

**Question for written answer E-007362/2011  
to the Commission**

Rule 117

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Subject: EU policy in the field of health for newborn infants and prematurity

Approximately one child in 10 in the EU is born premature. Prematurity strongly increases the risk of developing long-term health complications, including cerebral palsy, sensorial and motor disabilities, respiratory illness, and learning and behavioural disorders. These complications are not only a burden on families but also constitute a considerable cost for health and social welfare systems. Although pan-European data on prematurity is incomplete, according to NGOs active in the field (EU Benchmarking Report 2009/2010 of the European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants), there is evidence that the number of preterm infants across Europe has increased in the last 10 years. This increase might be due to external reasons such as stress, long work-hours or lack of social support.

Yet despite this worrying trend, neonatal and prenatal healthcare continue to have low priority on the policy agendas of EU Member States, while a large disparity in the quality of care between Member States also exists. The issue of prematurity or the importance of ensuring quality healthcare for newborn infants has not been addressed by the Commission either. Worryingly, the EU strategy for health 2008-2013 does not envisage any EU actions in this area.

As the burden on EU healthcare and social systems of the consequences of prematurity is only likely to grow in the coming years, rapid action at EU level is needed to complement the Member States' policies.

In this context:

Does the Commission plan to address the issue of prematurity by giving priority to developing a strategy to cope with the vast differences in Member States' care for newborn infants, for example by proposing pan-European standards or EU-wide guidelines on this issue?

Will the Commission consider including the issue of prematurity in the post-2013 strategy for health?

Does the Commission envisage there being funds for financing EU action in the field of prematurity within the 2014-2020 multiannual financial framework? If so, what actions could be envisaged?