

Joint Statement from EMA and EBCOG: Investing in women's health is investing in the future

There are many socio-economic factors that contribute to the health of women, newborns and families across Europe (WHO, European Perinatal Health Report). Factors such as poverty, the availability of healthcare, economic and political forces, and gender issues all impact on the health of women and children. Reduction of the inequality of care provision within the EU is an essential goal.

Access: The situation for unregistered women (illegal immigrants) as a group is of great concern because of the lack of access to healthcare in a number of European countries. We would draw particular attention to the situation of pregnant women, for whom access to healthcare is extremely important. Lack of access to healthcare negatively affects the health of both these women and their babies. Equally important is the lack of knowledge and information about sexuality and reproduction, and the lack of access to contraceptives, good healthcare services, counselling and maternity care. It is of great importance that all women in the EU have the right to free abortion, free contraceptives and when, necessary, access to interpretation services.

Poverty: In many countries people live in poverty and the impact on health outcomes is well documented (SRHC 2010, correct reference). The financial crisis specifically affects women and children living in poor areas where reductions in budgets more negatively impact on the people living in these areas compared to people living in better socio-economic conditions. Due to the heavy workload of healthcare staff in poor areas, the situation also affects the recruitment of healthcare personnel.

Today, healthcare personnel have to care for an increasing number of families living in precarious situations whilst at the same time staffing is generally reduced. In many European countries, health workers and their families are also suffering from the negative impacts of the economic crisis.

The whole world is working for a reduction of maternal and perinatal mortality (MDG 4 and 5). To achieve these goals, it is of great importance that countries in Europe honor their commitment to provide funding for MDG 4 and 5.

The manner in which society deals with women and their health can be taken as an indicator of the level of progress in society. We would therefore urge policy-makers within Europe, when deciding and implementing health care policies, to be aware of the impact of the inequalities in sexual and reproductive health on women.

The financial crisis is affecting Europe and services are in danger of being cut. Sexual and reproductive health services are a real investment in the future and we would call upon

governments and policy-makers to maintain their support for, and particularly their investment in, sexual and reproductive health services and systems in Europe.