



ALLIANCE FOR  
MATERNAL  
HEALTH  
EQUALITY

- FACT SHEET -

## There is a public health and rights-based approach need for Europe-facing policy action on maternal health equity



More than **5 million women** give birth in Europe each year however 1 in 10 do not have access to maternal health services during the first months of pregnancy



There were an estimated **1900 maternal deaths** in 2013 in Europe



Out of **8,656 surveyed women** 54% of the 310 pregnant women seen at Doctors of the World clinics in 9 European countries lacked access to antenatal care and a large majority were living in poverty

### Background

Maternal mortality is often seen as a problem for the developing world alone. However, in a Europe of ageing populations that struggles to build resilient and effective health systems, too many women still die during pregnancy and childbirth.

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. And while all women living in Europe have the fundamental right of equitable access to high quality healthcare, it is often mothers from vulnerable groups that are the first to face the reality of limited access to proper treatment, information and resources before, during and after pregnancy regardless of legal status who face the most challenges in accessing maternal 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 health care in Europe

Women's economic, social and health wellbeing is crucial for a prosperous society.

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.

## About the Alliance FAQ

### What is the Alliance for Maternal Health Equality?

The Alliance for Maternal Health Equality is an issues-based coalition in formation to ensure that policies are in place in Europe so all women have equitable access to maternal health care regardless of ethnic background, nationality or socio-economic status.

### Who can become a member of the Alliance?

The Alliance is open to EU level, international, and national organisations from the public, private and civil society sectors as well as health care professional societies and policy makers.

### What sort of Membership is there?

The Alliance has 3 types of members:

#### **1) Standard membership**

Standard members are organisations from different stakeholder groups who have a proven affinity with the Alliance objectives (as stated in our Manifesto). They actively contribute to developing the Alliance's strategy and annual programmes of work, as well as through feeding in their own activities (such as reports, conferences, research) into the Alliance agenda.

#### **2) Observer membership**

Typically taken up by international organisations such as the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). Observer member organisations can fully participate in agenda setting activities by providing guidance and advice through their expertise. While benefiting from the full rights of membership, due to their nature as representative of a neutral, expert environment, they opt to remain as observers, while otherwise being fully committed and supportive of the cause.

#### **3) Core founders**

These are the original members of the Alliance, also providing funding. Currently founding partner is MSD for Mothers – an initiative aimed at reducing maternal mortality worldwide. A founding partner of the Alliance for Maternal Health Equality, MSD for Mothers stands fully behind its values and causes and is providing funding for its activities.

*It is important to note that while the core founding status demonstrates strong support for this initiative, all members have equal standing in sessions, discussions and decisions.*

## Why is there a need for an Alliance on Maternal Health Equality?

### Public Health systems approach

- Currently health systems across Europe are undergoing **extensive reforms** (EC, *COM(2014) 215 final*, 2014) in order to cope with the realities of an aging population, constrained budgets and to a lesser extent, the impact of the implementation of the **Cross Border Healthcare Directive**
- **Health Systems Performance Assessment** metrics (including perinatal care) have been identified by the EC as part of its EU agenda for effective, accessible and resilient health systems (EC, *COM(2014) 215 final*, 2014)
- **Maternal mortality in Europe** is less of an issue than in the developing countries. But even in the most medically advanced nations, too many women die during pregnancy and/or childbirth. There are still persisting differences amongst European countries:
  - Highest neonatal and infant mortalities in Malta, Romania and Poland (European Perinatal Health Report, 2013)
  - Fetal mortality rates are higher in France, Latvia, UK, Romania and in the Brussels region in Belgium (European Perinatal Health Report, 2013)
  - Overall, in the EU perinatal mortality cases are often preventable and highly dependent on social factors (EC, Health Indicators)
- The **link between maternal health/ mortality and health inequalities** has long since been established. In the EU context, the reasons can include the impact of EU legislation such as the Freedom of Movement (patients, citizens, professionals and goods) in terms of **access to care and medicines, discrimination and health literacy**

### Rights-based approach

- Women are 'a critical foundation for the sustainable society into which they are integrated' (UNFPA 2005)
- Efforts on 'education, maternal health, and economic opportunities benefitting women and children have an immediate as well as long term beneficial impact' (World Bank 2001)
- Equal access to high quality (maternal) health care should be a fundamental right for all women living within the European Union regardless of nationality or background (EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, 2000). However, the realities are that access to high quality care is highly varied across EU Member States.

## What are the main priorities for the Alliance?

1. **Access to maternal healthcare for all, especially in fringe cases of minority and migrant mothers.**

No mother should be excluded from receiving proper, **high quality healthcare** before, during and after pregnancy. The Alliance believes that this should be an encompassing rule, aimed at every mother (underage and minor mothers included), especially in a Europe without borders but with differing health systems. Because of this, we highlight the need for actively streamlining maternal health into all policies: from employment (e.g. – maternity leave) to mobility (e.g. – cross border health issues, the need for holistic approach to migration). Additionally, it is also necessary to create a greater focus on maternal health within the broader EU-related health policies, especially in light of the European Commission's focus on building resilient healthcare systems, health literacy and access to healthcare. As maternal health touches upon numerous issues, failing to connect it with the broader EU policy discourse will inevitably expand the gap of inequalities that mothers in Europe are facing right now.

## 2. Policies facilitating a more favourable social environment, female empowerment and making an informed decision on motherhood.

In a Europe of increased mobility, all mothers need to be able to make an informed choice about their health, their rights and their own future. However, within 28 Member States with differing healthcare policies, this can often be an issue, therefore limiting women's opportunities for making an informed decision, as well as for enjoying their rights as expecting or new mothers. When it comes to maternal health in Europe, frequently '*mother knows best*' is not the case.

With this in mind, our second priority cluster aims to highlight that while often there are some provisions for receiving high quality maternal healthcare *on paper* there is a great need to inform mothers, especially when taking into consideration external factors for their wellbeing and possibility of exercising their rights. As a woman facing partner violence or pregnancy as a minor, the need for clear information is of crucial importance. The topic is broad: it includes issues from family planning measures and early sensitisation on sexual and reproductive rights, to ensuring that the linguistic barrier between a woman and her healthcare provider in another country is easy to overcome.

## 3. Focus on evidence – what is the reality for many mothers in Europe in terms of health?

Motherhood is usually a celebrated moment of life and the mother as the pillar of a family is a frequently used symbol in media and in society. However, this is often not the reality, with mothers suffering from complications, lack of knowledge and failure to exercise their rights. However, there is not a lot of data on the matter, which means that numerous problems on maternal health remain hidden. It is our goal to bring the issue back on the table, focusing on real life situations and people but also on clearer statistics: providing quality evidence is necessary for pushing for a change on the current status quo.

## Who provides the day-to-day running of the Alliance?

The Synergist is a social enterprise-incubator for private-public-people partnerships (4P), founded in 2013 and building on the principle of shared value. It identifies social causes that could benefit from a 4P approach and designs and implements projects to make this happen. Learn more in its annual report: <http://www.thesynergist.org/annual-report/>

It provides the Expert Secretariat for the Alliance for Maternal Health Equality.

## How is the Alliance funded?

The Alliance and its Expert Secretariat currently receives seed funding from MSD for Mothers. The Alliance Expert Secretariat accepts unrestricted grant funding from philanthropic grant-making organisations, international institutions and economic actors.

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