

Abortion Legislation in Europe

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Fertility rates vary across Europe as does contraceptive use. Concerning abortion, Europe is notable in that it has the countries with the lowest abortion rates in the world and also the countries with the highest. To date there is no 100% effective and affordable and accessible method of contraception. Many millions of women do not have access to services, information and counseling that can help them to avoid pregnancy. Abortion also raises more mixed feelings and fundamental disagreements than most other social or public health issue. But the reality is that worldwide approximately 46 million have abortions every year. About 17% of these women live in Europe. Abortion legislation in Europe – liberal and prohibitive – addresses some extremely fundamental rights and possible abuses, including a women's right to choose, a doctor's ethical right to refuse to perform abortions, etc. IPPF EN monitors abortion legislation in Europe (EU Member States, CEEC/NIS) and with the support of its local members tries to assess the de jure and de facto situation. It is clear that although e.g. the abortion laws in Belgium and Russia are quite similar, the de facto situation is extremely different. There are four priorities concerning abortion in Europe today. Firstly, there must be more hard data and research on abortion. Secondly, existing standards of clinic and other abortion practice must be shared amongst service providers. Thirdly, training and retraining must be provided to ensure that all providers have the capacity and capability to provide high quality services. And finally, advocates must reach out to all social actors, relevant institutions and individuals to reduce the reliance on abortion as a means of fertility regulation and also provide women with choices if they are faced with unplanned or unwanted pregnancy and seek to terminate that pregnancy safely.