

IPPF European Network Policy Statement on Voluntary Surgical Sterilization

Background:

Voluntary sterilization, despite the development of many new contraceptive methods over the last 15 years, remains the most commonly used modern method worldwide, in developing and developed countries alike¹. It should be noted that in contrast to other modern contraceptive methods, surgical sterilization needs to be considered as a permanent and in most cases irreversible method.

The IPPF European Network believes that voluntary surgical sterilization should be available and affordable to all individuals living in Europe for reasons of:

HEALTH – because it provides for an efficient, low-risk, once-only procedure that produces a minimum of side effects, while offering a lifetime of contraceptive protection.

CHOICE – because it offers the only contraceptive option that is recognized as being permanent.

RIGHTS – as it allows for a permanent solution for individuals and couples who have completed their families or have no wish to have children

The IPPF European Network further believes that:

- All people should be able to make an informed choice and voluntary decision through high-quality counselling.
- The decision to undergo sterilization is an individual choice and therefore no one should be forced to have sterilization under any circumstances. Any such medical intervention should always be personally motivated and the decision-making should never be influenced by political, economic or any other reason.
- No sterilization should be performed without informed consent.
- More efforts should be undertaken to promote vasectomy (male sterilization) as it is an easier method than female sterilization and fosters male participation in pregnancy prevention.
- Male and female sterilization should be fully available and reimbursed under national health insurance schemes.

Member Associations should:

- Ensure that all people have the right to comprehensive information, including the benefits and any potential risks, the existence of alternative non-permanent methods and the fact that sterilization does not protect from STI and HIV/AIDS.

¹ Source: "Contraceptive Sterilization: Global Issues and Trends", Engenderhealth, 2002.

| →• Ensure that people are aware of the option of sterilization and are able to balance this possibility with different non-permanent methods of contraception and that they are able to make an informed decision on the most appropriate method of contraception.

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| →• Ensure that any comprehensive sexual and reproductive health service includes information and counselling on sterilization and referral to sterilization services.

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- Ensure that people are aware that sterilization should be considered as irreversible and that they receive comprehensive counselling.
- Ensure that both options, male and female sterilization, are discussed in counselling heterosexual couples.

| →• Ensure that service-providing Member Association staff is trained on the characteristics of vasectomy as a simpler choice that carries rare side effects and does not affect male sexual functioning.

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- Consider organizing male-only reproductive health services.