18** out of **111** interns, have gone on to secure positions within EMPHNET.

A strong reflection of the program's success in nurturing talent and building a skilled public health workforce.

As she looks ahead, Aseel hopes to help strengthen systems that protect people before crises occur. "My goal is to contribute to building a region that is ready to respond to emergencies but also one that is resilient, informed, and compassionate in its approach to health."

Her Message to Future Interns

"Be curious and proactive," Aseel advises. "Don't wait for opportunities to come to you, ask questions, volunteer for projects, and treat feedback as a gift. EMPHNET is full of people who want to help you grow, but you need to show initiative. That's how growth starts here."

Aseel's journey from intern to employee reflects the very spirit of the Engage Internship Program, a space where learning turns into leadership, and where every young professional finds the opportunity to grow, contribute, and make a lasting difference in public health.



Mentorship Corner

From Intern to Mentor

Rana Alhamawi's Journey of Growth and Guidance

As part of our ongoing effort to highlight the mentorship experiences within the Engage Internship Program and celebrate those who continue to contribute to its success, this edition features Ms. Rana Alhamawi. Previously spotlighted as an Engage intern and later as an intern-turned-employee at EMPHNET, Rana's journey now comes full circle as she takes on a new role... that of a mentor. Her story exemplifies how the program nurtures growth, fosters leadership, and inspires former interns to guide the next generation of public health professionals.

When Rana joined EMPHNET's Engage Internship Program in 2021, she could not have imagined that a few years later, she would return, not as an intern, but as a mentor. Her story reflects the program's mission in its purest form: nurturing young professionals to grow into leaders who shape the next generation of public health practitioners and, in turn, give back by guiding others along the same path.

From Learning to Leading

Reflecting on her journey, Rana shares:

"Engage played a significant role in shaping both my personal and professional growth. It strengthened my technical skills and deepened my understanding of public health issues and research methodologies, while also building my confidence, communication, and teamwork abilities."

What began as an opportunity to apply classroom knowledge to real-world projects soon became a launchpad for professional



maturity. The internship exposed her to EMPHNET's work culture and broadened her understanding of how public health programs operate in complex and dynamic contexts.

Now a Senior Technical Officer, Rana's transition from intern to mentor feels like a natural progression, a full-circle moment grounded in learning, commitment, and the desire to support others.

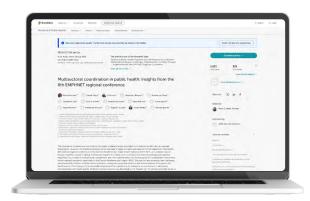
Stepping into Mentorship

Having once been an intern herself, Rana understood the importance of guidance early in one's career. Her decision to become a mentor was rooted in wanting to offer the same support she once received.

"As an employee, I had the opportunity to contribute to various public health projects

across low- and middle-income countries, as well as in conflict-affected settings. These experiences improved my communication and coordination skills and taught me the importance of teamwork and adaptability. I wanted to pass that knowledge forward."

Her first mentee, Suhaib Yehya, joined the Research and Policy team, working on the Integrating Mental Health into Postpartum Health Care Services project. Under Rana's mentorship, he explored postpartum depression, conducted a scoping review, and co-authored a viewpoint published from the Eighth EMPHNET Regional Conference "Multisectoral Coordination in Public Health: Insights from the 8th EMPHNET Regional Conference."



"Mentoring him was particularly meaningful," Rana says. "Having gone through the same experience myself, I could anticipate his challenges and help him navigate them effectively."

Seeing Growth Through Another's Eyes

For Rana, the most rewarding part of mentorship was watching her mentee's progress.

"Seeing him achieve his objectives, grow more confident, and apply new skills in research and analysis was deeply rewarding. It's a reminder of why mentorship matters... it multiplies knowledge and builds capacity that lasts far beyond a single project."

Did You Know?

Nearly 28% of Engage Alumni who became EMPHNET employees have now stepped into mentorship roles, continuing the cycle of learning and leadership by guiding the next generation of interns.

Balancing Roles and Responsibilities

While rewarding, Rana admits that balancing mentorship with her technical duties can be challenging. Yet, she views it as an investment worth making.

"Mentoring requires time and effort, but it's worth it. It's about ensuring that young professionals receive the guidance and confidence they need to succeed."

Through mentorship, she refined her own leadership and communication style, one that is grounded in empathy, listening, and adaptability.

"It taught me to communicate purposefully, to tailor my guidance to each person's strengths, and to lead with clarity. Mentorship is a continuous learning process for both sides."

Advice for Future Interns and Mentors

Drawing from her experience, Rana offers advice to current and aspiring interns:

"Success comes to those who are hardworking, curious, and open to learning. Don't be afraid to take initiative or make mistakes, they're part of the process."

Rana added that if she could speak to her "intern self" today, she would say:

"You're on the right path. Keep learning, stay persistent, and trust that every challenge is

shaping the professional you're meant to become."

A Journey That Comes Full Circle

Looking back, Rana credits the Engage Program for giving her the foundation to grow into her current role.

"It played a significant role in my professional growth, from providing early exposure to public health projects to teaching me leadership and research skills that continue to guide my work today."

Her story is more than one of professional success; it's a testament to continuity, how an intern's curiosity can evolve into mentorship, creating a ripple effect that strengthens public health capacity across the region.



Through mentors like Rana, Engage continues to build not just skilled professionals, but a community grounded in growth, empathy, and shared purpose, as well as inspire both new interns and emerging leaders to invest in one another and carry the spirit of public health forward.



What Our Interns and Alumni Are Doing

In this section, we spotlight recent activities, achievements, and events that our Engage interns and alumni have been part of, reflecting their continued growth and contribution to public health.

Ananya Singh, an Engage alumna who interned with the Polio and Routine Immunization Team, visited EMPHNET's headquarters, where she met with Dr. Magid Al-Gunaid, EMPHNET's Deputy Director and Director of Public Health Programs and talked about her experience and future plans.





Ameera Ba-Fadhel, an Engage intern with the Polio and Routine Immunization Team, participated in a consultative workshop organized by EMPHNET in collaboration with Yemen's Ministry of Public Health and Population. The workshop focused on developing a roadmap and policy brief for the introduction and scale-up of the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, guided by evidence from a desk review assessing Yemen's cervical cancer burden, a project Ameera has been contributing to over the past several months.

Aseel Odeh, an Engage alumna who interned with the Public Health Emergency Management Center (PHEMC) and is now part of EMPHNET's team, presented her work titled "Decolonizing Humanitarian Response and Health Emergency Management: Reflections from the Eastern Mediterranean Region" during EMPHNET's Monthly Technical Day (MTD) in June.





Aws Rababah, currently interning with the Center of Excellence for Applied Epidemiology (CEAE), joined field visits to primary healthcare centers in Jordan as part of the Family Practice Approach Project, implemented in collaboration with the Jordanian Ministry of Health (MoH) and WHO. The team conducted assessments to evaluate the readiness of facilities for the implementation of this approach.

Dalia Habash, a Polio and Routine Immunization intern, participated in the Regional Evidence-to-Recommendations (EtR) Training for the Introduction of the Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) Vaccine, held in Amman in July 2025, where she supported the event.





Diego Licona, a One Health intern, presented during EMPHNET's MTD in November, sharing insights from his work with the University of Geneva through his presentation "Cross-Sectoral Mapping of Humanitarian Action in Climate-Stressed and Fragile Settings: Operationalizing 'Humanitarian One Health.'"

Edward Gharayeb, an Engage alumnus from the Workforce Capacity Team, took part in a workshop hosted at EMPHNET HQ in Amman, organized for participants of the Royal Medical Services Applied Epidemiology Program, where outbreak case studies were discussed.





Tasnim Ibrahim, an Engage alumna from the Research and Policy Team, participated in field visits to camps in Mafraq as part of the MARIA Project (Mental and Reproductive Health Integration & Access). The team conducted multiple focus group discussions with postpartum women, their husbands, and healthcare providers at Al Khaldieyeh Health Center that Tasneem was part of.

Tasneem Meree, interning with the Project Management Office at EMPHNET's Country Office in Cairo, attended meetings with the Egypt Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) and WHO in August, and later presented the Engage Internship Program during the FETP Exchange Program Meeting held in September, alongside representatives from Iraq FETP, WHO, and MoHP.



Announcements

Engage Alumni Network: Strengthening Connections Beyond the Internship

As the Engage Internship Program continues to nurture the region's next generation of public health professionals, its impact doesn't end with graduation, it evolves.

To sustain the momentum of learning, growth, and collaboration, EMPHNET is launching the Engage Alumni Network, a dedicated community designed to keep our alumni connected, supported, and inspired long after their internship journey concludes.

Hosted on LinkedIn, the Engage Alumni Network serves as more than just a social space. It is a dynamic community of practice where alumni can connect, exchange insights, and collaborate on meaningful initiatives. Members will have access to curated resources, webinars, training opportunities, and job openings, and will also be featured across EMPHNET's communication channels to highlight their achievements and contributions to public health.

The network isn't just a community; it's a continuation of the Engage experience. Alumni are encouraged to collaborate, exchange insights, and even mentor future interns, creating a cycle of continuous growth and leadership.

By joining the Engage Alumni Network, graduates remain part of a vibrant and supportive ecosystem that values their journey, nurtures their professional growth, and celebrates their success.

Once an Engage intern, always part of the Engage community, where learning evolves into leadership, and every connection opens a new opportunity to make an impact.



GHD|EMPHNET: Working Together for Better Health

The Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network (EMPHNET) is a regional network that focuses on strengthening public health systems in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) and beyond. EMPHNET works in partnership with ministries of health, non-government organizations, international agencies, private sector, and relevant institutions from the region and the globe to promote public health and applied epidemiology. To advance the work of EMPHNET, Global Health Development (GHD) was initiated to build coordination mechanisms with partners and collaborators. Together, GHD|EMPHNET is dedicated to serving the region by supporting efforts to promote public health policies, strategic planning, sustainable financing, resource mobilization, public health programs, and other related areas.

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