



Countdown 2015

EUROPE



The power of partnership

European organizations join forces
to put reproductive health and family planning
on the European development agenda

About Countdown 2015 Europe

Countdown 2015 Europe is a Consortium of leading European NGOs working to increase European donor support in Official Development Assistance (ODA) for reproductive health and family planning. The group has joined forces to achieve universal access to reproductive health, and to address the unmet need for family planning, as outlined at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), and under the United Nations targets A and B under Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 5.

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Consortium partners



Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung (DSW), Germany



Equilibres et Populations (E&P), France



The European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development (EPF), Parliamentarians throughout Europe



Interact Worldwide, UK



The International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network (IPPF EN), Brussels



Marie Stopes International (MSI), Brussels



The Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (RFSU), Sweden



Sex & Samfund (Danish Family Planning Association), Denmark



Väestöliitto (Family Federation of Finland), Finland



World Population Foundation (WPF), the Netherlands

Collaborating partners



Associação para o Planeamento da Família (APF), Portugal



Federación de Planificación Familiar Estatal (FPFE), Spain



Irish Family Planning Association (IFPA), Ireland



Italian Association for Women in Development (AIDOS), Italy



Norwegian Association for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (NSRR), Norway



Österreichische Gesellschaft für Familienplanung (ÖGF), Austria



Sensoa, Belgium



Swiss Foundation for Sexual and Reproductive Health (PLANeS), Switzerland

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“SRHR investments are not going up as they should, but they [Countdown 2015 Europe] did bring more visibility to the subject. Some governments increased funding for reproductive health supplies, because they’ve kept it on the agenda.”
–senior European policymaker

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY	4
A BRIEF HISTORY OF COUNTDOWN 2015 EUROPE	5
FOCUSING COLLECTIVE STRENGTH ON REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SUPPLIES.....	6
ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE	7
MAINTAINING IMPACT AND EFFECTIVENESS	8
THE CURRENT PHASE: ADDRESSING THE UNMET NEED FOR FAMILY PLANNING	9
COUNTDOWN 2015 EUROPE MEMBERS	9

SUMMARY

European donors are amongst the biggest contributors to funding and support for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in developing countries. This is due to their awareness that SRHR are central to human development and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The priority placed on SRHR by European governments and institutions is no accident – it is the result of strategic, collective advocacy by individuals and organizations. One of the key players in these efforts is the Countdown 2015 Europe Consortium. Under the leadership of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) European Network, this group of 18 European advocacy organizations joined forces in 2005 to ensure that reproductive health was prioritized and funded within the European agenda for international development.

Much of the Consortium's success has occurred during tough economic times and in a challenging environment for funding for development. External evaluations strongly suggest that **Countdown 2015 Europe has contributed to an increase in funding from European governments for reproductive health services and supplies of at least 450 million Euros between 2007 and 2009, and to numerous policy changes in favour of reproductive health services and supplies.**

In addition, the Consortium's efforts have been part of the movement which led to the European Commission allocating 39 million Euros specifically for reproductive health services and supplies in 2010, and another 40 million Euros budgeted for 2011 to 2013, of which 23 million Euros being allocated specifically to reproductive health supplies.

The Consortium has also helped to enhance coordination among donors and build the capacity of its members to advocate for reproductive health services and supplies at national, regional and international levels.

Building on success

Despite these successes, it is clear that more progress is needed if universal access to reproductive health is to be achieved by 2015, the date set out in the Millennium Declaration for reaching the MDGs. To this end, the Consortium embarked upon a new challenge in 2010: raising awareness among European donors about the unmet need for family planning.

This publication highlights the group's working processes, collaborative spirit and commitment to constantly evaluate and improve upon the way it works. It focuses on the period 2007 to 2010, when the group's emphasis was on advocating for support to reproductive health supplies. However, it also illustrates the successful procedures and group dynamics which continue to be the basis for its current efforts aimed at addressing unmet need for family planning.

“... we are very dependent on Countdown 2015 Europe – their contribution to the policy momentum on supplies is considerable ... a very important player.”
–interviewee from external evaluation of Countdown 2015 Europe

Countdown 2015 Europe partners channelled their individual expertise and years of effective working relationships into a Consortium that represents a collective voice for reproductive health in European development cooperation.

The road to success has not been easy, as might be expected when such a large and culturally diverse group needs to strategize together. Yet IPPF European Network, as the lead partner, has carefully built trust among the group and moved the partners – year after year – into closer collaboration. As part of a federation of member associations, IPPF European Network is able to bring together the expertise, systems and protocols needed to ensure a constructive working relationship between the partners. This has resulted in clear benefits for the individual partner organizations as well as for the Consortium as a whole, and it provides a strong basis for future advocacy in support of universal access to reproductive health.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF COUNTDOWN 2015 EUROPE

In 2004, the leaders of ten European organizations working on SRHR decided to join forces to increase the effectiveness of their advocacy efforts. The aim was to champion reproductive health and supplies and increase funding and support for it in key European policy and development processes, as outlined at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)¹, and under the United Nations targets A and B under Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 5².

A novel approach

Working collaboratively with a large group of advocacy organizations to achieve joint objectives was a relatively novel approach, and concerns were expressed by the main donor about whether it could be managed effectively. Fortunately, the selected SRHR organizations had been working well together in different capacities for a number of years, for example, as part of the EuroNGOs network (European NGOs for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Population and Development). Thus, **they had established ways of working with each other that formed the basis for a successful consortium.**

To further support their collaborative capacity, a number of important organizational steps were taken. The future partners asked IPPF European Network, which has extensive experience managing collaborative projects, to take the role of lead organization and to manage the consortium.

Widespread impact

In drafting its strategic objectives, the Consortium set its sights on making widespread impact through a two-pronged approach: working to influence European country governments while also advocating Europe-wide with the European institutions. This was a challenge, but ultimately achievable by Countdown 2015 Europe partners, because the group is made up of active national organizations from 15 European countries with strong track records of successful advocacy on the national level and with the European institutions.

Countdown 2015 Europe started as a group of ten partners in 2005, and brought in eight new organisations as collaborating partners in 2007. Today, the partner organizations are based in

Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom, as well as in Brussels, at the heart of the European institutions. Collaborating partners are from Belgium, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Spain and Switzerland.

Universal access to reproductive health and family planning

Since 2005, the Consortium has been raising awareness among European donors of the need to fulfil their commitments to meeting MDG 5, and particularly Target 5b – universal access to reproductive health. Between 2007 and 2010 this was achieved by bringing attention to the need for reproductive health supplies; and since 2010 the work has moved on to emphasize unmet need for family planning and its role in achieving development goals.

Signs of success

Despite the challenges of managing a large group of organizations and an ambitious aim to influence reproductive health policies and funding throughout Europe, **Countdown 2015 Europe has emerged as one of the most successful consortia working on development issues.** It has grown into a persuasive, reputable and sought-after group within reproductive health advocacy and the wider development sector.

This document sets out the major findings and lessons learned during the period 2007 – 2010, when the Consortium concentrated its efforts on putting reproductive health supplies on the European donor agenda. During that period, evaluators found that reproductive health services and supplies received more attention at European and international levels, in political debates and with target audiences, and that this can be credited in part to the work of Countdown 2015 Europe. In addition, Consortium members have been shown to have a good reputation for building longer-term constituency through relations with and commitment of MPs, young decision makers and journalists. **External interviews confirm this has paid dividends for advocacy outcomes.**

These achievements are the result of strategic activities and ways of working, which set Countdown 2015 Europe apart from many other collaborative efforts, which will be outlined on the following pages.

1 In 1994 at the **International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)**, 179 countries (among which the EU Member States) committed to a Programme of Action (PoA) for improving sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights (SRHR), meaning 'the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and the means to do so. It also included the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health, and the right to make decisions concerning their reproduction free from discrimination, coercion and violence'.

2 **Millennium development goal 5** to 'improve maternal health' with targets 5A: Reduce by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio and target 5B: Achieve, by 2015, universal access to reproductive health

FOCUSING COLLECTIVE STRENGTH ON REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SUPPLIES

Ensuring good reproductive health means tackling a wide range of health and rights issues which cut across most areas of human development and involve all people across their lifespan. This includes young people's sexuality education and health, people's ability to decide on the timing or spacing of their children, prevention of maternal and child mortality and morbidity, and prevention of HIV and other infections. Poor reproductive health is associated with poverty, gender inequality and other major social and economic problems.

The organizations which make up Countdown 2015 Europe already work effectively on many of these issues, particularly by advocating with their national governments and European policymakers to increase support for reproductive health services and supplies in developing countries. In an initial phase that started in 2005, Countdown 2015 Europe partners focused on universal access to RH being an important target to achieve MDG5 on maternal health. The Consortium shifted its focus in 2007 to **use its collective strength to improve a single, neglected, cross-cutting element of this work: reproductive health supplies.**

Reproductive health supplies refer to all the essential equipment, commodities and medicines required for sexual and reproductive health, maternal and neonatal health and for effective responses to HIV and AIDS. Highly successful reproductive health programmes over the past four decades have dramatically increased demand for reproductive health commodities around the world, especially contraception. However, the supply has not kept pace with the

demand, and in some cases we have seen cutbacks in support and funding, as well as a lack of coordination among donors which has led to inefficiencies, supply chain problems and stock-outs.

This threatens the progress made in improving health and development outcomes across a range of sectors, including HIV and AIDS, maternal and child health and overall health system strengthening.

By pooling their strengths and resources to improve reproductive health supplies funding and support, Countdown 2015 Europe partners have strengthened synergies between reproductive health, safe motherhood and HIV/AIDS and have put RH supplies higher on the agenda of European donors.

In 2008, use of modern contraceptives prevented:

- 188 million unintended pregnancies
- 1.2 million newborn deaths
- 230,000 maternal deaths

Source: UNFPA, Guttmacher Institute. Adding It Up: The Costs and Benefits of Investing in Family Planning and Maternal and Newborn Health. 2009.

ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE

Countdown 2015 Europe operates with a strong degree of policy and strategy unity. It is a functioning advocacy network focused on change – not just a project that runs a series of time-limited joint activities. It maintains this unity while working primarily at two levels:

- Europe-wide, as a vehicle for collective advocacy through joint activities; and
- At national levels, as a knowledge base and source of collaboration for Consortium partners.

Collective European advocacy

Countdown 2015 Europe's true strength lies in its ability to combine the skills, resources and energy of its partners and channel them towards targeted advocacy objectives. In this way, the Consortium is truly more than the sum of its parts.

One of the Consortium's primary objectives is to increase financial and political support and commitment among European policymakers, and decision- and opinion-makers for reproductive health services and supplies. At the international level, examples of this include Countdown 2015 Europe partners' joint work to persuade the Board of Directors of UNITAID – which originally only funded treatment for HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis – to also fund prevention commodities. Countdown 2015 Europe partners also wrote a joint letter to the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board to urge an increase in support for female condoms. Both of **these efforts preceded policy changes or statements in support of reproductive health supplies.**

Countdown 2015 Europe partners undertook various joint activities in the run-up to the G8 Summits in Japan, Rome and Toronto and the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra, Ghana in 2008. **Population and development issues were mentioned in some of the final statements and declarations from Japan, and gender and reproductive health issues were raised and debated among policymakers in Accra.**

Regionally, Countdown 2015 Europe partners worked together, under the leadership of one of the partners, to invite national Members of Parliament (MPs) as participants in reproductive health-focused study tours and events in developing countries. Study tours included visits to Niger, Burkina Faso, Zambia, Georgia, and the International AIDS Conference in Mexico. **In 2008, among policymakers who participated in study tours and conferences, 13 MPs from 10 countries became vocal reproductive health supporters.** In a number of cases, this led to Countdown 2015 Europe partners being invited to draft parliamentary questions and make statements and speeches in parliamentary forums.

In 2009/2010, the Consortium delivered technical input for European Union (EU) policy and strategy papers. **Joint efforts resulted in: a strong statement for World AIDS Day, with a clear mention of the need to focus on reproductive health;**

and a strong focus on prevention in the Council Conclusion on the Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the EU Programme for Action (PfA) on HIV, TB and Malaria. In addition, SRHR and supplies were included in draft EU policy documents on gender and global health.

Supporting national-level advocacy

Since the Consortium began its work, 12 countries have added language related to reproductive health supplies to their national policies and strategies on health, reproductive health, HIV and AIDS or international development.

Expand the support base among European civil society

Another objective of the Consortium is to expand the support base for reproductive health supplies among European civil society. Countdown 2015 Europe partners work intensively within the broader civil society community to put reproductive health supplies on the agenda and to support general civil society organizations that want to take up the issue.

For instance, staff members of Countdown 2015 Europe partner organizations play active roles in various platforms and networks as board members and in other capacities. This includes platforms and networks on HIV/AIDS, general global health and poverty alleviation. Consortium members also actively contribute to joint

statements and civil society policies and declarations throughout Europe, which help to illustrate the linkages between reproductive health supplies and other development issues, including human rights, gender, education, health systems strengthening and maternal and child health.

Gathering evidence for advocacy

An important activity of the Consortium is tracking governments' funding and policy commitments to reproductive health services and supplies. Consortium members and others use this data to recognize reproductive health champions and to encourage governments which have not met their commitments. **A 2010 external evaluation showed that Countdown 2015 Europe has become an increasingly reputable watchdog for reproductive services and supplies funding in Europe.**

As many governments have moved away from earmarked funding, towards budget support and support for overall health systems, identifying how funds are spent, is exceptionally difficult. Yet **the Consortium's systematic documentation of spending has created an important source of evidence for holding governments to account for their commitments to reproductive health services and supplies.**

This data is also compiled in targeted publications and briefing materials that inform policies and statements at international, regional and national levels. **In a recent evaluation, a number of policymakers noted that the Consortium's communications materials are viewed as credible and respected – a key source for data and information on reproductive health supplies.**

MAINTAINING IMPACT AND EFFECTIVENESS

External evaluation is a cornerstone of Countdown 2015 Europe's operations. When the Consortium began in 2005, measuring advocacy using indicators was in its infancy, so the group's strongly reflexive approach was unique. Today, the Consortium's evaluation framework and final external evaluation reporting have been fully developed and is used as a model by several other partners.

While it is still difficult to attribute specific wins to particular groups or activities, rigorous evaluative processes have enabled the Consortium to identify where it has contributed to important funding and policy gains. In addition, assessments have revealed the elements that make the group work so effectively, and provided guidance on how to make its collaboration even better.

Consortium dynamics

The success of any consortium depends on having a basis of unity comprised of members' shared understanding of purpose, ability to take and act upon collective decisions and confidence in each other as allies (Figure 1). When these factors work in harmony, the result is an ever-deeper and more productive working relationship, which increases the group's collective voice and influence.

External evaluators identified unity and a harmonious working relationship as major strengths of Countdown 2015 Europe. This was credited to the constructive relationships between Consortium members as well as the guidance of the lead organization, IPPF European Network.

Trust among members is at the heart of creating successful coalitions and consortia, and the evaluators found considerable

evidence that many of Countdown 2015 Europe's ways of working were designed to encourage and adapt to the increasing levels of trust among members over time. This is a testimony to the forward-thinking coordination of the group and a sign of its sustainability.

“Countdown 2015 Europe ... has significantly deepened its basis of unity, building on a growing confidence in its capacity to support effective national advocacy and to act as a powerful collective advocacy force in relation to inter-governmental bodies.”

—external evaluation of Countdown 2015 Europe (2010)

Figure 1. The dynamics of a successful consortium – Countdown 2015 Europe has achieved many of the key elements required for strong collective advocacy

Building the individual capacity of members

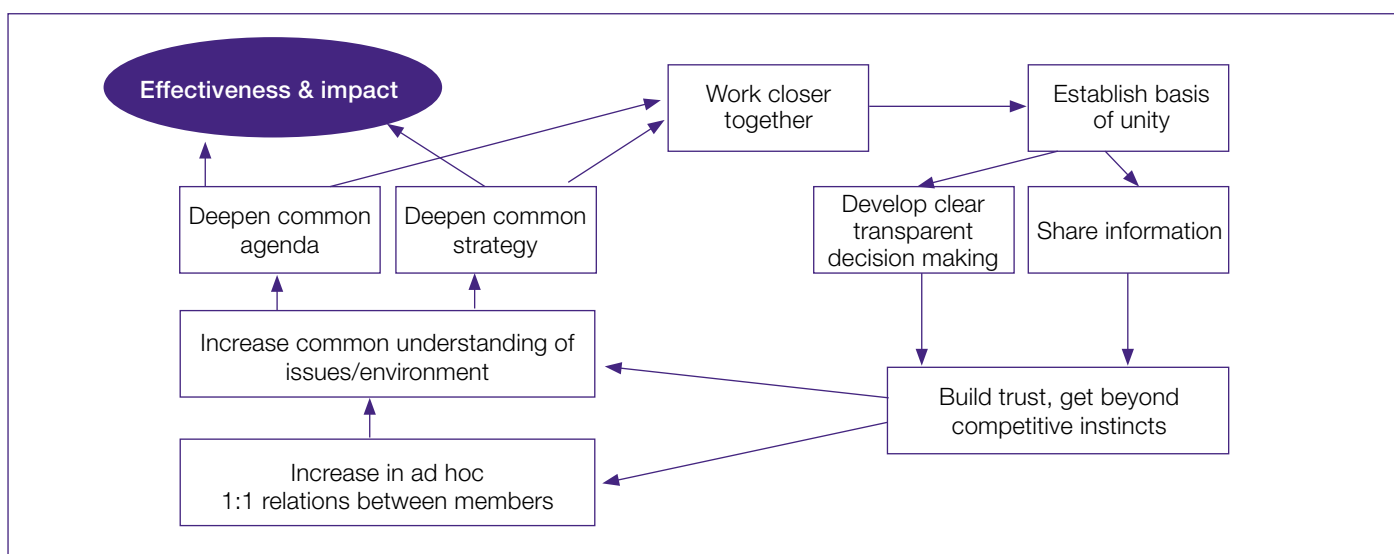
As the Consortium's successes have been identified, and as it looks at where it can improve, there has been a sense of increased commitment among the partners. This has enhanced the confidence partners have in Consortium

processes and in going forward into the next phase of its work

The partners themselves have noted that the exchange of experience and knowledge between them is one of the principal benefits of the Consortium to their own organizations. It has improved each partner's capacity to be effective in its own sphere and built an overall sense of momentum.

Evaluations also suggest that many members appreciate the Consortium's research and publications, which provide easy access to reproductive political environments and issues across Europe. These are essential tools for effective advocacy work on reproductive health services and supplies.

In short, Countdown 2015 Europe has become a vigorous and effective network and a source of learning for its members and the environment in which they operate.



Source: Stalker, S., Bennett, R. and de Toma, C. (2010) Europe Champions RH Worldwide II: Tackling the Supplies Challenge – Final Evaluation. Brussels: IPPF European Network.

THE CURRENT PHASE: ADDRESSING THE UNMET NEED FOR FAMILY PLANNING

The political, policy and funding environment is constantly evolving. Significant external political events, numerous general elections in major donor countries and the EU, the ICPD+15 process and the MDGs reviews have meant that the Consortium has been operating in a very volatile policy and political environment.

Yet **there is evidence that the Consortium's full power is only just beginning to show**. Its influence over funding and policy changes throughout Europe is clear, and it continues to demonstrate an innovative approach to working together for a common goal.

As the Consortium has developed its abilities to work together efficiently and effectively, **it has become a prominent voice in European development circles, and has the potential for significantly greater impact in the next phase of its operations**.

All of these achievements have increased donor trust in the capacities of Countdown 2015 Europe, and in the leadership and expertise of IPPF European Network. This is evidenced by the award of a new three-year grant to guide the Consortium into its next challenge – **addressing the unmet need for family**

planning. In this new and exciting phase, the Consortium is working in partnership with civil society organizations in the global South to increase understanding of the link between poverty and the unmet need for family planning.

Countdown 2015 Europe partners have already started this work, helping to communicate the family planning demands of developing countries to EU policymakers, and undertaking activities to increase European funding to meet these demands.

The group is also using its successful collaborative framework to strengthen the advocacy capacity of European reproductive health non-governmental organizations. At the same time, it is working to enhance and improve the dialogue and coordination between European civil society, EU Member States and the EU institutions on the unmet need for family planning.

This new focus on unmet need for family planning enables the Consortium to devote its proven collective strength to another vital aspect of universal access to reproductive health. This is a crucial step for ensuring the health and rights of women, men and young people, and for making progress in achieving a wide range of development goals – by 2015 and beyond.

COUNTDOWN 2015 EUROPE MEMBERS

Under the banner of Countdown 2015 Europe 10 consortium partners and eight collaborating partners carry out activities in 15 European countries and with the EU institutions.

Consortium partners

- The International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network – IPPF EN (Brussels)
- Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung – DSW (Germany)
- Equilibres et Populations – E&P (France)
- The European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development – EPF (Parliamentarians throughout Europe)
- Interact Worldwide (UK)
- Marie Stopes International Brussels Office– MSI (Brussels)
- Sex & Samfund – Danish Family Planning Association (Denmark)
- The Swedish Association for Sexuality Education – RFSU (Sweden)
- Rutgers Nisso Group-World Population Foundation – RutgersWPF (The Netherlands)
- Vaëestoliitto – Family Federation of Finland (Finland)

Collaborating partners

- Österreichische Gesellschaft für Familienplanung – OGF (Austria)
- Sensoa (Belgium)
- Irish Family Planning Association – IFPA (Ireland)
- Italian Association for Women in Development – AIDOS (Italy)
- Norwegian Association for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights – NSRR (Norway)
- Associação para o Planeamento da Família – APF (Portugal)
- Federación de Planificación Familiar Estatal – FPFE (Spain)
- Swiss Foundation for Sexual and Reproductive Health – PLANeS (Switzerland)



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