

# CONTRA(YOUTH)CEPTION

Do young people in Macedonia have access to modern contraception?

Modern contraception is one of the more important aspects of sexual and reproductive health, in particular in regard to young people. Despite that there have been several national strategies (National Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy and National Safe Motherhood Strategy) that plan provision of free contraception this has not yet been realized. As a result, the rate of usage of modern contraception in Macedonia is the lowest in the region and the lowest in the world. The 2011 UNICEF Multiple indicator cluster research shows that 8.2% of girls aged 15 to 19 uses some modern contraceptive, 8.3% of those aged 20 to 24 and 11.4% of those aged 25 to 29 use some some type of modern contraception. As per the same research the percentage of pills (oral hormone contraception) usage is only 1.3%

The data clearly indicates that it is necessary for concrete measures to undertaken by the corresponding institutions in order to solve this issue, in other words to increase the number of girls and women that would used modern contraception.

The purpose of this document is to display facts and exhibit the situation about the use of modern contraception amongst the young and the need for taking measures by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, i.e. the Ministry of Health and the Health Insurance Fund.

## WHY IS CONTRACEPTION FOR THE YOUNG IMPORTANT?

One of the important issues that concerns the sexual and reproductive health is also contraception, specifically the use of modern contraception. The health benefits from using contraception are numerous:

- Contraception prevents unplanned pregnancy;
- The use of contraception has additional medicinal benefits like: lowering the risk of endometrial cancer, ovarian cancer, pelvic inflammatory disease, prevention of ovarian cysts, iron-deficiency anemia, reducing menstrual cramps and menstrual bleeding problems, ovulation pain, increased facial and body hair, symptoms of polycystic ovarian syndrome and endometriosis syndrome;
- Many studies have shown that women who plan their parenthood (and that use contraception) are generally healthier, better educated, their status is better within the family and within the community and they are economically more productive;
- Contraception above all represents a right to health and health care (in 2012 the United Nations that is the United Nations Population Fund in its annual report<sup>3</sup> declared the access to contraception to be a universal human right).

## WHAT IS THE SITUATION LIKE IN MACEDONIA?

In the Republic of Macedonia there is no continual flow of data that would show the annual trends concerning the use of modern contraception. The two more important reports and researches on this topic are:

- The Situation of the World Population (UNFPA) and
- The Multiple indicator cluster research (UNICEF)

Through these reports and researches we can get the data for the trends concerning the use of contraception amongst the young, and the general population, and we can compare the situation with other countries in the world.

From the 2005-2006<sup>4</sup> and 2011<sup>5</sup> Multiple indicator cluster research it can be concluded that there are no considerable changes in regard to the use of contraception in the three age groups that entail the group of young women (as displayed in the chart below). This means that in Macedonia in the period of 6 years no interventions have been undertaken (or the undertaken interventions have not shown to be effective) to change this situation that is to increase the use of contraception.

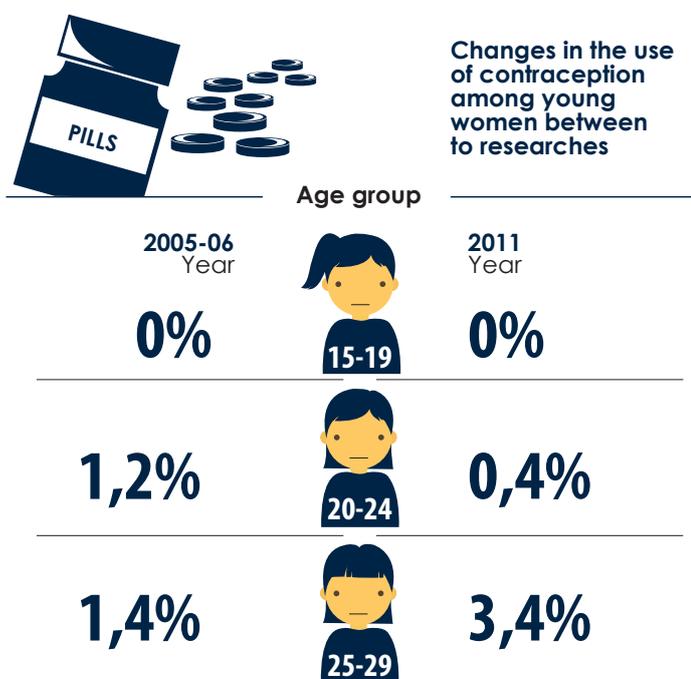
Notwithstanding, as per the data in the 2011<sup>6</sup> State of World Population Report, the percentage of women in Macedonia that are in the reproductive period and use modern contraception is by far behind that of the countries in the region and Europe.

The state of the market for oral hormone contraception in Macedonia indicates that it is accessible. Specifically in our country a total of six contraceptive pills and one urgent contraceptive pill are registered. At this moment five contraceptive pills and one urgent contraceptive pill are available on the market.<sup>8</sup>

The prices of the pills vary, that is they range from 2 euros for the least expensive to 10 euros for the most expensive.

However, the price does represent one of the factors that affects the use of the contraceptives among young women.<sup>9</sup>

Chart 1



<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization Department of Reproductive Health and Research (WHO/RHR) and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health/Center for Communication Programs (CCP), INFO Project. Family Planning: A Global Handbook for Providers. Baltimore and Geneva: CCP and WHO, 2007, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> UNFPA (2012) State of World Population 2012, New York, UNFPA, p. ii.

<sup>3</sup> UNFPA (2012) Annual Report 2012 – Promises to keep. New York, UNFPA, p. 8.

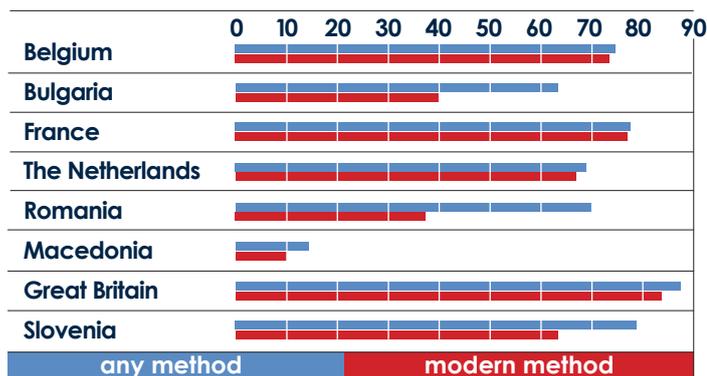
<sup>4</sup> State Statistical Office of Macedonia, (2007), Multiple Cluster Indicator Survey 2005-2006, State Statistical Office of Macedonia, Skopje.

<sup>5</sup> MULTIPLE indicator cluster survey (2011) Ministry of Health, Ministry of education and Science, Ministry of Labor and Social Policies., Skopje.

<sup>6</sup> UNFPA, (2011), State of World Population, New York, UNFPA.

**Percentage of use of contraception (modern or any other methods) in the European countries according to the report form UNFPA- State of world population for 2011**

Chart 2



**WE HAVE STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS, BUT THEY ARE NOT IMPLEMENTED.**

In the Republic of Macedonia for a number of years now processes have been begun that address the creation of policies for the betterment of the sexual and reproductive health of the citizens of Macedonia. These policies are prepared with contributions of various parties in a consultative process and the use of international good practices.

Unfortunately these policies are not effected, especially in the part of access to contraception and thus the effects of this non-effecting are mirrored in the degree of use of contraception.

In the National Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy<sup>10</sup> one of the strategic parts is family planning and contraception. This strategy projects supply of free contraception to vulnerable and socially excluded groups as well as supply of urgent contraception. The results from these achievements are measured through clearly set indicators, which means that that the realization of these interventions will lead to 40% of women in their reproductive period using contraception as well as an extension of the positive list of medicines with 3 types of contraceptives.

Besides this strategy, the Safe Motherhood Strategy<sup>11</sup> also predicts measures that address the increase of the use of contraception.

These two national strategies very clearly determine the directions for the improvement of sexual and reproductive health of the population, including the young. These goals will be realized by the supply of accessible contraception.

**DIFFERENT MODELS FOR PROVISION OF CONTRACEPTION IN EUROPE.**

The price of the contraceptives presents a barrier, especially for the young. The market price of the oral hormone contraceptives in our country is up to 10 euros. This expense at the monthly level is too high for most of the young people.

Therefore, in an attempt to make the contraceptives more accessible different countries in Europe have tackled this question differently within their health systems. Part of the European countries have solved this through reimbursements of the expenses for the purchase of contraceptives. Here are a number of examples from different countries:<sup>12</sup>

**Germany**  
 <18 years of age: Full reimbursement of the expenses for prescribed contraceptives.  
 18-20 years of age: Partial reimbursement of the expenses for prescribed contraceptives.

**The Netherlands**  
 <21 years of age: Full reimbursement through the mandatory health care with a maximal limit of 350 euros.

**France**  
 15-18 years of age: Urgent contraceptive pills from the first and second generation, implants and the spiral are free.

**Romania<sup>13</sup>**  
 All citizens of Romania that are insured within the framework of the state's health insurance system are obliged to give a contribution to the national health care fund. Those who contribute or are exempt from participation can get hormone contraceptives or spirals free of charge. In addition, Romania has a national program for health care of women and children, which enables condoms and hormone contraceptives to be free of charge for the most vulnerable categories in the centres for family planning. This entails those that live in the rural areas, the unemployed, people on welfare, and children in the education system.

<sup>7</sup> Dimitrovska, A. et al (2012) Drugs Registry of the Republic of Macedonia, Ministry of Health, Drugs Bureau, Skopje.

<sup>8</sup> Telephone interview with a pharmacist from a pharmacy in Skopje [26.07.2013]

<sup>9</sup> HERA (2011) Factors that influence the use of contraception in the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje, HERA, pp 7.

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Health (2010) Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy of Republic of the Macedonia until 2020, with an Action Plan until 2013, Skopje

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Health (2010) Safe Motherhood Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia for the period 2010-2015 with an Action Plan, Skopje

<sup>12</sup> International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network (2013) Barometer on Women's Access to Modern Contraception Choice, Brussels, p. 21.

<sup>13</sup> HERA (2011) Factors that influence the use of contraception in the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje, HERA, pp 7

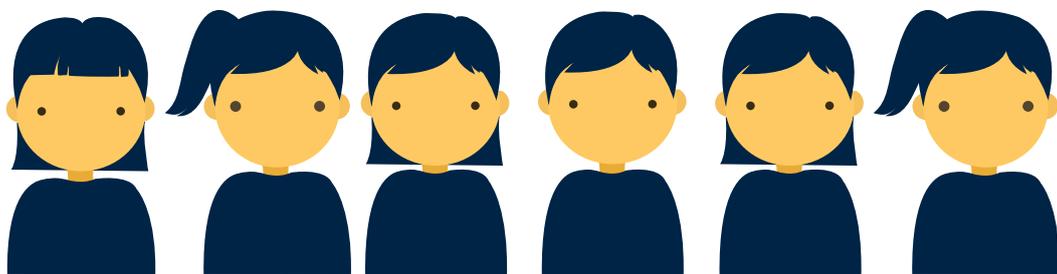


# RECOMMENDATIONS

The sexual and reproductive rights of the young people in Macedonia are guaranteed with a number of international documents that the Republic of Macedonia has signed and ratified. In the past few years certain progress in regard to sexual and reproductive health has been noted in our country. However, one of the areas where there is none, or there is no significant progress made, is the use of modern contraception. Having in perspective the benefits of the use of contraception for the individual, as well as for the society as a whole, it is necessary to take appropriate steps and interventions.

For the improvement, that is to say, the increase of the prevalence of the use of contraception the following is necessary:

- Complete implementation of the National Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy and the National Safe Motherhood Strategy, including the parts regarding access to contraception;
- Including at least three contraceptives on the list of medicines that are covered by the Health Insurance Fund;
- Supplying free contraception for the vulnerable and socially excluded groups and;
- Including the young in the process of decision making for the implementation of these interventions.



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