

# *Professional support and rights at an EU level*

Undoubtedly, the issue of adolescent pregnancy is a social issue that many communities and families in the European Union have to face. Nowadays, teenage mothers need to know their rights in order to guarantee the well-being and the safety both of themselves and of the newborn soul, as well. Over the last years, European Member States attempt to provide young mothers with the appropriate professional support and inform them accurately about their rights.

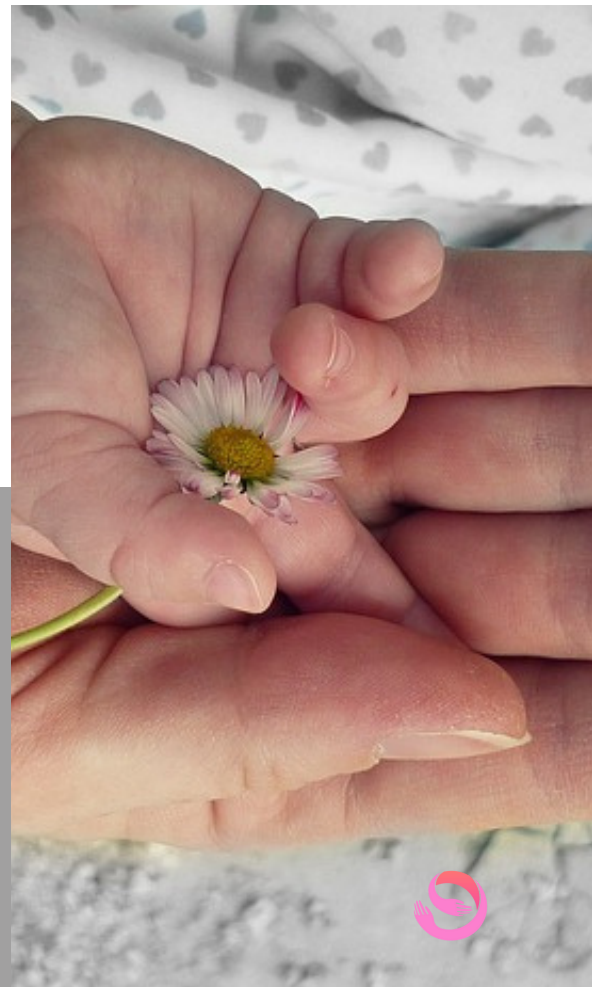
It goes without saying that professional support is directly linked with counseling and guidance services, since young mothers need to be aware of the challenges that may appear, due to motherhood. Emotional or psychological support is absolutely necessary not only during pregnancy, but also after giving birth, since various mental health issues, like depression, substance abuse or post traumatic stress disorder, are likely to occur. Many mental health support programs have been introduced in the EU, in order to tackle these kinds of challenges. Professional support can also have the form of childcare support services, like finding suitable childcare options, housing assistance for the young parents, or financial aid for childcare expenses and information on available resources, too. Not to mention, that professional support is highly connected with educational support, since continuous access to education is an established right for all people. Even after giving birth it is crucial for young girls not to abandon school, and enter university if they wish and thus, have more future employment opportunities. In many EU states educational support can have the form of tailored educational programs, alternative learning options, like distance learning from home, flexible schedules and tutoring services.



Moreover, there are many vocational training opportunities that can qualify teenage mothers with the appropriate skills and therefore, enhance their employability and ensure to a certain extent their economic independence. Without any doubt, specialized training programs are quite widespread, since through them young mothers have more chances to be employed and provide their children a better future.



As far as their rights are concerned, young mothers are having to a greater or lesser extent the same rights as an adult mother. Firstly, according to Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, teenage mothers have the right to family life, exactly in the same way as adults. If the pregnant girl is salaried, she continues to have her employment rights, meaning that she is having the right to fair and equal treatment in the workplace. Employment rights include protection against dismissal, the right to maternity leave and the right to return to work after childbirth, whereas during their pregnancy they should not face any kind of discrimination. Another point worth mentioning is that pregnant teenagers have the right to attend school classes and the right to take time off from school for prenatal visits, childbirth or abortion care. The EU guarantees that teenage mothers preserve the right to make their own pregnancy decisions, whether this is to keep and raise the baby, have an abortion or place the child for adoption.



Early childbearing is quite a challenging situation and apart from the legal framework and professional support that many European organizations and institutions are providing, it is also of paramount importance to sensitize teenagers to sexual education from an early age, in order to gain insight towards adolescent pregnancy.





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