

Countdown 2015

EUROPE

Campaigning for universal access
to reproductive health

Family planning saves lives & improves health

The importance of family planning

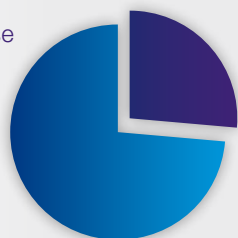
Family planning is one of the most effective and well-tested strategies for saving women's and children's lives and improving health.

When women and couples have access to family planning – particularly a range of modern contraceptive methods – they are better able to prevent unintended pregnancies and space their pregnancies. These measures significantly decrease a woman's risk of dying in childbirth and of experiencing long-term health problems. They also improve her child's chance of survival and good health.

In the past decade, aid for family planning has declined as a proportion of total aid for health in virtually every recipient country. **After so much progress, there is now a significant risk of losing ground unless investment and commitment to family planning increase.**

Box 1. 867 million women in developing countries want to avoid pregnancy (2012)

645 million use
contraception



at least 222 million are
not using any form of
modern contraception

women
with unmet need

The unmet need for family planning

More than half of women in developing countries want to avoid a pregnancy completely or space or limit future pregnancies. At least 222 million of these women are not using any form of modern contraception – in other words, they have an **unmet need for family planning** (Box 1).

Not meeting the need for family planning affects many areas of human development but has the most direct impact on women's and children's health.

Family planning improves overall maternal health

Use of modern contraceptives and access to family planning services enable women and couples to avoid unintended pregnancies. This is crucial, because more than 40% of all pregnancies worldwide are unintended.

What is family planning?

Family planning refers to supplies and services which enable individuals and couples to attain and plan for their desired number of children, and the spacing and timing of births. Supplies include modern contraceptive methods, such as oral pills, injectables, IUDs, hormone-releasing implants, vaginal barrier methods, and male and female condoms. Services include health care, counselling and information and education related to sexual and reproductive health.

Preventing unintended pregnancies saves women's lives by reducing the number of unsafe abortions and unsafe deliveries – two of the main causes of maternal death. In addition, for every woman who dies of pregnancy and childbirth complications, at least 20 more suffer long-term illness. Access to modern contraceptives helps to prevent this illness and suffering.

Estimates suggest that if the need for contraception were met in developing countries, the number of unintended pregnancies would drop by two thirds, from 80 million to 26 million. There would also be 21 million fewer unplanned births and 26 million fewer induced abortions.

Family planning improves the health of girls and young women

Girls and young women – those aged 10–19 – are more likely than older women to experience complications if they get pregnant or give birth. Their children are twice as likely to die within the first year than the children of women aged 20 and older. For these reasons, family planning is essential for girls and young women. This is particularly true for girls who marry very young or are forced into marriage, as they are more likely to get pregnant than unmarried adolescents.

The risks to girls and young women can be addressed by ensuring that both girls and boys receive comprehensive sexuality education, and that adolescents have access to modern contraception.

Maternal mortality would drop
by 25–35%
if the need for contraceptives were met.

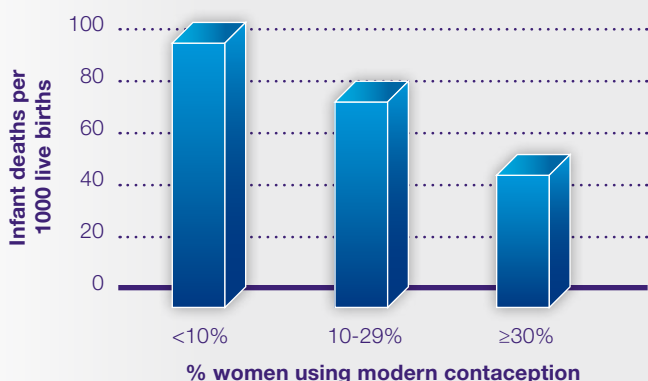
Family planning improves child health

The current level of modern contraceptive use results in 1.1 million fewer newborn deaths annually (Box 2). Meeting the need for modern contraceptives could avert at least half a million (590,000) more newborn deaths each year.

In addition, if women had the means to space their births three years apart, infant mortality would drop by 24%, and under-five mortality would fall by 35%.

In addition, if there were at least two years between a birth and a subsequent pregnancy, deaths of children under-five would fall by 13%; if the gap were three years, such deaths would decrease by 25%.

Box 2. Family planning is one of the most powerful interventions for decreasing child mortality



Family planning helps prevent HIV

Family planning, in the form of male and female condoms, prevents the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. Comprehensive family planning enables women living with HIV to plan the birth and spacing of their children, and to avoid unintended pregnancies. This contributes to reducing mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

Family planning programmes can also serve as an entry point for providing a wider range of health care services, including HIV and AIDS care. When family planning and HIV services are integrated, it can reduce overall cost and improve access, uptake and quality of services.

“Choice of method is very, very important ... We should be aware that women react differently to different contraceptives. If you don’t offer choice, you are not doing a service to the women.”

– Dr. Moses Muwonge, M.D.,
Health Logistics Consultant, Uganda

WHAT EUROPEAN DONOR GOVERNMENTS CAN DO

- Increase funding for sexual and reproductive health services and family planning, as part of an overall increase in funding for health and health-systems strengthening.
- Ensure availability of a mix of contraceptive methods, which is sustainable over time.
- Support and fund the integration of services related to family planning and HIV.
- Prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable groups, such as those in the poorest communities, young people, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, people living with HIV, and refugees.
- Work with recipient-country governments to create and support policies and programmes aimed at enhancing the social position of women; this should include comprehensive sexuality education, information and communication for women, girls, men and boys.

Countdown 2015 Europe is a consortium of 16 leading European non-governmental organizations working to address the unmet need for family planning in developing countries. The consortium raises awareness and promotes increased European donor support in terms of policies and funding to ensure universal access to reproductive health and family planning worldwide. For more information, please contact the International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network (IPPF EN) at: countdown2015europe@ippfen.org or visit www.countdown2015europe.org



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