

# Induced abortions from the European Perspective

Mika Gissler

THL National Institute for Health and Welfare, Helsinki, Finland

NHV Nordic School of Public Health, Gothenburg, Sweden

Acknowledgement: REPROSTAT projects,  
funded by EU health programmes.



# Sidonnaisuudet

- FT (epidemiologia), VTM (kansantaloustiede, tilastotiede)
- **Päätoimet**
  - THL:n tutkimusprofessori ja NHV:n epidemiologian professori
- **Sivutoimet**
  - Oulun yliopiston terveystieteiden laitoksen dosentti
  - Turun yliopiston lastenpsykiatrian tutkimuskeskuksen erityisasiantuntija
- **Muut sidonnaisuudet**
  - Tutkimusrahoitusta
    - Kansallinen syntymäkohortti 1987: Emil Aaltosen säätiö, Kansaneläkelaitos ja Työsuojelurahasto yhteensä 470 460 €
    - Syöpäsäätiö: Lisääntymisterveys nuorella iällä sairastetun syövän jälkeen. 70 000 €
  - Ei muita sidonnaisuuksia.

# Legislation



# Induced abortion is available in 26 EU member states

- Induced abortion is illegal in two countries:
  - Ireland (excluding cases to save woman's life)
  - Malta (no exemptions)
- Access to induced abortion is very restricted in one country.
  - Poland (induced abortion for indications related to fetal abnormality, serious risk to maternal health and for the pregnancy initiated by reported rape or other act of violence)

# Four member states require a legal indication for induced abortion

- Indications related to physical and mental health
  - Spain (excluding 1 July 2010-2014?)
- Indications related to physical and mental health or socioeconomic circumstances:
  - Cyprus
  - Finland
  - United Kingdom
    - excluding Northern Ireland (abortion is only available in cases of non-viable fetus or fetal abnormality and risk to maternal life)

# Twenty member states allow induced abortion on woman's request

- Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, and Sweden
  - 1950s: Soviet Union and most CEE countries (excluding Yugoslavia)
  - From 1970s onwards: other countries

# Time limits

## (abortions on request)

- The time limit for an induced abortion on request is usually 10-14 weeks, but
  - Sweden 18 weeks and
  - United Kingdom 24 weeks
- It remained unclear, if the gestational limits refer to time since conception or time since last menstrual period:
  - For example Austria and Germany calculates the gestational age from LMP

# Time limits

## (fetal and maternal indications)

- Fetal indications:
  - In 14 member states: either between 20 and 24 weeks or according to the fetal viability.
  - In 12 member states: no legal upper limit.
- Maternal indications:
  - In 9 member states: between 21 and 24 weeks.
  - In 18 countries: no legal upper limit.



# Time limits

## (fetal and maternal indications)

- Pregnancy terminations in late stage are not defined as induced abortions, but prematurely induced labour. The child is tried to be saved.
- The final decision is done by the clinicians.
- Effect on statistics:
  - Induced abortions: minor effect.
  - Stillbirth and perinatal deaths: deteriorating their usefulness to measure health care quality.

# Authorisation for induced abortion

- No EU member states require spousal authorisation.
- Parental authorisation is required for induced abortions among minors (15-18 years) in 14 member states:
  - Czech Republic, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia and Sweden.

# Methods for induced abortion

- Medical abortion is not allowed in seven EU member states:
  - Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania and Slovak Republic.

# Conscientious objection

- Most EU countries have conscientious objection for performing induced abortion or participating in the decision making:
  - Excluding four EU countries (Sweden, Finland, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic) and Iceland.
- If a woman wishes to terminate her pregnancy and faces problems to get an induced abortion, health care services should provide her with an alternative within the prevailing frame and limits of the national legislation.
  - The national legislations, the restrictions imposed on such rights and their consequences should be studied in the EU level.

# Statistics



# International statistics on induced abortions

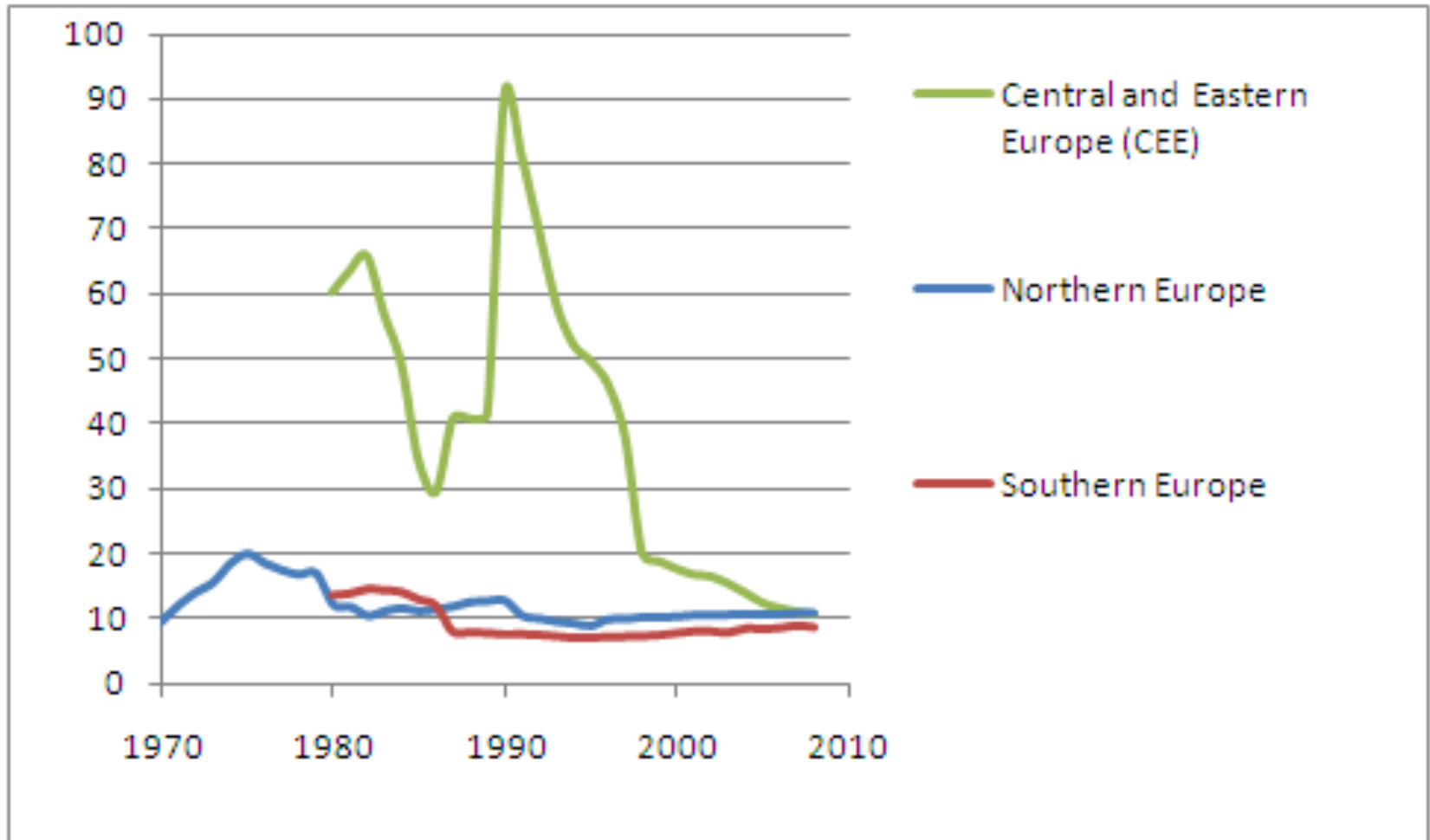
- International data is collected by Eurostat, United Nations and WHO Regional Office for Europe
- Data for 23+2 countries:
  - No data for Austria, Cyprus and Luxembourg
  - No registered induced abortions in Ireland and Malta

# Induced abortions in the EU in 2008 (Gissler et al. BJOG 2012)

- The EU member states with information on legal induced abortions report 1.2 million induced abortions per year.
- Abortion rates per 1000 women aged 15-49 years
  - **The whole European Union: 10.3/1 000**
  - Restricted access to abortion: **0.0/1 000**
  - Abortion on request: **11.0/1 000 (6-25/1 000)**
  - Legal indication required: **12.3/1 000 (9-14/1 000)**



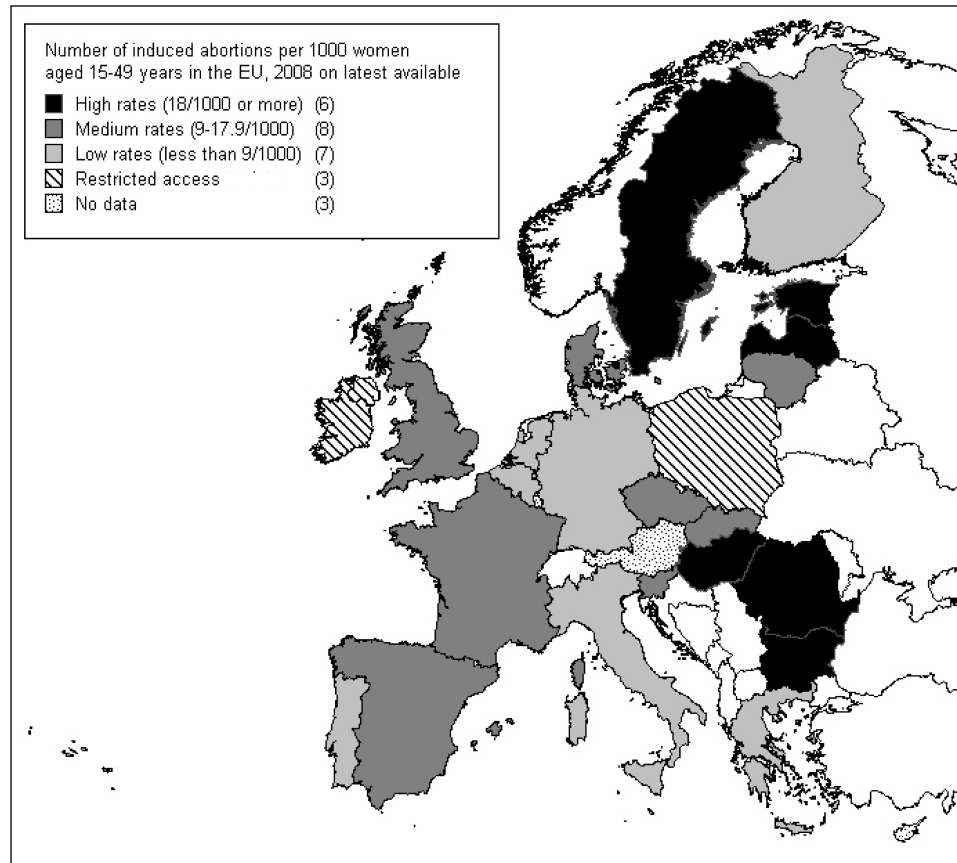
# Induced abortion rate by region 1970-2008







# Induced abortion rates 2008 (Gissler et al. BJOG 2012)

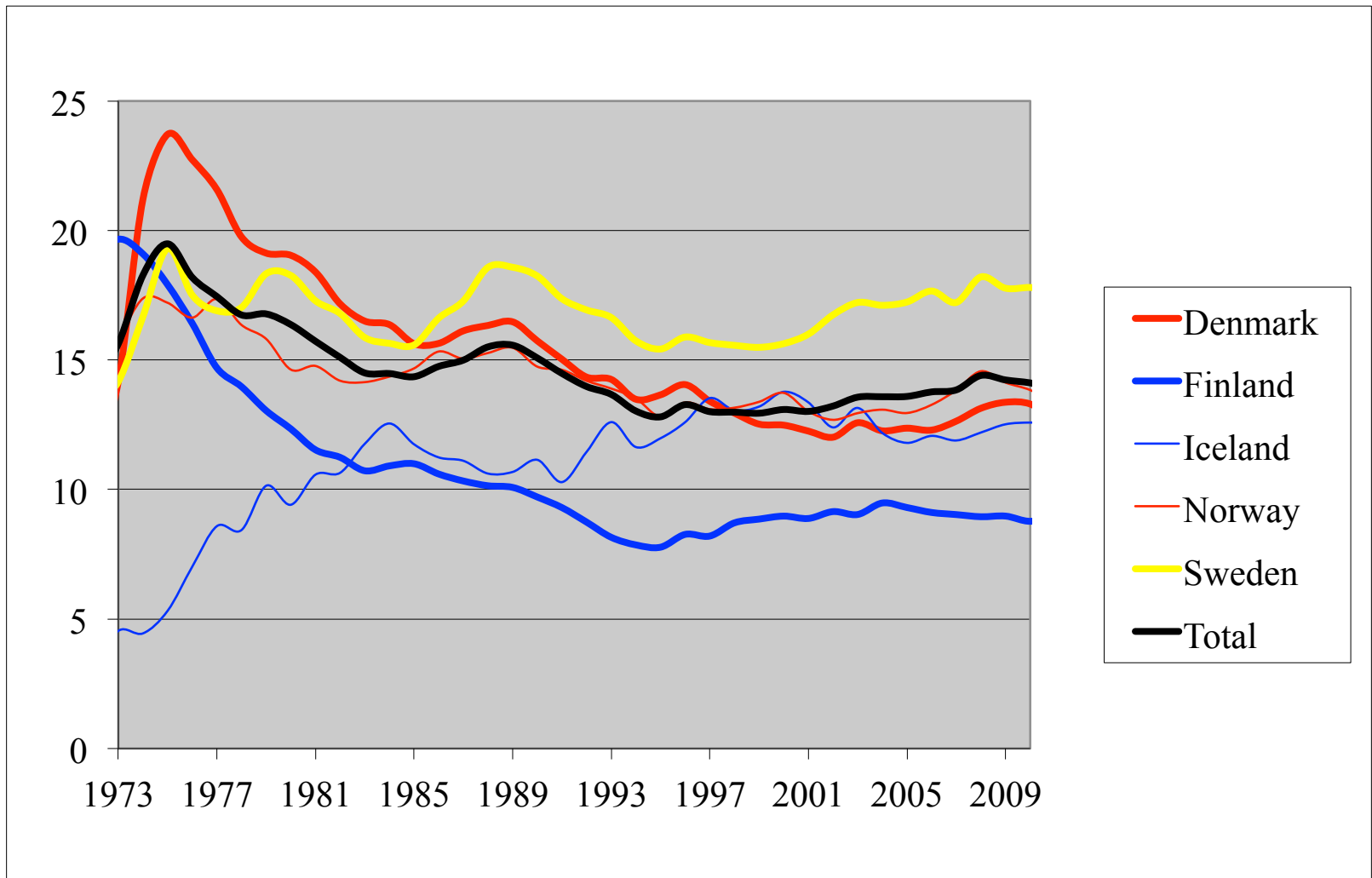


# Induced abortion rates 2008

1. Estonia	25.1/1000	18. Netherlands	7.3/1000
2. Romania	23.4/1000	19. Belgium	7.2/1000
3. Bulgaria	20.0/1000	20. Greece	6.1/1000
4. Hungary	18.4/1000	21. Germany	6.0/1000
5. Sweden	18.3/1000	22. Poland	0.1/1000

No data: Austria, Cyprus and Luxembourg  
Abortion illegal: Ireland and Malta

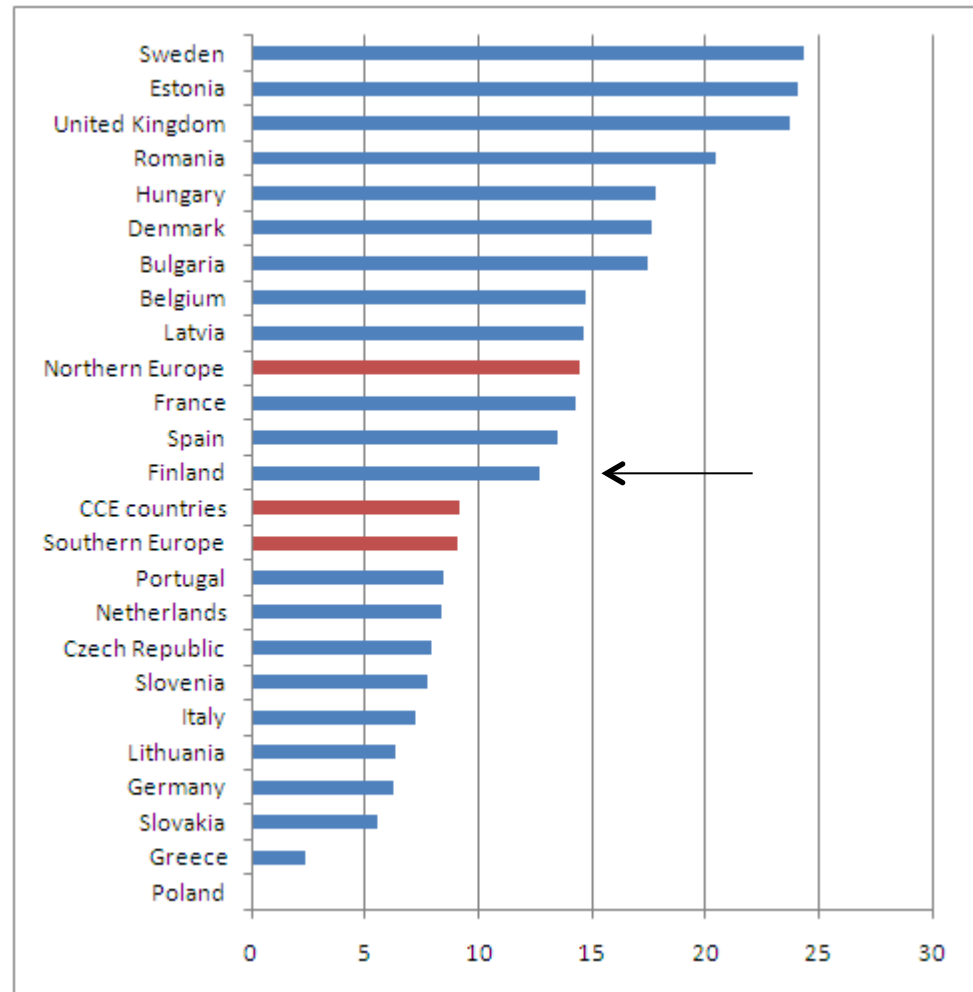
# Nordic statistics on induced abortions (THL), all abortions per 1000 women aged 15-49 years



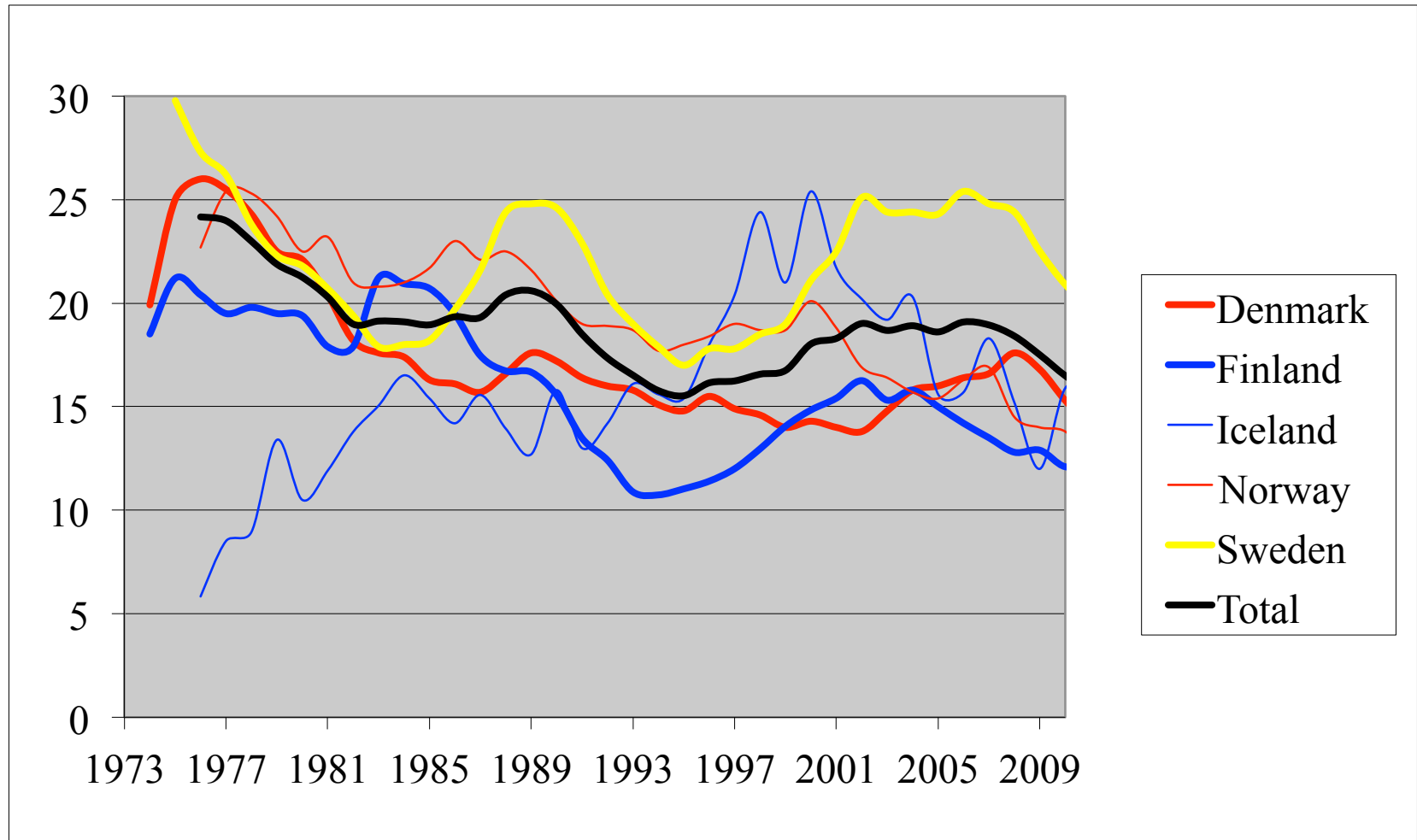


# Induced abortions among teenagers 2008

- 169 500 induced abortions per year
- 14% of all induced abortions
- 12.0/1000 women aged 15-19 years



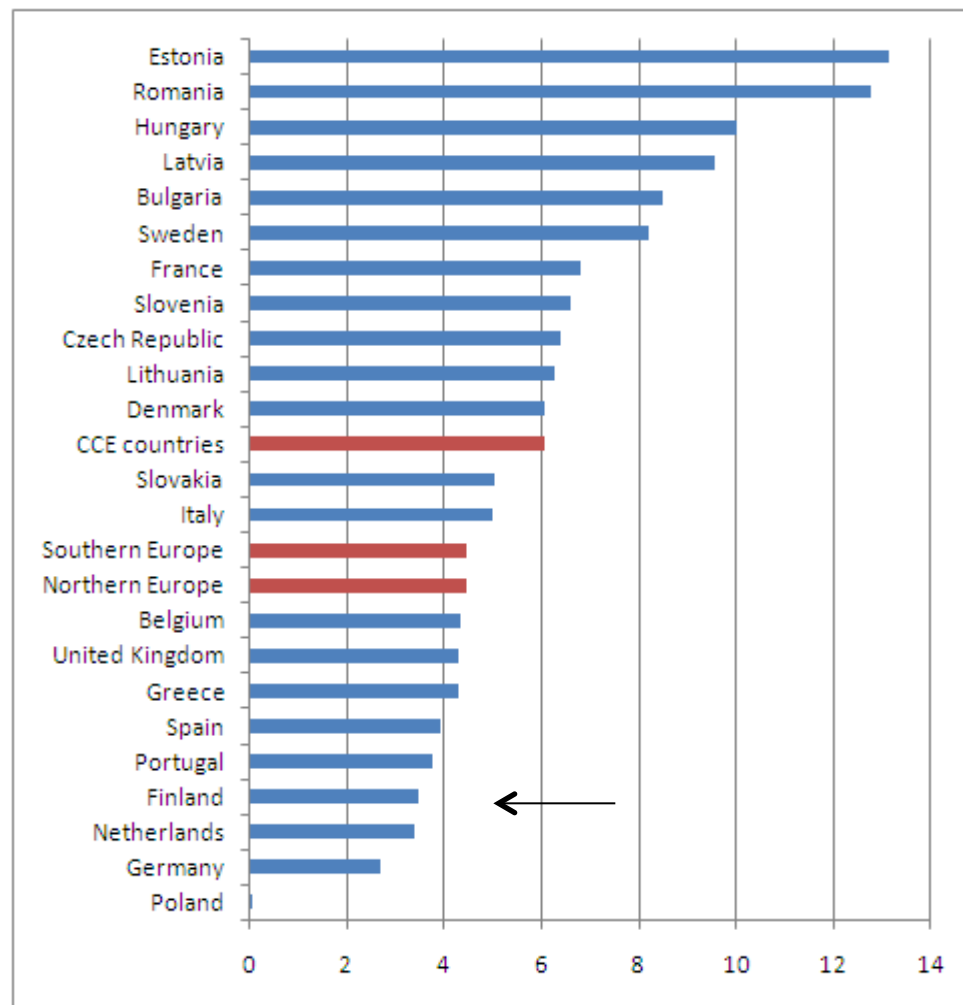
# Nordic statistics on induced abortions (THL), teen abortions per 1000 women aged 15-19 y





# Induced abortions among women aged 35 years or more 2008

- 255 000 induced abortions per year
- 21% of all induced abortions
- 4.8/1000 women aged 35-49 years



# Induced abortions after 12 weeks

- High rates:
  - Spain 11.8%
  - Finland 7.3%
- Low rates:
  - Czech Republic, Italy and France 3%
  - Estonia 2%
  - Slovak Republic < 1%

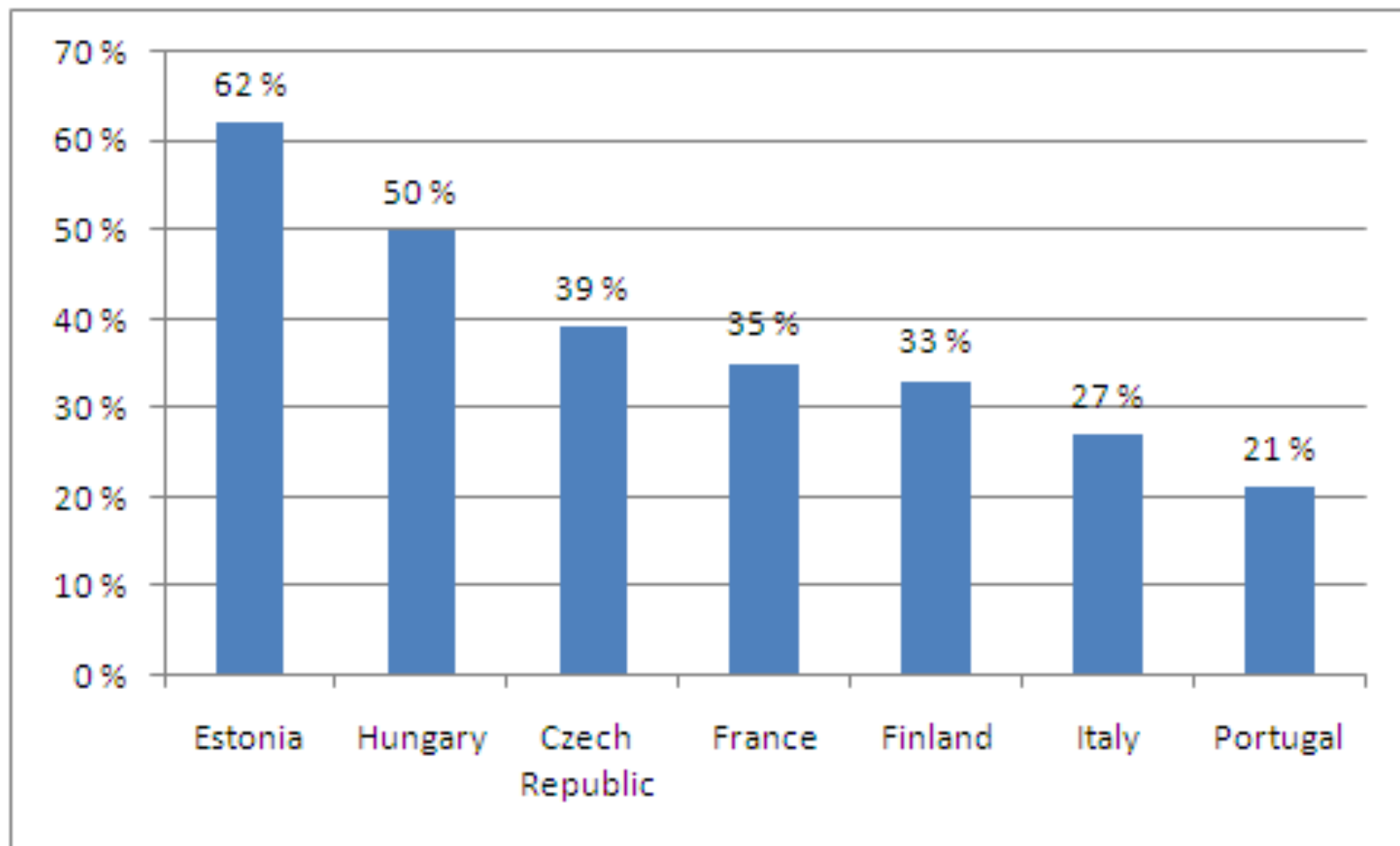
# Induced abortions by parity

- No previous births
  - 48-52% Belgium, Finland, France and Spain
  - 40-41% Italy and Portugal
  - 34% Slovenia
  - 26-29% Czech Republic, Estonia, and Slovak Republic
- Four or more previous births
  - 2-6% All ten countries providing data



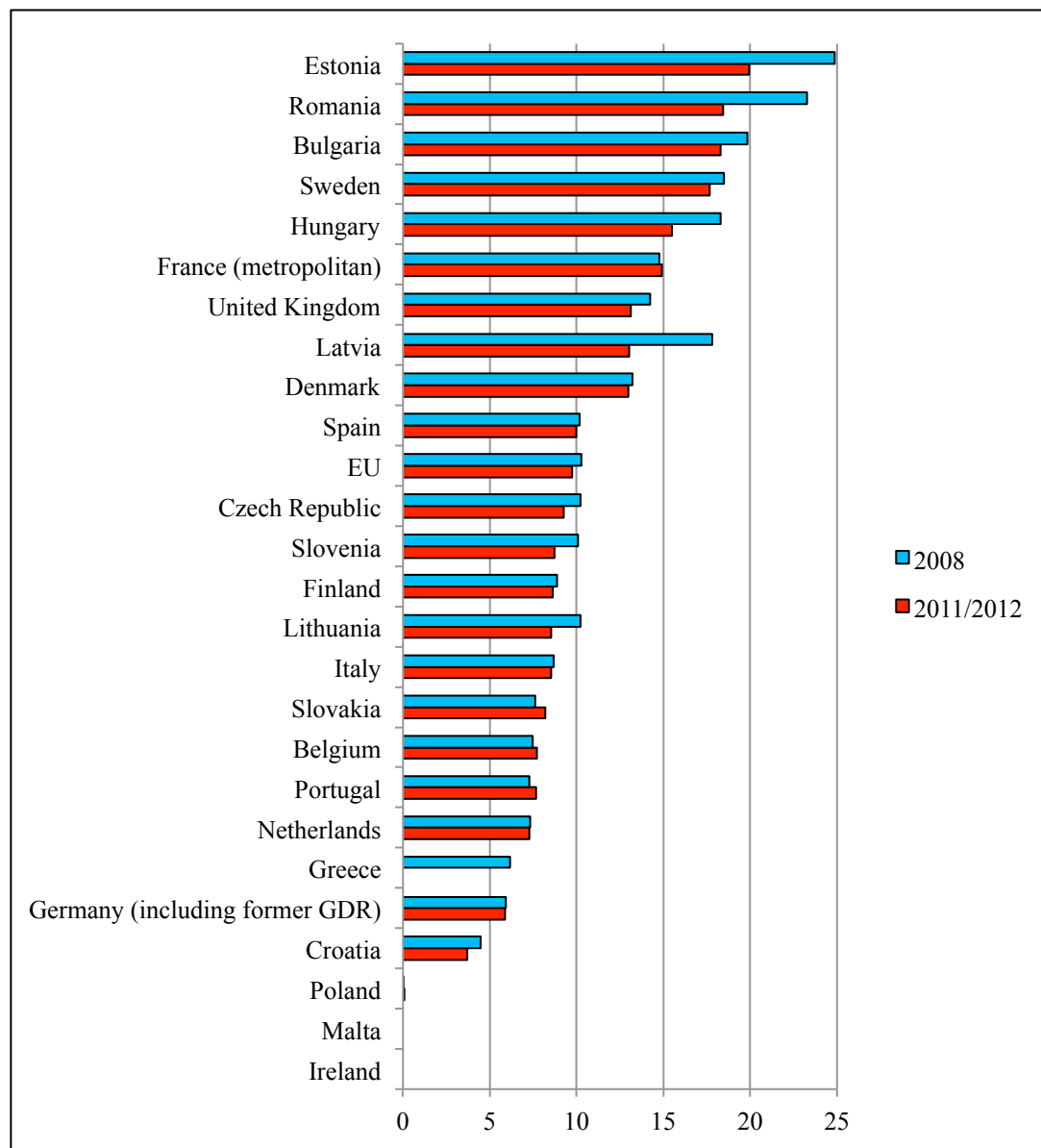


# Repeated induced abortions, %



# How about after 2008?

<b>Poland</b>	<b>28 %</b>
<b>Belgium</b>	<b>5 %</b>
<b>Portugal</b>	<b>2 %</b>
<b>France</b>	<b>1 %</b>
Sweden	-1 %
Netherlands	-2 %
Denmark	-2 %
Spain	-3 %
Italy	-3 %
Finland	-4 %
<b>EUROPEAN UNION</b>	<b>-5 %</b>
United Kingdom	-6 %
Germany	-7 %
Czech Republic	-11 %
Slovenia	-17 %
Bulgaria	-18 %
Hungary	-18 %
Croatia	-21 %
Slovakia	-22 %
<b>Estonia</b>	<b>-28 %</b>
<b>Romania</b>	<b>-31 %</b>
<b>Lithuania</b>	<b>-33 %</b>
<b>Latvia</b>	<b>-41 %</b>



# Data quality issues

- Data was based on official national statistics. Their quality remains unknown.
  - Illegal induced abortions are not covered.
  - It remained unclear, whether private services are covered.
  - Definition of induced abortion:
    - spontaneous abortion vs. induced abortion
    - induced abortion vs. birth
    - induction of menstruation (evacuation of uterus without pregnancy test)
- Health Information System & Public Health Reporting
  - Induced abortions should be covered both nationally and internationally (Eurostat / EU Public Health Monitoring).

# Data quality issues

- Some data are known to be underestimates:
  - Older statistics in France, Germany, Italy, and Poland may be underestimations, but the data collection for example in France and Italy has been improved.
  - In Greece, up to three out of four abortions may be unregistered (Ioannidi-Kapolou, 2004).
- National data on induced abortions should be validated.
- International collection of statistics on induced abortions should have quality requirements.

# Conclusions

- Women in the EU have different access to induced abortions.
- Large country variation suggests that induced abortion rates can be lowered in most countries without making induced abortion illegal.
- Regional differences still exist, even though these have decreased during the last decades:
  - Improved availability of reliable contraceptives and reproductive health services.
  - Better sexual health education in schools
  - Converging social norms on contraception and childbearing.

# Resolution of the Council of Europe: **Access to safe and legal abortion in Europe**

The Parliamentary Assembly should therefore invite the member states of the Council of Europe to:

- decriminalise abortion, if they have not already done so;
- guarantee women's effective exercise of their right to abortion and lift restrictions which hinder, de jure or de facto, access to safe abortion;
- adopt appropriate sexual and reproductive health strategies, including access of women and men to contraception at a reasonable cost and of a suitable nature for them as well as compulsory relationships and sex education for young people.

Doc. 11537 rev, from 8 April 2008:

<http://assembly.coe.int/main.asp?Link=/documents/workingdocs/doc08/edoc11537.htm>