



Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART) to play a key role in combating ageing of the European population

- **One in six European couples affected by infertility**
- **Fertility rate falls to only two thirds of the replacement rate**
- **In the UK alone, adopting state-of-the-art-ART would bring 10,000 babies per year**

European Health Forum Gastein 2007, Austria. Europe is not yet making proper use of all possibilities to combat one of its major long-term problems: the dramatic decline in birth rates. As a panel of high-ranking experts at the 10th European Health Forum Gastein, taking place from 3rd to 6th October 2007 in Bad Hofgastein, Austria, stated, Assisted Reproductive technology (ART) could make a substantial contribution to improve the increasingly dramatic situation. Indeed, ageing increases in life expectancy and fertility rates lay – with 1,5 children per woman – below the usual replacement level of 2,1 per woman. As a consequence, in the next 40 years, old age dependency ratios are expected to rise from 39 to 80%.

Policy makers recognized, that there is a strong need to address the demographic decline. In fact, there is a range of public policies that can be utilized in reversing the trends in fertility rates. Alongside with measures like improving the income situation of families, enabling women to combine better motherhood and career and many others, medical treatment can also play an important role.

As a result of birthrates declining below replacement level, falling productivity and increasing dependency will cut potential GDP growth from 2,1% to 1,3% by 2050. Age related public spending as a proportion of GDP will increase significantly over the coming years. (*Sources: Fougere et al, 2005; Mc Morrow & Roger,2003; OECD,2005*)

At the European Health Forum in Gastein, in this connection, the potential of Assisted Reproductive Technologies as a contribution to removing the barriers to childbirth was discussed. "Infertility is a disease that affects one in six couples. The European Health Forum at Gastein is a valuable opportunity to consider the relationship between infertility and demographics in some detail. As the birth rate declines, the availability of assisted reproduction techniques and providing couples with the appropriate support, become all the more important in the broader demographic context" said Jill Evans MEP, UK.

At the European Health Forum Gastein in Bad Gastein Evi Hatziandreou, Director of Health and Health Care at RAND Europe, showed the potential of Assisted Reproduction Technologies as a contribution to removing the barriers of childbirth. "ART is not a magic bullet, but as a part of population policy mix an important contribution - i.e. adopting ART would bring 10.000 babies per year in the UK."

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Additional press information on the EHFG and pictures can be found at www.ehfg.org