

POSITION PAPER: ABORTION

INTRODUCTION

YouAct advocates for the right of individuals to make decisions about their own bodies and decide if, when, and how to have children, and have the capacity, means, and support to fulfil their decision. YouAct fights for a world where sexuality is accepted as a positive aspect of life, and the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of young people. This means that young people should have access to accurate information, youth-friendly healthcare and have the capacity to decide freely and responsibly about all aspects of their sexuality and reproductive lives. *YouAct stands against all forms of reproductive coercion and strongly believes that forcing people through pregnancy is a violation of human rights.*

YouAct asserts that the right to abortions is an integral part of sexual and reproductive health, rights, and justice. It is a crucial aspect of human rights, gender equality, reproductive justice and healthcare. It is therefore essential that abortions are legal, safe, accessible and non-stigmatized.



THE NEED FOR LEGALITY, SAFETY AND YOUTH-FRIENDLY ACCESS TO ABORTION CARE

- Abortion is a common medical procedure. Guttmacher Institute estimates that 56 million induced abortions took place annually during 2010–2014, meaning that around 25% of all pregnancies ended in abortion worldwide (Guttmacher Institute, 2018).
- People without access to safe, legal and non-stigmatised abortion services are more likely to be forced to carry out a pregnancy to term or undergo an unsafe or illegal abortion. Without access to sexual education, contraceptives, and abortion, people are denied the right to make decisions regarding their lives, bodies and futures.
- According to the Centre for Reproductive Rights, 25.5% of the world's population live under abortion laws that

completely ban access or only allow abortions if the pregnant person's life is in danger (Center for Reproductive Rights, n.d.).

- According to estimates, 22,800 women die each year from complications from an unsafe abortion (Guttmacher Institute, 2018). Almost every death and injury as a result of unsafe abortion is preventable if safe and legal abortion care is available and accessible (International Planned Parenthood, "How to talk about abortion").
- Research shows that compared to older people, adolescents are more likely to obtain unsafe abortions; more likely to terminate their pregnancies late when the procedure has higher risks; and more hesitant to seek medical care for complications resulting from unsafe abortions (Guttmacher Institute, 2016).
- Adolescents are also more likely to receive abortions that do not match WHO standards. This is due to the stigma that young people face and the lack of youth-friendly information and healthcare (Guttmacher Institute, 2016).
- Many countries within the European Council area still have highly restrictive abortion laws and inadequate sexual education, and abortion stigma is highly prevalent.
- There are three times as many unsafe abortions and unintended adolescent pregnancies in Central and Eastern Europe than in Western Europe (Astra Network, 2014).



WHY ARE ABORTION RIGHTS NOT REALISED?

Legal barriers

Legal barriers to abortion include bans, limits and restrictions that prevent people from accessing abortions when they need them. Parental consent laws, mandatory counselling, partner consent laws, and mandatory waiting periods are examples of legal factors that affects access to abortion specifically for young people.

Social/cultural/financial barriers

There are social, cultural and financial barriers that prevent people, youth in particular, from accessing safe abortion care. These barriers include stigma, judgement from providers, lack of financial means, unnecessary medical tests such as forced ultrasounds, lack of evidence-based information, refusal by healthcare professionals, misleading information, lack of anonymity, or inability to reach healthcare facilities. This is not an exhaustive list of barriers. Note that socially vulnerable people (youth, people of colour, people with disabilities, trans and non-binary people, incarcerated people, people without legal status, etc.) experience different and specific barriers to just reproductive healthcare in general, and abortion specifically. A person's capacity to access abortion care might be dependent on their identity (for example racial, religious or gender), positionality and social status, and the barriers to access can be cumulative.

Abortion Stigma

Abortion stigma is the negative attitudes associated with abortion, which lead to myths, shame, harassment, and physical and mental harm to individuals who undergo abortions as well as their families, friends, and healthcare providers (International Planned Parenthood, "Tackling Abortion Stigma"). The stigma surrounding abortion is one of the biggest barriers that prevent people from accessing information, healthcare, and support for safe abortion. Young people face specific forms of stigma because of the cultural values and norms that are associated with being young, female and/or unmarried, making it harder for young people especially to access abortion care (Kumar et al., 2009; Norris et al., 2011).



YOUACT'S APPROACH

Abortion is a common procedure even in countries where there are legal restrictions. Therefore, safe and high-quality abortion care is a medical necessity, and it saves lives. YouAct advocates for the full decriminalisation of abortion in order to create a safer and more enabling environment for all people.

Abortion stigma is prevalent everywhere, and is the root cause of legal restrictions, negative attitudes, and the discrimination and violence that people who have had an abortion and abortion providers face. YouAct works to fight abortion stigma by raising awareness and providing accurate, youth-friendly information.

Abortion provision does not stand alone, but must go hand-in-hand with other aspects of reproductive health, rights and justice. Ensuring reproductive healthcare to the highest standard includes access to abortion, education, evidence-based information, and contraception. It also includes supporting people's right to parent children in safe and healthy environments free from violence by individuals or the state. As part of a movement for reproductive justice, intersectionality must be put at the center of all of our work. This means recognising the compounding forms of stigma that specific groups face, the specific needs that people have, and supporting those who are marginalised in different ways.

YouAct works to combat abortion stigma and raise awareness of the specific needs of young people through advocacy, training and campaigns. Find our toolkits on abortion storytelling as a way to combat abortion stigma in Eastern Europe [here](#).



YOUACT'S POSITION

YouAct envisions a world where people have access to safe and legal abortions, and have the capacity, support and resources to be able to access abortion care.

- All barriers to access immediate abortion care perpetuate abortion stigma and suggest that people are unable to make decisions over their own bodies. YouAct will therefore advocate for the removal of all these barriers, legal and others, in the Council of Europe member states, and support efforts to remove barriers to access abortion in the rest of the world. This includes advocating for the right to decide where to have an abortion, for example in the home.
- Young people are particularly vulnerable when abortion rights are denied and limited. YouAct will therefore advocate for the removal of barriers to abortion access that are particularly damaging for youth.
- YouAct will work to challenge abortion stigma and to change harmful societal gender norms that stigmatise people who have abortions, people who provide abortions, and people who fight for reproductive justice.

- Young people's ability to make decisions over their bodies and reproductive lives should be recognised, trusted, and supported. YouAct will advocate for this in all areas related to reproductive justice. This includes ensuring access to contraception and comprehensive sexuality education.
- Abortion is a human right and should be recognised as such. Forcing people through pregnancy or into unsafe abortion is a violation of human rights. YouAct will therefore advocate for the formal recognition of abortion care as a human right.



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