

Marie Stopes International commends advances in the region and globally in support of the right to choose. We also recognise that progress towards the right to abortion has not been universal and many women and girls still lack access to safe and legal services, including in Northern Ireland.

Globally around 13% of maternal mortality is attributable to unsafe abortion, with 47,000 deaths each year. It is widely recognized that legal restrictions do not reduce the number of women seeking abortion, but merely increase the number of unsafe abortions. Globally 56 million abortions take place each year, with 25 million of these unsafe. Significantly more unsafe procedures occur in countries with more restrictive abortion laws. In parts of the ECE region, more than half of abortions are unsafe.

It is crucial that Member States recognise access to abortion as both an essential part of sexual and reproductive health and rights, and a prerequisite for gender equality. If we are to deliver the SDGs, particularly Goal 5 on gender equality, we cannot ignore the evidence that points towards the benefits of safe and legal comprehensive abortion services, and women and girls must make decisions about their own bodies.

The 25th anniversary of ICPD must recognise that medical abortion has revolutionised access and that health systems and regulation must keep pace with its increased availability, ensuring quality of care and keeping decision making in women's hands. We must be cognisant that medical abortion is increasingly available outside of health facilities and work to ensure that this is safe and effective. Choice must be protected, with some women preferring medical abortion because it enables privacy, autonomy and a greater sense of control, but some women choose or need surgical abortion.

We encourage Member States to recognise women's agency and autonomy and provide full and unrestricted access to woman-controlled methods of abortion including medical abortion. Where legal, regulatory, social or economic restrictions exist, states must make every effort to remove them and ensure universal access.

The ECE region has a vital role to play in recognising that access to safe abortion and post abortion care is a human right. As members of a global community, Member States should continue to defend a woman's right to choose, and to support other Member States to do the same.