

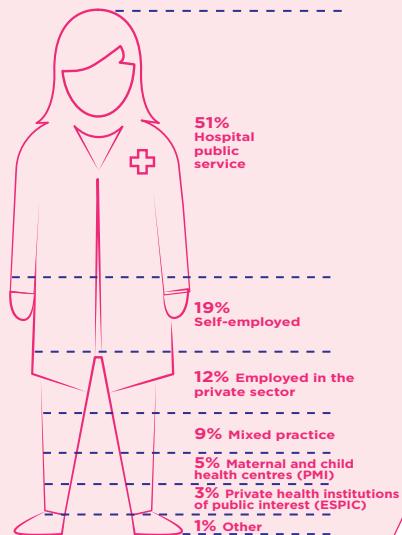
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Ethics, autonomy and medical skills

International definition of the midwife

According to the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM), a midwife is a responsible and accountable professional who has successfully completed a midwifery education programme and has acquired the requisite qualifications to be legally licensed to practice midwifery in the country she lives in. A midwife works with women to provide them the essential support, advice and care they need during pregnancy, labour and the postpartum period. A midwife can conduct normal deliveries on her own responsibility and must provide the necessary care to newborn and infant babies. A midwife's scope of work can also extend to maternal health, sexual and reproductive health and care to children.

Where do midwives work?



French midwives undergo high-level training to ensure high-quality care for patients

The midwifery training curriculum in France is one of the most thorough in Europe. It is spread over five years: the first year is common to all health careers, and it is then followed by four years of midwifery training in one of the 35 midwifery schools in France.

Midwives are medical professionals who can provide diagnoses and prescribe medication, just like doctors and dental surgeons.



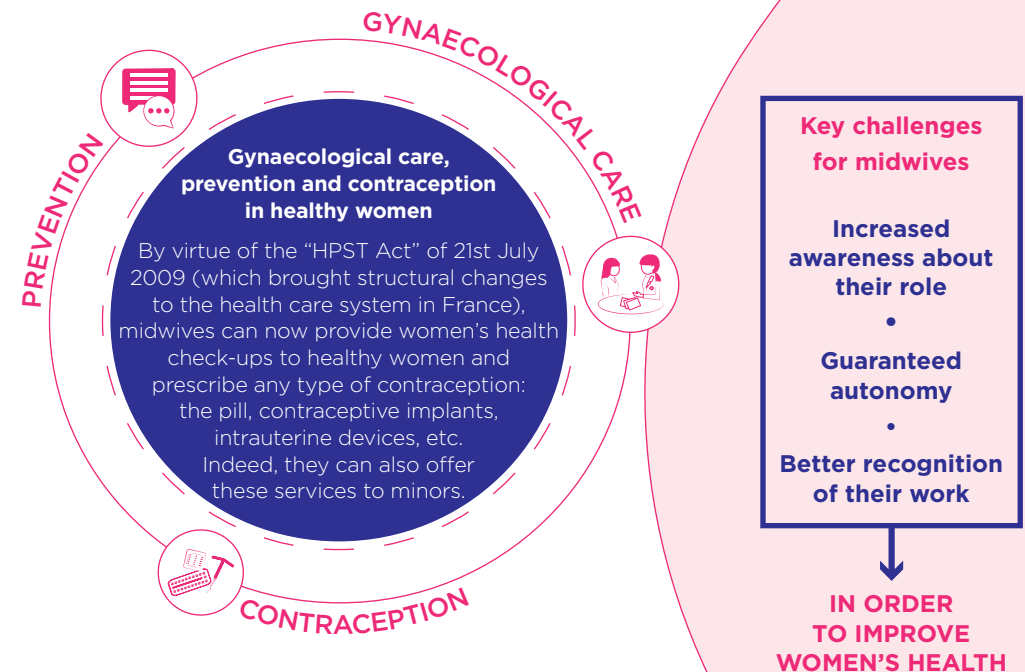
Midwifery in France in figures

In France, the practice of midwifery was opened to men in 1982 but 97.5% of midwives are women. Overall, their average age is 40. 28% of midwives work in a private practice (self-employed or mixed practice). These figures show that in France, midwifery is a dynamic and vibrant profession that appeals to young generations.

The key role of midwives in improving the health of women and newborns

The medical competencies of midwives in France

There are nearly 23,000 midwives in France, offering a wide range of medical services to women and newborn infants. Midwives are physiology experts. They supervise pregnancy and childbirth; they support women after childbirth by providing postnatal care; they can prescribe any type of contraception and provide women's health care to healthy women. They can also prescribe nicotine substitutes and give vaccinations to mothers, newborns and their close relatives, as well as prescribe and perform medical abortions.



Birth centres

Birth centres in France were announced as early as 1998, but they only became legal and started to be experimented in 2013. Unlike maternity wards in hospitals, these centres offer personalised low-tech midwifery care to women. They are immediately adjacent to hospitals and address continuity of care in a way that focuses on the interests of women and newborns first. Birth centres started to be tested in France in November 2015 (for a limited duration of five years) as a means to enhance midwives' professional autonomy.

European mobility in favour of women's health

Freedom of movement for midwives within the European Union

More and more health professionals now decide to look for a job or for training opportunities outside their country, in one of the 28 Member States of the European Union (EU). This trend helps offset imbalances between countries with a surplus or a lack of workforce in a given sector, and it enhances access to health care for all patients in Europe. The EU has decided to allow health workers –including qualified midwives who have completed their education in a Member State– to serve in any of its 28 Member States.



The specific features of midwifery education in Europe

Most Member States of the EU have specific education programmes for midwifery. According to EU legislation*, the minimum duration of (full-time) basic training to become a midwife is 3 years. In some countries, it is also possible to “specialize” in midwifery after studying nursing (3 years of nursing training + 2 years of midwifery training), like in Belgium or Switzerland for instance. Although they may vary slightly from one country to another, these standard training requirements were designed in order to promote the mobility of midwives throughout Europe.

*Directive 2013/55/EU of 20 November 2013 amending Directive 2005/36/EC of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications.

Midwifery practice in Europe

Harmonising professional qualifications within the EU

The Directive 2013/55/EU set up a European framework between Member States to enable the automatic recognition of the qualifications of midwives working in a different EU Member State.

Any midwife can have her European diploma and her professional skills recognised in a Member State other than the one where she completed her education, in order to be allowed to work anywhere within the EU. Having a recognised European diploma in midwifery is the key requirement to be allowed to work as a midwife in France.

In spite of these existing requirements set by the EU, efforts must still be made to improve midwifery practice and strengthen the role of midwives in caring for and improving the health of women, and to make sure their skills are duly recognised.

EUROMIP

28
Member States

1
Observatory for
the midwifery
profession

4
areas of focus:
training, forms of
practice, mobility,
and the role of
regulatory bodies

FOR A EUROPEAN RECOGNITION OF MIDWIVES

On the occasion of the 2017 French Presidential election, the French Chamber of Midwives issued a White Paper featuring 12 proposals to improve women's health. One of them is to create a European Observatory for the Midwifery Profession (EUROMIP).

This observatory would bring together all European midwifery associations and unite their efforts around four major issues: training, forms of practice, mobility, and the role of regulatory bodies. Its aim would be to promote a better recognition of midwifery, to improve midwives' practice conditions in Europe and to empower them further in their role with women.

The importance of midwives across the world

Caring for women and newborns

According to a special issue of The Lancet on obstetrics and gynaecology (published in April 2014), midwifery practice is *"a vital solution to the challenges of providing high-quality maternal and newborn care for all women and newborn infants, in every country"*. In whatever situation or health system, the health and wellbeing of women and newborns can be improved by midwives. They are the crucial link that brings women into the health system, to provide them with the care they and their babies need. Midwives therefore play a major role in helping women who wish to receive appropriate care.

All of these attributes basically match the key concepts set out by the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM).



Bolstering the role of midwives internationally

From 2008 to 2011, the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) developed a set of global standards to regulate the practice of midwifery. These global standards can help introduce amendments in existing laws and promote changes aimed at supporting and enhancing the professional autonomy and practice of midwives.

The purpose of the laws, policies and processes based on these standards is to create regulation frameworks for midwifery practice, in order to improve the quality and safety of care given to mothers and their babies. The French Chamber of Midwives fully supports this initiative and is willing to help develop strategies that will enable the international implementation of these global standards. Therefore, the Chamber is willing to actively participate, with all the midwives in France, in helping all countries set up legal and regulatory frameworks that allow midwives to fully and autonomously use their skills, while ensuring access to quality care for all women and newborn infants.

THE FRENCH MIDWIVES AND THEIR CHAMBER SUPPORT A NUMBER OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

that aim to improve the health of women and newborns worldwide.

AMREF

Training midwives in order to improve women's health

AMREF Flying Doctors is the leading public health organisation in Africa. It reaches 9 million people every year through 160 health programmes in 35 African countries. The main areas of focus of AMREF's France office are maternal and child health and the training of skilled health workers. In 2011, AMREF launched the Stand Up for African Mothers campaign, which aims at training 15,000 midwives in order to bring down maternal and child mortality rates.

The French Chamber of Midwives has been supporting AMREF since 2012.



Gynécologie Sans Frontières

Midwives take action to improve the health of women around the world

Gynaecology Without Borders (GSF) is a French non-governmental organisation (NGO) composed of doctors and midwives concerned about women's health in countries with low access to medical, psychological and social services. Gynaecology Without Borders (GSF) has been providing assistance in developing countries for many years, especially in Haiti and Madagascar. Its action ranges from the provision of necessary resources to health care for women and newborn infants, in an aim to reduce maternal and child mortality.

The French Chamber of Midwives has been supporting GSF since 2016.



Combating violence against women with the MIPROF

The French Chamber of Midwives is committed to combating violence against women and children and improving their access to professional health care.

The Chamber has been working in close cooperation with a French inter-ministerial task force called MIPROF* since the creation of this task force in January 2013, in order to enable midwives to get even further involved and play an active role in combating violence against women.

**Inter-ministerial task force for the protection of women against violence and action against trafficking in human beings*

The Chamber of Midwives in France

The "Conseil national de l'Ordre des sages-femmes" (French Chamber of Midwives) was set up in 1945. It is the competent registration, regulatory and supervisory authority for midwives in France. Its aim is to safeguard the honour and independence of midwifery practice and to make sure all of its members abide by the professional duties and the rules stated in their code of ethics.

The Chamber plays an advisory role with public and health authorities on issues that are likely to affect the founding principles of midwifery practice.

In addition to its regulatory function, the French Chamber of Midwives aims at helping women assert their rights and their choices.



ORDRE DES SAGES-FEMMES
www.ordre-sages-femmes.fr

Registration requirements

In order to be licensed to work in France, midwives have to be registered on the roll of the Chamber of Midwives in the department where they work.

A midwife can only be registered if she meets the Chamber's qualification and nationality requirements or if she was granted a special license. She must also meet a number of requirements related to ethics, independence and skills, and provide evidence of sufficient command of French.