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Call to Action for Delivering Respectful Maternity Care in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

In conjunction with the launch of the UNFPA report *“Respectful Maternity Care: Women’s Experiences and Outlooks in Eastern Europe and Central Asia”* on 12 March 2026, the European Board and College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (EBCOG) and UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund and sexual and reproductive health agency, call for the development of strategies and measures to advance respectful maternity care for all women and their families in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

- (1) Guided by relevant international human rights frameworks, including the Programme of Action adopted by the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which state that reproductive health services must be grounded in dignity, informed choice and the elimination of all forms of discrimination and coercion;
- (2) Reaffirming the World Health Organization (WHO) standards for improving the quality of maternal and newborn care, which define respectful maternity care as a fundamental right and a core pillar of clinical safety;
- (3) Acknowledging the evidence presented in the regional report *“Respectful Maternity Care: Women’s Experiences and Outlooks in Eastern Europe and Central Asia,”* which, among other findings, indicates that 67 per cent of women surveyed experienced mistreatment, including interventions without informed consent and gaps in professional communication.
- (4) Recognizing that these findings reflect systemic challenges that impact the long-term health and the confidence of women and families toward health institutions;
- (5) Recognizing that the quality of care is linked to the environment in which health professionals work, and that achieving respectful maternity care requires addressing the institutional pressures, resource gaps, and professional burnout among healthcare workers;
- (6) Welcoming the recommendations included in *“Respectful Maternity Care: Women’s Experiences and Outlooks in Eastern Europe and Central Asia,”* which recommend that an interdisciplinary, multifaceted strategic approach is needed to address challenges for the provision of respectful care;
- (7) Recognizing that a comprehensive response to the challenges of delivering respectful maternity care within the region requires comprehensive intersectoral cooperation, bridging the gap between national health policies and the daily reality;



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(8) Recognizing the essential role of a “whole-system approach,” where academia, healthcare providers, regulators, civil society and government bodies collaborate to implement a comprehensive strategy that embeds evidence-based educational programmes, professional training and transparent monitoring systems to ensure accountability and safety for all stakeholders;

We call upon the Member States in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region to support a multidisciplinary programme to ensure that dignity and respect become the gold standard of maternity care in our region, including by:

Enacting legislation

- Integrate Respectful Maternity Care (RMC) principles into all national clinical guidelines and hospital accreditation standards, ensuring that dignity is a legal requirement, not just a recommendation.
- Implement robust legal frameworks to recognize the importance of respectful care and proactively prevent the long-term physical and psychological harms of obstetric violence.
- Embed mandatory legal requirements for all service providers to demonstrate adherence to national RMC policies through transparent annual performance reports and feedback loops.
- Ensure that the judiciary and law-enforcement agents receive specialized training to appreciate the legal rights of patients and handle cases of mistreatment with the necessary clinical and human rights context.
- Mandate that every maternity unit operates under the highest global standards (WHO/EBCOG), effectively transforming international excellence into protected rights at the national level.

Strengthening professional training

- Ensure all healthcare personnel participate in mandatory, team-based training that translates the principles of dignity and respect into daily clinical practice.
- Cultivate a human rights-centred professional culture through continuous development, specifically designed to shift clinical attitudes at the point of service.
- Secure adequate resourcing for the workforce, providing the funding necessary for professional growth, fair workloads, and the psychological support required to maintain a culture of care.

- Foster a climate of mutual respect, strengthening the professional autonomy of midwives and recognizing them as essential specialists in woman-centred care.
- Equip health managers with dedicated expertise in quality assurance and clinical governance systems to bridge the gap between policy and service delivery.

Empowering women and families

- Establish universally accessible prenatal education programmes that serve as a foundation for rights awareness, personal empowerment and informed birth planning.
- Elevate informed consent to a vital clinical milestone, ensuring every woman is equipped with clear, evidence-based and culturally sensitive information to lead her own care journey.
- Guarantee the fundamental pillars of dignified care, specifically ensuring privacy, confidentiality and the unrestricted presence of a chosen birth partner.
- Empower families with comprehensive knowledge regarding the signs of birth trauma and ensure they have direct, seamless access to mental health resources and referral pathways.
- Strengthen the sharing of evidence-based information to enhance autonomy, ensuring that every woman feels capable of making decisions that reflect her values and needs.

Ensuring accountability

- Implement national quality indicators and digital feedback platforms that capture the lived experiences of women in real time.
- Ensure each maternity unit regularly submits data on patient experience, moving beyond mere compliance to foster a genuine culture of transparent accountability.
- Mandate regular interdisciplinary team meetings to critically review patient feedback and dynamically adjust clinical practices to meet the needs of the community.
- Integrate patient advocacy groups into the heart of service delivery meetings, ensuring the voices of women and families directly shape the evolution of maternity care.

Societal engagement

- Promote educational initiatives for youth and communities that frame bodily autonomy and respectful healthcare as non-negotiable fundamental rights.



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- Leverage innovative digital solutions and private sector partnerships to create safe feedback platforms and educational tools that foster a societal culture of informed choice.
- Establish clear professional standards for the media to build bridges of trust, raise public awareness, and constructively address the systemic roots of obstetric violence.
- Support evidence-based awareness campaigns across all media platforms to define respectful care, destigmatize the reporting of mistreatment, and promote a culture of self-autonomy.

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