



**Version provisoire**

**Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men**

**Pre-natal sex selection**

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**Draft resolution**

1. Son preference 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, as a burden for their families unable to perpetuate the family lineage.

2. Sex selection is a problem of huge dimensions in some Asian countries, where the selective abortion of females, together with the killing of female newborns have been practiced for decades. Pre-natal sex selection is indicated by a departure from the natural average sex ratio of 105 boys for 100 girls and increases 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 pre-natal 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, Azerbaijan where boys outnumber girls 112 to 100 and in Georgia where the sex ratio at birth is 111 boys for 100 girls.

4. The Assembly condemns the practice of pre-natal 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, it believes that the social and family pressure placed on women not to pursue their pregnancy by reason 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 pre-natal 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, as shown in studies demonstrating linkages between a skewed sex ratio at birth and the criminality rate.

7. In line with the Council of Europe Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine, the Assembly believes that, in the context of assisted reproduction technologies such as pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PDG), pre-natal 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 all Council of Europe member states to:

8.1 monitor the sex ratio at birth and take prompt action to tackle possible imbalances, when they arise;

- 8.2 collect data on sex ratios at birth amongst specific communities;
- 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 pre-natal sex selection and its social consequences;
- 8.5 encourage national ethics bodies to elaborate and introduce guidelines addressed to medical staff, discouraging pre-natal sex selection by whatever method, unless justified for the prevention of sex-linked genetic diseases;
- 8.6 consider recommending public hospitals to instruct doctors to withhold information about the sex of the foetus or, at least ensure that this information is given in a positive way, irrespective of the sex of the foetus;
- 8.7 introduce legislation with a view to prohibiting sex selection in the context of assisted reproduction technologies and legal abortion, with the exception of when it is justified to avoid a hereditary disease.
9. In addition, the Assembly calls on the governments 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 relevant developments;
- 9.4. organise and/or support the organisation of awareness-raising initiatives and campaigns on pre-natal sex selection and its consequences, addressed to the public, involving relevant international organisations including the Council of Europe;
- 9.5. organise and support training on pre-natal sex selection addressed to medical staff.
10. The Assembly encourages the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) to strengthen their work on pre-natal sex selection.
11. It also recommends the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to look at the issue of pre-natal 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.

## **Draft recommendation**

1. Referring to its Resolution .... (2011) on pre-natal sex selection, the Parliamentary Assembly wishes to draw the Committee of Ministers' attention to this practice which occurs in a number of Council of Europe member states, in particular Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, as indicated by skewed sex ratios at birth.

2. Pre-natal sex selection calls into question core values upheld by the Council of Europe, such as equality and dignity of human beings, non-discrimination and the protection of the individual's dignity and fundamental rights with regard to the applications of biology and medicine. It also touches upon core activities of the Council of Europe such as the promotion and protection of human rights, the promotion of gender equality and the prevention of and fight against gender-based violence.

3. The Assembly therefore invites the Committee of Ministers to:

3.1 bring to the attention of the Group of experts on action against violence against women and domestic violence (GREVIO) and the Committee of the Parties of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, once established, the issue of pre-natal sex selection, in light of its links with violence against women;

3.2 charge the Steering Committee on Bioethics to conduct a comparative study on pre-natal sex selection and consider the elaboration of guidelines and good practices on pre-natal sex selection in the context of Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine;

3.3 step up efforts aimed at promoting the signature, ratification and implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence and the European Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine;

4. As regards the four Council of Europe member states with the most skewed sex ratios, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, the Assembly asks the Committee of Ministers to:

4.1 take the issue of pre-natal sex selection into account in the context of assistance and cooperation programmes with these countries, in particular in the field of education, youth and dialogue with civil society;

4.2 charge its relevant committees and structures working in the field of equality between women and men to organise or contribute to awareness-raising campaigns on the equal value of girls and boys in these countries.