

Press release

Alarming figures on prematurity

First ever worldwide estimates of preterm birth rates by country published today

Munich - 2nd May 2012 - The numbers speak for themselves: Each year, some 15 million babies in the world, more than one in 10 births, are born too early, according to the just released report "*Born Too Soon: The Global Action Report on Preterm Birth*". More than one million of those babies die shortly after birth; countless others suffer some type of lifelong physical, neurological, or educational disability, often at great cost to families and societies.

The report explains what is known about preterm birth, its causes, and the kinds of care that are needed and offers a detailed plan for the actions needed to reduce both the death toll and the numbers of preterm births. It was published by The World Health Organization (WHO), The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health as well as the organisations Save the Children and The March of Dimes Foundation and represents almost 50 United Nations agencies, universities, and organizations, amongst others also the European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants (EFCNI).

Prematurity: a growing trend for Europe

In an environment of demographic change and rising fiscal constraints, maternal and newborn health should become key to the future sustainability of health and social care systems, next to topics like chronic diseases and healthy and active ageing: In 2010, EFCNI published a data collection on prevention, treatment and care of preterm infants in Europe. (*EU Benchmarking Report 2009/2010 „Too Little, Too Late?“*). According to the findings of this report, the number of preterm births is rising: each year, about 500,000 babies are born too soon in Europe. Prevalence of preterm birth varies across the countries and ranges between 5.5 and 11.4%, representing an average 7.1% for the region. "*EFCNI highly welcomes the publication of "Born too Soon". The report calls attention to the risks and problems associated with preterm birth, which is the single biggest and often preventable, cause of infant mortality and morbidity in both developed and developing countries.*" says Silke Mader, co-editor of the report and Chairwoman and founding member of EFCNI. "*Thousands of infant deaths, chronic diseases and other medical conditions related to preterm birth could be prevented through effective, well organized and targeted maternal and newborn care and aftercare services.*"

Prematurity: a policy priority in Europe?

Despite the rising number of preterm births in Europe and the related risks for long-term complications which can impact a child's health and development well beyond the neonatal period into adulthood, there is a general lack of European-wide accepted standards of care for maternal and newborn health. Neither the EU nor most of its member states identify prematurity and neonatal care as a policy priority. "*Pre-conceptional health of women, healthy pregnancies and high-quality treatment and care from the moment of birth play an important role in determining the outcome of a baby. Specialisation and increased coordination of neonatal healthcare, from prevention to family-centred developmental care and aftercare services, are crucial. Urgent policy action in this field is needed to improve access and quality of healthcare for this vulnerable population.*" says Dr. Matthias Keller, co-author of "*Born too Soon*", founding member of EFCNI and Medical Director at Passau Children's Hospital Dritter Orden.

In order to give maternal and newborn health in Europe the visibility and attention it deserves, Dr. Angelika Niebler, Member of the European Parliament, and her colleague, Dr. Peter Liese, founded a parliamentary interest group on this topic in 2011: "*As patron of EFCNI it is of particular importance to me that equal and effective, high-quality neonatal care and better prevention are provided. We should be investing more in research, preventive care, diagnostics and treatment, to protect and promote the health of the new generation. Europe's children are the future of our society.*"

Last November, EFCNI together with the European Parliament Interest Group on Maternal and Neonatal Health launched “***Caring for Tomorrow- the EFCNI White Paper on Maternal and Newborn Health and Aftercare Services*** and the 10 points ***Call to Action for Newborn Health***. The White Paper was initiated by EFCNI and national parents' organisations to contribute to discussions about the delivery of high-quality pre-conceptional, maternal, and newborn care, as well as aftercare services for parents in the EU. It is a comprehensive, collaborative document, put together by leading European experts in pre-conceptional and maternal health, neonatology and the provision of psychological and social support to families impacted by preterm birth. It is a starting point on how to improve existing healthcare plans for maternal and newborn health. Together with the ***Call to Action for Newborn Health***, the White Paper calls on European and national policy makers amongst others to acknowledge the health and social inequalities linked to prematurity across Member States, to introduce systematic data collection, to develop and implement coordinated EU neonatal health and social policies, to promote high quality standards for prevention, treatment and long-term care, and to support greater research, training and education and exchange of best practices.

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Download:

[Read the report "*Born too Soon*"](#)

[Read the report "*Caring for Tomorrow - the EFCNI White Paper on Maternal and Newborn Health and Aftercare Services*"](#)

[Read the "*Call to Action for Newborn Health*"](#)

[Read the report *EU Benchmarking Report 2009/2010 „Too Little, Too Late?“*](#)

[Read more on the care of newborns and their mothers in Europe](#)

About EFCNI:

The European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants (EFCNI) is the first pan-European organisation to represent the interests of preterm infants and their families. It gathers together parents and medical professionals from different disciplines with the common goal of improving long-term health of preterm and newborn children by ensuring the best possible prevention, treatment, care and support.

For more information: <http://www.efcni.org/>

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