



Resolution 1829 (2011)¹

Final version

Prenatal sex selection

Parliamentary Assembly

1. A preference for sons and discrimination against women are so widespread in the world that, spontaneously or under pressure, millions of women decide not to give birth to daughters, who are considered as a burden for their family and unable to perpetuate the family lineage.

2. Sex selection is a huge problem in some Asian countries, where the selective abortion of females, together with the killing of female newborns has been practised for decades. Prenatal sex selection is indicated by a “skewed sex ratio”, meaning a departure from the natural average sex ratio at birth of 105 boys for 100 girls. This tends to increase as the number of children goes up in a family, or when there are legal or economic restrictions to the size of the family.

3. There is strong evidence that prenatal sex selection is not limited to Asia. In recent years, a departure from the natural sex ratio at birth has been observed in a number of Council of Europe member states and has reached worrying proportions in Albania, Armenia and Azerbaijan, where the sex ratio at birth is 112 boys for 100 girls and in Georgia where it is 111 boys for 100 girls.

4. The Parliamentary Assembly condemns the practice of prenatal sex selection as a phenomenon which finds its roots in a culture of gender inequality and reinforces a climate of violence against women, contrary to the values upheld by the Council of Europe.

5. Recalling the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210), the Assembly believes that the social and family pressure placed on women not to pursue their pregnancy because of the sex of the embryo/foetus is to be considered as a form of psychological violence and that the practice of forced abortions is to be criminalised.

6. The Assembly wishes to warn Council of Europe member states against the social consequences of prenatal sex selection, namely population imbalances which are likely to create difficulties for men to find spouses, lead to serious human rights violations such as forced prostitution, trafficking for the purposes of marriage or sexual exploitation, and contribute to a rise in criminality and social unrest.

7. In line with the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Dignity of the Human Being with regard to the Application of Biology and Medicine: Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine (ETS No. 164), the Assembly believes that, in the context of assisted reproduction technologies such as preimplantation genetic diagnosis, prenatal sex selection should be resorted to only to avoid serious hereditary diseases linked to one sex.

8. In view of these considerations, the Assembly calls on the member states to:

8.1. collect the sex ratio at birth, monitor its development and take prompt action to tackle possible imbalances;

8.2. encourage research on sex ratios at birth among specific communities;

1. Assembly debate on 3 October 2011 (29th Sitting) (see Doc. 12715, report of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, rapporteur: Ms Stump; and Doc. 12727, opinion of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Xuclà i Costa). Text adopted by the Assembly on 3 October 2011 (29th Sitting). See also Recommendation 1979 (2011).



- 8.3. collect data on sex selection in the context of the use of all techniques of medically assisted procreation;
 - 8.4. promote research on the causes of prenatal sex selection and its social consequences;
 - 8.5. encourage national ethics bodies to elaborate and introduce guidelines for medical staff, discouraging prenatal sex selection by whatever method, unless justified for the prevention of serious sex-linked genetic diseases;
 - 8.6. recommend that all relevant public authorities issue guidelines to all medical staff who work in this field so that when information is provided on the sex of the foetus – in line with existing legal regulations – such information is presented positively, irrespective of the sex;
 - 8.7. introduce legislation with a view to prohibiting sex selection in the context of assisted reproduction technologies and legal abortion, except when it is justified to avoid a serious hereditary disease;
 - 8.8. report back to the Council of Europe in January 2015 on the effect of the measures in this paragraph.
9. In addition, the Assembly calls on the authorities of Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia to:
- 9.1. investigate the causes and reasons behind skewed sex ratios at birth;
 - 9.2. step up their efforts to raise the status of women in society and ensure effective implementation of laws and policies on gender equality and non-discrimination;
 - 9.3. ensure the collection of reliable data on sex ratios at birth, including in different geographical areas within the same country, and ensure monitoring of their evolution;
 - 9.4. organise and/or support the organisation of public awareness-raising initiatives and campaigns on prenatal sex selection and its harmful consequences, involving relevant international organisations, including the Council of Europe;
 - 9.5. monitor and analyse the impact of campaigns, laws and policies and, first and foremost, the implementation of laws and policies on gender equality;
 - 9.6. organise and support training for medical staff on prenatal sex selection and its harmful consequences.
10. The Assembly encourages the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to strengthen their work on combating prenatal sex selection.
11. It also recommends that the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women look at the issue of prenatal sex selection, in general as a phenomenon which stems and reinforces discrimination against women, and more specifically when reviewing the situation in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.