



IPPF International
Planned Parenthood
Federation

European Network

DENIAL OF CONTRACEPTIVE CARE

A deep-rooted problem
in Europe and Central Asia

IPPF EUROPEAN NETWORK IS BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS TO CONTRACEPTIVE FREEDOM, HELPING TO ENSURE THAT ALL PEOPLE CAN LEAD SAFE AND DIGNIFIED REPRODUCTIVE LIVES.

Across Europe and Central Asia, women are being denied control over their sexual and reproductive lives as a result of hostile chauvinist policies, gender inequality and social oppression.

Many governments are not doing enough to ensure that women and girls have true access to contraceptive care, and it is the poorest and most marginalised who bear the brunt of this neglect. Too often, contraception is the privilege of the few, and women from low-income backgrounds are five times more likely to be forced into pregnancy through denial of care.

In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the level of modern contraceptive use (meaning all non-emergency, reversible methods) is alarmingly low. For example, in Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Tajikistan, it is even lower than the average rate of 36% in the least developed

countries worldwide (UNFPA, 2018). And overall in Europe, 43% of pregnancies are unintended (EPF, 2018), a result of denial of contraceptive care and of governments refusing to ensure sex and relationships education for all young people.

Young people are also being let down by health care systems in which they face institutionalised stigma and discrimination when seeking contraception. Too often, the information they receive is biased and care providers are judgemental, with services lacking confidentiality, respect and understanding of their specific needs.

IPPF EN is working across Europe and Central Asia to break through these barriers. We are fighting to redefine contraceptive care as a policy priority and to offer stigma-free care to all, especially to those who are most in need. Here are some stories from our members:

IPPF EN FIGHTS FOR CONTRACEPTIVE FREEDOM FOR ALL

// I came to the FPFE youth centre for the first time a few months ago for information about emergency contraception, and I really liked how they treated me: the centre was anonymous, and I didn't need an appointment. ... I think that all young people should approach youth centres to get information and answers to their questions so that they can avoid taking risks and enjoy their sexuality more.

21-year-old woman supported by FPFE, Spain

When governments refuse to ensure that people receive quality education and accurate information about sexual health and relationships, their access to contraceptive care is severely curtailed. Other major obstacles to contraceptive freedom include health care systems that discriminate against particular groups of people, and costs that are unaffordable. Young, poor and marginalised women and girls such as Roma, refugees and undocumented migrants are most likely to have their need for contraceptive care cast aside by uncaring politicians. This greatly damages their health and wellbeing.

In Spain, young people are among those who face the greatest denial of contraceptive care, undermining their ability to live safe and free reproductive lives. **The Federación de Planificación Familiar de España (FPFE)** is tackling the barriers that cause this harm, for example by improving the quality of contraceptive counselling provided to them. FPFE has identified harmful social norms and discrimination by the health care system as major obstacles to quality service provision for all and is working closely with health care providers to counteract these issues.

In Albania, 38% of women rely on ineffective traditional methods of contraception, while only 25% use modern methods (UNFPA, 2018). The **Family Planning Association of Albania (ACPD)** has established clinics that provide quality and non-judgemental care to vulnerable groups. Women and young people living in rural areas as well as the Roma community are provided with contraceptive care through mobile clinics in areas

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where access to health care is limited or does not exist at all. ACPD also gives a voice to rural women and Roma people and empowers them to speak for themselves in decision-making spaces.

The Bulgarian Family Planning and Sexual Health Association (BFPA) is working tirelessly to fill the gaps in the Bulgarian health care system, which continues to fail many groups of people. BFPA has successfully ensured care for Roma people who are often sidelined in state health care provision, and face barriers to accessing contraception. Through strategic partnerships with community leaders and Roma health mediators, BFPA has managed to create a bridge between Roma people and care providers, enabling services to be delivered in marginalised communities.

The Latvian Association for Family Planning & Sexual Health (Papardes Zieds) is fighting for their government to make contraceptive care available to every woman and family in need, drawing attention to the large number of people who are neglected by the state and unable to afford safe and effective contraception. Papardes Zieds has been successful in raising the visibility of the harm caused when women cannot make decisions about their own bodies, lives and futures. An unintended pregnancy can mean that these women fall deeper into social isolation, are unable to finish their education and find it difficult to find employment or to leave an abusive relationship. The state has now committed to provide free contraception from 2019 for all women living on the margins of society.

Young people are often denied care in societies where sex is taboo and parents can control their children's access to medical providers. These challenges are amplified in conservative contexts where women and girls are made to feel uncomfortable when talking about contraception.

The Tajikistan Family Planning Association (TFPA) has pioneered a phone application that allows young people to gain crucial knowledge about modern contraception and sexually transmitted infections/HIV and connects them with health care providers. Through its innovative app, TFPA has created a safe space for young people to access stigma-free care, and to explore methods of sexual and reproductive self-care. This app has changed attitudes towards people living with STIs/HIV and inspired young people to have open and honest conversations about sexual and reproductive health care with their peers.

At three times the European Union average, Romania's rate of teenage pregnancy is one of the highest in the region. **The Societatea de Educatie Contraceptiva si Sexuala (SECS)** has trained school doctors and nurses to provide non-judgemental counselling on contraceptive methods. This programme allowed many young people to receive life planning counselling for the first time. SECS also encouraged doctors and nurses to partner with trained school counsellors to provide sex and relationships education.

// **Before using the app, she thought STIs could only be caught by sex workers or people lacking morals, and that something like that could never happen to her or to her close friends. But now she realises that it can happen to anyone, even by accident. Now she tries to understand people who might have an STI.** //

Young person in Tajikistan recounting an interview with a 19-year old woman as part of TFPA's project

WE EMBRACE REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM

Contraceptive freedom should not depend on which country you live in, nor should it depend on your income. It is unacceptable that women and girls are being deprived of basic contraceptive care in Europe and Central Asia, even in countries where contraception is largely reimbursed by the government, due to poor policy implementation.

The gap in contraceptive use between the poorest and the wealthiest countries is huge, and no country has equal access to contraceptive care. There is a clear lack of commitment by policymakers

and government actors to truly make access to contraception a reality for all. And even where policies exist, they are generally not well resourced and implemented.

IPPF EN is fighting for the reproductive safety of all people, including the most vulnerable among us. Everyone has the right to lead a safe and dignified reproductive life, free from harm and discrimination. We urge governments to step up and show that they stand for individuals' reproductive freedom in both policy and practice.

“ The training helped me to revise my attitude when I speak to students. Now I try to be friendlier and more thoughtful about their needs to encourage them to go to the doctor and ask about sexual and reproductive health issues. It was a high-quality training and I learned a lot. **”**

Doctor working in a school & trained by SECS, Romania



IPPF European Network cares. We are working with member associations and partners in over 40 countries across Europe and Central Asia so that all women, men, children and young people can lead safe and dignified sexual and reproductive lives, free from harm and discrimination. © 2018

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