

From Civil Society Research to Academic Policy Recommendations: Improving Access to Contraception in Croatia

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Position: Research and Teaching Assistant

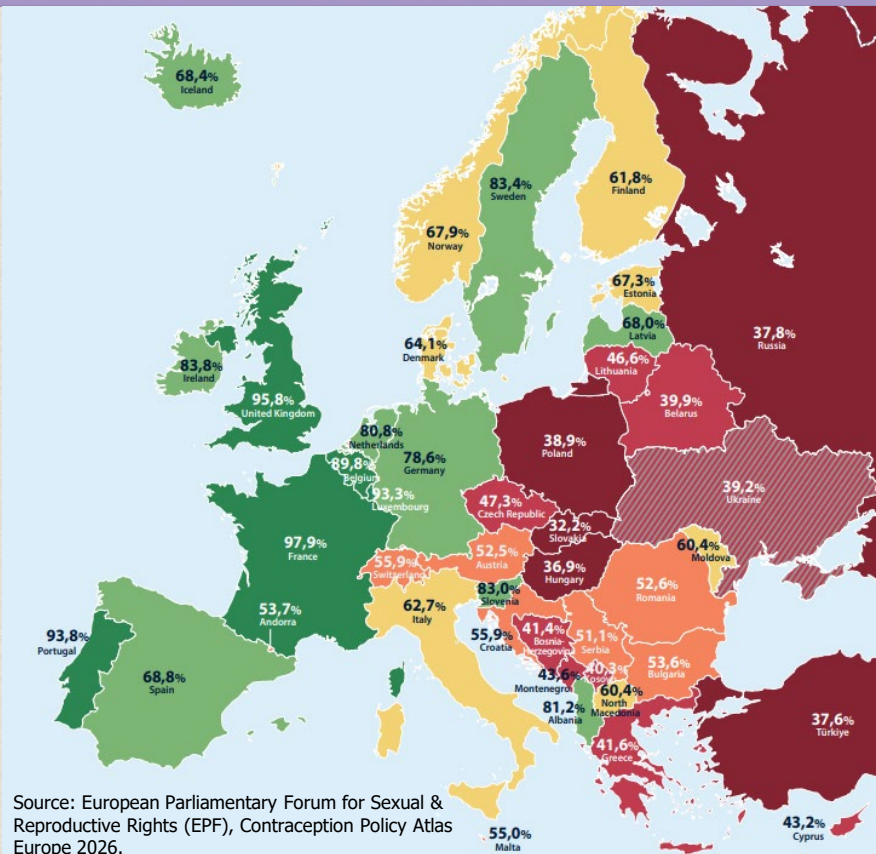
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Country: Croatia

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Context

- Contraception is a gender equality issue, not only a health service.
- Croatia still faces gaps in affordability, counselling and reliable information.
- Misinformation reflects social taboo and the lack of systematic sexuality education.
- According to the European Contraception Policy Atlas, which compares 47 European countries on access to contraception, Croatia ranks 22nd, with a score of 55.9/100 in 2026.



Source: European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual & Reproductive Rights (EPF), Contraception Policy Atlas Europe 2026.

Research design

Mixed-methods approach combining **quantitative** and **qualitative** evidence

Quantitative research

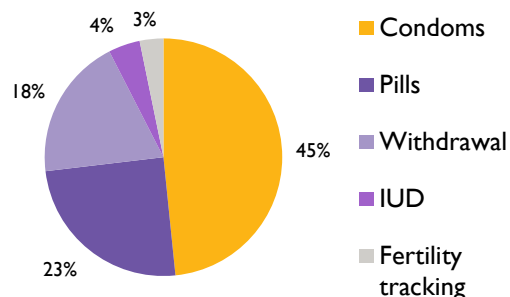
- Survey conducted by Sofija Association from February to June 2024
- 1,136 respondents, 96% women
- Covered contraceptive use, access, information sources, affordability and barriers
- Sample included 51% Gen Z, 44% Millennials and 5% Gen X

Qualitative research

- Conducted in March-April 2025. 10 women aged 24-45 from across Croatia
- Explored personal experiences with contraception: information and education, affordability, side effects, healthcare quality and communication with doctors

Evidence

Most-used contraceptive methods (%)



Source: Authors' Analysis

Use is concentrated in condoms, pills and withdrawal

Long-acting options remain rare or harder to access.

Focus group key findings

9/10
participants

reported **not receiving contraception education** in school

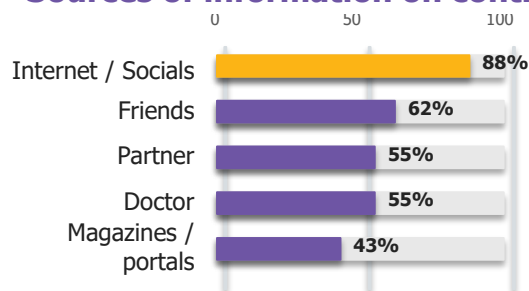
7/10
participants

reported **serious distrust** in doctors and pharmacists

7/10
participants

reported **negative side effects** from hormonal contraception

Sources of information on contraception

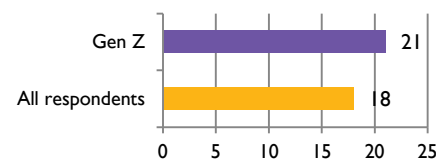


Source: Authors' Analysis

Informal sources play a major role

friends are cited more often than healthcare professionals as a source of information.

3. Contraceptive cost as a barrier (%)



18% say cost is a barrier

78% support at least 50% **state subsidies** for hormonal contraception

Most barriers
North Croatia

vs

Least barriers
Zagreb

Source: Authors' Analysis

Recommendations

1. Improve financial support and availability

- Introduce **public co-financing** for contraception, especially for young people up to 25 and vulnerable groups
- Ensure access for **unemployed people** and those with **low income**
- Cover **emergency contraception** through the health system
- Consider **over-the-counter access to hormonal contraception**, following practices in EU countries with better contraceptive access
- Prioritize methods that are effective but financially harder to access, including **long-acting contraception**

Recommendations

2. Strengthen counselling and education

- Improve the availability and quality of **contraception counselling**, especially in rural areas.
- Provide confidential **counselling through health centers** and trusted public services.
- Develop age-appropriate **education programs** for young people. Include information on different methods, effectiveness, correct use and side effects.
- Establish follow-up and **monitoring for users of contraceptive pills** in cooperation with gynaecologists.

Recommendations

3. Improve information and resources

- Create **reliable, official** and **easily accessible online information** on contraception
- Include method **options, side effects, costs, availability** and **access procedures**.
- Make information available in **multiple languages**, including minority languages
- Clearly explain **where and how** different contraceptives can be obtained
- Provide **accessible counselling points** connected by public transport, with privacy and discretion

Key Takeaways

- Access to contraception is a **gender-equality and economic issue**, not only a health issue. Barriers in Croatia are systemic and unequal.
- Improving access requires a **combined policy response**: public financing, better counselling and education, and reliable, transparent information on methods, costs and availability.
- **Civil society-academia collaboration**: research conducted by the Sofija Association informed academic recommendations to the Government, supporting budget-based measures to improve access to contraception.

Thank you

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