

POLICY PAPER ON WOMEN'S ACCESS TO CONTRACEPTIVES



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The aim of this policy paper is to present international legal norms, standards and experience regarding the right to availability of contraceptive methods. This paper is designed for the state authorities and civil society representatives who implement advocacy activities and legislative initiatives in this field.

The purpose of contraceptives is to prevent pregnancy. In Armenia, there are various methods such as male condoms, implants, combined oral contraceptives, injectable contraceptives, intrauterine device (IUD) and emergency contraception pills.

In many countries condoms are considered the most widespread contraception method. However, the problem is that women not always can agree with their partners about using condoms. For this reason, there are female condoms which, unfortunately, are not available in many countries, including in Armenia. Thus, women are not able to fully control their body.

States have a positive obligation to protect women's right to privacy, sexual and reproductive health, right to freedom from discrimination, right to equality, and right to decide freely on the number and spacing of their children. International bodies are constantly calling the states to provide women with availability of contraceptives. For example, the UN Human Rights Council, the UN Human Rights Committee, and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women have recommended Armenia to provide availability, accessibility and quality of contraceptives for all women, including rural women.

However, women are constantly facing challenges about contraception use. One of the challenges is the high price of contraception methods. Another problem for rural women is the absence of pharmacies and hospitals in several rural communities. In small countries women face violations of the right to privacy by doctors or pharmacists. They are also ashamed to discuss such topics with doctors. Another serious challenge is the lack of information, and stigma about contraception, because when women have false information about contraception they avoid using such methods, and as a result, they endanger their health and well-being. Sexual violence against women also causes unwanted pregnancy,

because women fail to control their fertility.

Therefore, states are obliged to provide **availability** of various contraceptives. They must make sure that hospitals have sufficient quantity of all contraceptive methods that are also available in rural areas. States are obliged to guarantee **accessibility** of information and service about contraceptive methods for all groups of women. These methods must be **acceptable** and of **high-quality** for all women, including women with disabilities, women with HIV/AIDS etc. These are essential guarantees from the point of view of reproductive health and human rights.