

EUROPEAN POPULATION FORUM: 12-14 JANUARY 2004
POPULATION CHALLENGES AND POLICY RESPONSES
TUESDAY 13 JANUARY 2004: AFTERNOON SESSION:
PANEL DISCUSSION: 'MORBIDITY, MORTALITY AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH;
FACING CHALLENGES IN TRANSITION COUNTRIES

CONTRIBUTION FROM FLOOR FROM DILYS COSSEY, CHAIR, INTERACT
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I would like to emphasise a point, which has emerged strongly both from the background papers and the presentations, on the gap between policy and practice in a number of countries in the provision of abortion services. Maternal mortality figures indicate that legal abortion and a comprehensive reproductive and sexual health policy do not necessarily mean safe abortion.

Five years ago at the 1999 UN Special Session for Cairo + 5, one of the key actions for further implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action was that where abortion was not 'against the law' health systems should 'train and equip health service providers and ... take other measures to ensure that such abortion is safe and accessible'. Additional measures should be taken to safeguard women's health.

In the words of Christine McCafferty, MP, UK, this morning: 'there's a lot more to be done'. In many countries there is a steep hill to climb.

In this context I would like to make two comments:

1. The World Health Organisation report on 'Safe Abortion: technical and policy guidelines for health systems' (mentioned by Valentina Leskaj in her presentation) offers opportunities and can be a powerful tool for both NGOs and officials to use in raising standards of abortion care and in integrating such care into the full range of comprehensive reproductive health services.
2. Much has been discussed about the empowerment of women and recognising young people's needs. Contributions from the floor (like the one we have heard from Gemma Hobcraft on young people) are a powerful illustration. Can I make a strong plea for NGOs, officials and Parliamentarians to listen to what women and young people are saying? This is one positive way of ensuring friendly, accessible and successful services which are used by the people they are designed to help.