

Resolution 1399 (2004)¹

European strategy for the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The right to protection of health is part of the Council of Europe acquis (Articles 11 and 13 of the Revised European Social Charter). Every individual has the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health, which is defined by the World Health Organization as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being.
2. The right to sexual and reproductive health implies that people are able to enjoy a mutually satisfying and safe relationship, free from coercion or violence and without fear of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/Aids, or unwanted pregnancies. Individuals and couples should be able to regulate their fertility without adverse or dangerous consequences.
3. The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) (Cairo, 1994) and the 4th World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) have put sexual and reproductive rights firmly on the human rights agenda. The objectives of the ICPD Programme of Action have shifted the focus to the needs and rights of the individual.
4. A large number of objectives were adopted in Cairo in 1994 as part of the ICPD Programme of Action. A total of 179 countries pledged to reduce maternal mortality and combat HIV/Aids and to improve people's sexual and reproductive health and rights. The ICPD objectives were further reaffirmed in the Millennium Development Goals, which were adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2000.
5. In 2002 parliamentarians from over seventy countries around the world adopted the Ottawa Statement of Commitment, endorsed by the Parliamentary Assembly in September 2003 and in which they pledged to "give high priority to achieving universal access to reproductive health services and commodities in national health and poverty-reduction frameworks, both in terms of budget allocations and in terms of programme activities".
6. This year, 2004, marks the tenth anniversary of the ICDP Programme of Action. To mark this important benchmark, a review has been initiated by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to assess progress and shortfalls. The Assembly itself has adopted [Resolution 1394 \(2004\)](#) on the involvement of men, especially young men, in reproductive health. This text calls on Council of Europe member and Observer states to involve men and boys in all aspects of sexual and reproductive health, through special awareness-raising and education programmes, and improved access to reproductive health services.
7. Many Council of Europe member states have very high standards of sexual and reproductive health, taking into account indicators such as contraceptive use, HIV/Aids prevalence, abortion rates, maternal and child morbidity and mortality rates. Their experiences can serve as useful examples to other member states in finding solutions to improve the sexual and reproductive health situation in their own countries.

1. Assembly debate on 5 October 2004 (27th Sitting) (see [Doc. 10266](#), report of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Ms McCafferty; and [Doc. 10310](#), opinion of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, rapporteur: Ms Zapfl-Helbling). Text adopted by the Assembly on 5 October 2004 (27th Sitting).



8. However, there is an enormous disparity of standards between member states and even within member states. In many Council of Europe member states there are issues for concern: increase in teenage pregnancies, high rates of STIs including HIV/Aids, rising infertility rates, poor access, availability and affordability of sexual and reproductive health commodities and services and a lack of use thereof, as well as poor relationship and sex education.

9. In many eastern-European countries contraceptive use remains low, leading to unwanted pregnancies; abortion rates in some areas are among the highest in the world as a result of a lack of appropriate sexual and reproductive health information and services. In some member states women are still forced to resort to illegal, backstreet and therefore unsafe abortions.

10. Maternal and child morbidity and mortality and cancers of the reproductive system are issues of great concern in many countries, as is sexual violence and exploitation, including trafficking in human beings.

11. The Assembly calls upon member states to:

11.1. work together to design a European strategy for the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights, and prepare, adopt and implement comprehensive national strategies for sexual and reproductive health which address the following issues:

- a. sexual and reproductive health information and education, especially for children and adolescents; increase in teenage pregnancy rates;
- b. rise in the rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/Aids; infertility;
- c. high abortion rates, including unsafe abortions in the member states where abortion is illegal;
- d. lack of affordable, accessible and available sexual and reproductive health commodities and services;
- e. cancers of the reproductive system, including breast cancer;
- f. sexual violence and exploitation, including trafficking in human beings;
- g. maternal and child morbidity and mortality;

11.2. take all appropriate measures to ensure equality between men and women in all aspects of life, including in relation to access for all to comprehensive sexual and reproductive healthcare services;

11.3. increase STI screening, treatment and voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) for HIV and subsequent treatment for those found to be HIV positive;

11.4. facilitate access to a wide range of affordable contraceptives and services;

11.5. provide age-and gender-appropriate, comprehensive sexual and reproductive information and education;

11.6. respond to the specific needs of young people, with specific reference to safeguarding confidentiality and to appropriate youth-oriented services;

11.7. respond to the specific needs of vulnerable population groups, including migrants, minorities and the rural population;

11.8. take into account the changing sexual and reproductive health needs over a person's life cycle;

11.9. encourage the whole of society, particularly the public sector, and international organisations to adopt, in response to the HIV/Aids issue, humane, constructive and non-discriminatory policies and practices, which protect the rights of individuals who have been infected.

12. In order to attain the above goals, the Assembly encourages member states to:

12.1. work with and support national and regional non-governmental organisations and the private sector in the formulation and implementation of national strategies for sexual and reproductive health;

12.2. engage in dialogue with young people and vulnerable population groups in the formulation of appropriate strategies and programmes, which respond to these groups' sexual and reproductive health needs;

12.3. encourage the creation, in national parliaments, of mechanisms and structures which tackle the sexual and reproductive health situation, in the national context, such as all-party parliamentary groups;

12.4. provide appropriate funding in national health budgets to achieve these objectives.