

Updating the European Directive on Midwives: an Opportunity to Align with Global Standards

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The European Commission is currently considering revisions to the Directive on minimum professional qualifications for midwives (Directive 2005/36/EC). This could be the first substantial revision in over twenty years and therefore represents an important opportunity to update the regulation of the profession in light of the latest scientific evidence and changes in healthcare systems¹.

Although the directive formally applies to EU and European Economic Area Member States, its impact extends far beyond the region. European regulatory frameworks are often used as a reference in other national and regional contexts when defining educational and professional standards. For this reason, updating the directive also has implications for the global governance of maternal and newborn health.

In recent years, international organisations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) have developed and updated global standards for midwifery education, regulation, and professional competencies. These include the ICM Global Standards for Midwifery Education² and the Essential Competencies for Midwifery Practice³, which are regularly updated to reflect international scientific and professional consensus.

Aligning European legislation with these standards is essential to ensure quality and safety of care. Evidence shows that health systems where midwives are well educated and enabled to practise to the full scope of their professional competencies achieve better outcomes for women and newborns⁴. Furthermore, greater consistency in educational standards facilitates mutual recognition of qualifications and professional mobility within Europe. The latter is particularly relevant in contexts such as Italy, where strengthening alignment with international standards could support the ongoing development of midwifery education, professional autonomy, and implementation of midwifery led models of care.

Midwives are able to provide up to 90% of essential sexual, reproductive, maternal, and newborn health interventions, particularly within primary care-based models⁵. Strengthening midwifery education and the professional role of midwives is, therefore, an effective strategy to improve access to care, reduce inequalities, and enhance the resilience of health systems.

The revision of the European directive, therefore, offers a concrete opportunity to modernise the regulation of the midwifery profession, strengthen alignment between European policies and international standards, and contribute to improving the quality of maternal and newborn care. Aligning European legislation with global standards is not only a bureaucratic process, but an investment in the health of women, newborns, and families.

Declarations

Author Contributions

All authors contributed to the conception and drafting of the manuscript and approved the final version.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest. All authors hold professional roles within national and international midwifery organizations; however, the views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of their affiliated institutions.

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