



ALLIANCE FOR  
MATERNAL  
HEALTH  
EQUALITY

- MANIFESTO -

## Alliance for Maternal Health Equality Making Maternal Health Equity a Universal Reality in Europe by 2020

**THE ALLIANCE FOR MATERNAL HEALTH EQUALITY** brings together key actors at EU and national level to work towards ensuring that policies exist and are implemented to deliver equity of access to quality maternal health at all levels. It aims to ensure:

1. UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO QUALITY MATERNAL HEALTHCARE ACROSS THE EU
2. FOCUSING ON REAL LIFE SITUATIONS AND ON CLEARER STATISTICS
3. CREATING A FAVOURABLE ENVIRONMENT TO EMPOWER WOMEN TO MAKE CHOICES

Maternal mortality is often seen solely as a problem for the developing world. However, in a Europe of ageing populations and decreasing birth rates that struggles to build resilient and effective health systems, too many women still die during pregnancy and childbirth. With more than five million births each year, and two million failed pregnancies, maternal deaths in Europe often reach up to 1000 cases on the continent<sup>1</sup>.

In an EU of free movement and differing health systems, the gaps in access to care, medicines and health literacy are even further straining the already existing connection between maternal mortality and health inequalities. Strikingly, statistics show that 1 in 10 women in Europe do not have access to care during the first months of their pregnancy<sup>2</sup>.

And while all women living in Europe have the fundamental right of equitable access to high quality healthcare, it is often mothers, regardless of their status who face challenges in accessing healthcare. The issue is multi-faceted, capturing the problematics of female empowerment, access to healthcare but also the need for greater focus on the everyday, real-life statistics and numbers, often lacking when it comes to uptake of maternal healthcare in Europe.

We therefore call upon the political groups within the European Parliament, MEPs, national representatives in EU Member States, as well as the European Commission, to commit to the legitimate rights and needs of women in Europe, regardless of socio-economic or legal status and to make our proposals their priority.

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<sup>1</sup> EURO-PERISTAT Project, European Perinatal Report, 2008, p.94:  
<http://www.europeristat.com/images/doc/EPHR/european-perinatal-health-report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> European Women's Lobby (EWL), Factsheet on Women and Health, April 2015:  
[http://www.womenlobby.org/spip.php?action=acceder\\_document&arg=4238&cle=60c8d7ee6f92fc58b53873cd67591c17ccbcb29e&file=pdf%2Ffactsheet\\_women\\_and\\_health.pdf](http://www.womenlobby.org/spip.php?action=acceder_document&arg=4238&cle=60c8d7ee6f92fc58b53873cd67591c17ccbcb29e&file=pdf%2Ffactsheet_women_and_health.pdf)

## UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO QUALITY MATERNAL HEALTH ACROSS EUROPE

1. We call on policymakers to ensure that the United Nations Agenda 2030, within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), **Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages** is applied and integrated within the European context, therefore respecting the enshrined universality of these goals. With more than five million births each year, and two million failed pregnancies, maternal deaths in Europe often reach up to 1000 cases on the continent<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, approximately 25,000 babies are stillborn in the EU each year.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the current SDGs need to be applied within a European context as well as globally:
  - a. **3.1** “By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births”<sup>5</sup>
  - b. **3.2** “By 2030, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1000 live births”<sup>6</sup>
  - c. **3.8** “Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all”<sup>7</sup>
2. We call on policymakers at EU and national levels to set policies and regulations in place which ensure the lowering of perinatal mortality rates, namely by focusing on:
  - Addressing the need for perinatal health indicators and extending the efforts made in this sphere so far, such as through projects like the 2001 *PERISTAT - Indicators for monitoring and evaluating perinatal health in Europe*, as well as the 2005 *EURONEOSTAT - European Information System to Monitor Short and Long-Term Morbidity to Improve Quality of Care and Patient-Safety for Very-Low-Birth-Weight Infants*
  - At the UN level, taking a proactive stance in light of the universal character of the SDGs, therefore making the EU a champion on maternal health both worldwide and within its own Member States (MS)
  - Streamlining maternal mortality into all relevant policy discourse, considering the broad nature of the issue (from equity issues to maternity leave rights, and health literacy).

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<sup>3</sup> EURO-PERISTAT Project, European Perinatal Report, 2008, p.94:

<http://www.europeristat.com/images/doc/EPHR/european-perinatal-health-report.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, Open Working Group proposal for Sustainable Development Goals, p.9:

<https://docs.google.com/gview?url=http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1579SDGs%20Proposal.pdf&embedded=true>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

In today's Europe, particular groups of women are particularly vulnerable to the adverse outcomes of pregnancy and birth – among these are women from the Roma minority, as well as under-aged and migrant mothers<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, out of the 310 pregnant women seen at Doctors of the World clinics in Europe, 54% lacked access to antenatal care, with the majority of them living in poverty<sup>9</sup>.

### FOCUSING ON REAL LIFE SITUATIONS AND ON CLEARER STATISTICS

1. We call on national health authorities and international organisations to measure and instigate systems which can hold health mechanisms to account on equitable and universal access to maternal health in Europe. Such systems should be uniform, in order to allow for meaningful comparisons to the situation in each country.
2. When defining the indicators for the European Semester (Health Country Recommendations), the Health Systems Performance Assessment Framework and European Core Health Indicators, indicators such as perinatal outcomes should be embedded.
3. Factors that go beyond the health sectors must also be taken into consideration in maternal healthcare assessments: those include poverty, nutrition, work and education status, as well as gender inequalities.
4. Proper education on health choices for mothers and their families alike is of high importance, as better health literacy will also improve the better use of health services.

### CREATING A FAVOURABLE ENVIRONMENT TO EMPOWER WOMEN TO MAKE CHOICES

1. Highlighting the need for policies facilitating a more favourable social environment, female empowerment and making an informed decision on motherhood, including making sure that women can benefit from evidence-based risk/benefit assessments in making decisions about their and their children's health alike.
2. Taking into consideration chronic diseases that also affect pregnant women (for example, asthma and diabetes) that may lead to negative outcomes in maternal health.
3. Encouraging a healthier lifestyle before, during and after pregnancy.
4. Facilitating proper information and knowledge on the safe use of medicines during pregnancy when it comes to chronic conditions such as asthma, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, cancer, therefore removing the negative misconceptions surrounding pregnancy and motherhood whilst being affected by the abovementioned conditions.

*The Alliance for Maternal Health Equality aims to ensure that policies in Europe provide for equitable access to high quality maternal health care for all women, regardless of nationality and background. It is our belief that all improvement begins with a women-centred approach and that any steps taken forward must be sustainable in order to deliver long-term results for the future. With all this in mind, we bring together a core group of partnering EU-level, international, and national public, private and civil society organisations as well as policy makers and health care professionals. Our goal is to raise the issue of maternal health equity and permanently place it on the map of Europe.*

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<sup>8</sup> World Health Organization, Maternal and Newborn Health, Accessed July 29, 2015: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/Life-stages/maternal-and-newborn-health/maternal-and-newborn-health>

<sup>9</sup> Doctors of the World, Access to healthcare for children and pregnant women in Europe 2015, May 2015: [http://b3cdn.net/droftheworld/426949db427014e434\\_q6m6bliru.pdf](http://b3cdn.net/droftheworld/426949db427014e434_q6m6bliru.pdf)