

Contraceptive Provision Constitutes a Crucial Element of Right to Health

Contraceptive methods are the most effective and safe way to prevent unwanted pregnancies and to plan pregnancies. Planning a pregnancy provides health gains for adults and allows children to receive quality care in well-being.

Inadequate access to contraception methods and counseling services, not knowing the correct use of methods and/or not using them at all, or failure of the method used cause unwanted pregnancies.

Unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions are serious health problems for women and children. It is one of the leading causes of death in women in childbearing period. Unwanted pregnancies also deepen gender inequality, reduce women's employment and increase women's poverty. Unwanted pregnancies are a type of violence against women due to their consequences.

Contraception Methods Should Be Accessible

In Turkey services related to the regulation of fertility for sexual and reproductive health (SRH) started in the 1960s and significant progress was achieved. However, most recent findings based on field reports (1) and qualitative interviews indicate that contraceptive methods and materials have not been accessible in the majority of primary and secondary healthcare institutions in recent years.

According to the 2018 Turkey Demographic and Health Survey (TDHS) (2), the unmet need for family planning, which was 6% in previous years, has doubled to 12%. If we add to this percentage those who do not want children anymore and who are protected by the traditional method (the withdrawal method with low effectiveness) even though they still do not want children ($12\%+21\%=33\%$), there is an unmet need for fertility regulation services (Family Planning) of one out of three families in Turkey. This means that one out of every three women does not want to get pregnant but cannot reach an effective contraceptive method.

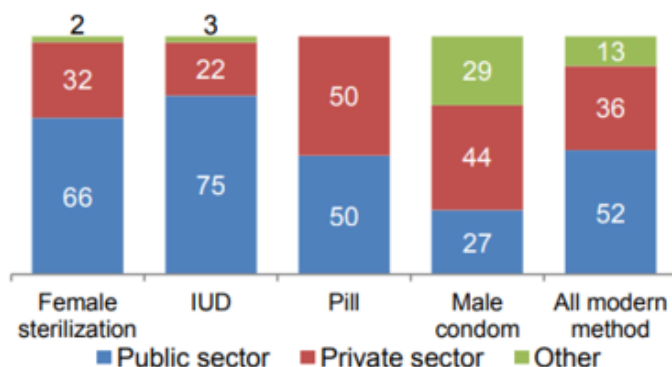
In addition, the amount of the budget allocated by the Ministry of Health for the purchase of contraceptive methods materials and the data on their distribution to primary and secondary health care institutions are not known, making it difficult to determine the size of the service gap.

1. Sexual and Reproductive Health Situation Analysis Report in Turkey, Dr. Ayşegül Esin, Assoc. Sare Mihçioğur, Canan Demir, Gizem Kanal, CISU Platform, April 2021

2. 2018 Turkey Demographic and Health Survey (TDHS), Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies, T.R. Presidency of Turkey Directorate of Strategy and Budget and TÜBİTAK, Ankara, Turkey.

Figure 7.4 Source of selected modern contraceptive methods

Percent distribution of current users of modern methods age 15-49 by most recent source of method, according to contraceptive methods



Graphic: Distribution of modern contraceptive methods currently used by women in the age group of 15-49 by the most recent sources, TDHS 2018

According to TDHS 2018, when modern contraceptive methods are provided; tubing, IUD and needle are mostly procured from the public sector. It is seen that 73% of penis condoms are not provided by the public sector and therefore had to be purchased. Only half of contraceptive materials used are provided by the government.

In recent years, there has been a discussion of the fact that the supply of contraceptives in Turkey was further exacerbated by the pandemic. According to the legislation, modern methods should be provided primarily in Family Health Centers, the first step (primary) healthcare institutions in the neighbourhoods. However, this service is not included in the performance indicators and therefore does not bring a financial benefit to the healthcare providers. Besides, there is no sanction for not providing this service. These factors result in the neglect of these services under their heavy workload.

Free and Easy Access to Contraceptive Methods is a Right Given by Law No. 2827 on Population Planning

- If the budget and institutional service capacity of the public sector is increased through legislative changes
- If access to information is increased with effective consultancy to the public by municipal administrations
- If political parties prioritize sexual rights and access to contraceptive methods on their agenda,

all adults in need across the country can have free and easy access to contraceptive methods.

What To Do

Contraceptive materials must be provided, counseled, and given free of charge with a prescription

- Pill, condom, monthly-quarterly injection etc. These effective methods to prevent unwanted pregnancies should be purchased, promoted and distributed by the Ministry of Health in sufficient numbers for all health institutions throughout the country, primarily for the benefit of primary health care institutions.
- Until the necessary measures are taken to ensure the effective countrywide supply and distribution of contraceptive products, an urgent arrangement can be made for these methods to be available on prescription free of charge.

Comprehensive sexuality education should be added to the curriculum

- In order to ensure that young people have access to safe and accurate information, age-appropriate, comprehensive and inclusive sexuality knowledge, education modules should be created and added to the K12 curriculum.

SRH services should be included in the performance indicators

- Including the application of contraceptive methods in the performance indicators of primary and secondary health care providers is vital for these methods to be accessible and applicable, and therefore for the health and wellbeing of women, mothers and children.

Service capacities of healthcare institutions should be increased

- Healthcare institutions should have the necessary equipment, personnel and materials to be able to provide SRH services. Adequate amount of budget should be provided and purchase and distribution processes at local level should be monitored by the Ministry of Health.

In-service training should be restarted

- Professional trainings on reproductive health lost importance after the Health Transformation Reform in Turkey in early 2000s. Revival and systematic practice of these trainings is vital for strengthening family planning service delivery.

Detailed data should be produced and shared with the public

- Public institutions should produce and share detailed data on pregnancy prevention and SRH services in order to develop policies for accessing rights and elements of civil society-public cooperation in the field of SRH rights.

Women's health should be one of the priority issues in the programs of political parties

- Political parties should emphasize that women's health cannot reach the desired level without ensuring gender equality.
- They should also emphasize that all the proposals made above are in line with the international documents that Turkey has committed as a signatory.
- Political parties should reflect on the importance of fertility regulation and access to contraceptives in their programmes. This issue should be raised in the agenda of the public and politics, drawing attention to the difficulty of accessing family planning and contraception materials at every opportunity.
- Politicians need to make efforts to implement the legislation for increasing access to SRH rights and services. Because the regulation of fertility is not a mere definition in law but also a fundamental right and corporate responsibility specified in Article 41 of the Constitution.
- Political parties and politicians should spend more of their time on the preparation of the necessary legislative amendments to strengthen the existing laws and they should monitor why these laws are not put into practice effectively. They should make a serious effort for the removal of political barriers against gender equality for improving women's health.

