

Family planning in modern Belarus

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Family planning is the ability of individuals and couples to have the desired number of children, as well as to choose the optimal time of their birth and adjust the intervals between childbirth. Modern family planning is carried out through the use of contraceptive methods, as well as through the treatment of unintentional infertility.

The accessibility of safe and effective family planning is of great importance for health and well-being. Numerous studies have shown that unwanted or mistimed pregnancies entail a series of negative economic, psychological and social consequences for both the woman herself and her child¹. Unplanned pregnancies are the main cause of abortions.

In post-transition populations, which include the population of Belarus, family planning is widespread. The level of contraceptive use in Belarus is high and differs little from many other European countries. However, the so-called traditional methods with low reliability still play a significant role in the structure of contraception (about 17% of families using contraception relied on traditional methods in 2017). And this is a typical for post-Soviet countries. The prevalence of certain methods of contraception, the degree of confidence in the modern methods of pregnancy prevention and reproductive technologies and their availability vary depending on the socio-demographic characteristics of women.

To assess the situation in the field of birth control, it is also common to use the indicator of unmet need for family planning, which is equal to the proportion of couples who do not want to have a child soon, are healthy (fertile), sexually active, but do not use any method of contraception. This indicator is included in the list of indicators for the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. According to the 2012 survey, its value for Belarus is small – 7% of married women, but in the age groups of 15-19 and 20-24 years, it is twice as much². And if we add those who use ineffective methods to the couples who do not use contraception, then the indicator of unmet need for family planning will more than double. This indirectly shows that the family planning service is not sufficiently developed.

According to the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights³, in the ranking of the availability of modern contraception and information about it Belarus ranks

¹ David Henry P. (2006). Born Unwanted, 35 Years Later: The Prague Study // Reproductive Health Matters, Volume 14, Issue 27, Pages 181-190.

² United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2021). World Contraceptive Use 2021.

³ <https://www.epfweb.org/node/89>

fourth from the end among 46 European countries; the situation is worse than in Belarus only in Poland, Russia, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

At the same time, the problems of birth control are poorly represented in the scientific literature. This study will try to fill this gap – key indicators characterizing the current situation in the field of family planning in the Republic of Belarus will be estimated and analyzed, groups with the greatest risk of unwanted pregnancy and abortion will be identified. In addition, an attempt will be made to assess the prevalence of infertility problems in Belarus, as well as to find out how active couples faced with this problem are in overcoming reproductive disorders.

The main source of data will be the results of two recent large population surveys. First of all, this is the 2017 survey "Family formation, stability of family relations and fertility in the changing socio-economic conditions of Belarusians", conducted on the basis of the approaches and requirements of the international program "Generations and Gender"⁴. Secondly, the results of the "Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey to assess the situation of children and women in the Republic of Belarus" conducted in 2019 by the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus within the framework of the global MICS program (UNICEF)⁵ will be used. The official statistics of Belstat will also be involved.

Demographically, Belarus and Russia are very close, so the conclusions obtained from the Belarusian data will be quite relevant for Russia, especially considering that in the Russian Federation surveys that include family planning issues are conducted extremely rarely.

⁴ <https://www.ggp-i.org/>

⁵ <https://mics.unicef.org/>