age-groups as well. In the northeastern region of Emilia-Romagna, 1981 age-specific abortion rates for women younger than 40 were substantially higher than the national rate for each age-group. This was most striking among the youngest women: Women aged 15–19 in this region had an abortion rate of 15.5 per 1,000, twice the national rate of 7.6 per 1,000, while those aged 20–24 had a rate of 35.6 per 1,000, nearly 60% higher than the overall rate for this age-group. With the exception of Puglia, where abortion rates were elevated, most of Italy’s southern regions had age-specific abortion rates similar to the nationwide figures. Several regions in the south, notably Calabria and Campania, had rates considerably lower than the national average, especially among women aged 15–19 and 20–24.

Age-specific abortion rates decreased between 1981 and 1991 for women of all ages, and declines appeared largest in regions with the most elevated rates in 1981, thus somewhat diminishing differences between regions. Women aged 20–24 in Emilia-Romagna, for example, registered an age-specific rate of 15.6 abortions per 1,000 in 1991, substantially closer than the 1981 cohort to that age-group’s countrywide rate of 13.6 per 1,000.

The distribution of age-specific abortion rates among women in the 1991 cohort also shifted upward. The highest abortion rate occurred among women aged 30–34 (16.9 per 1,000), followed by women aged 25–29 (15.7 per 1,000). Women aged 35–39 had a higher rate of abortion (14.6 per 1,000) than did those aged 20–24 (13.6 per 1,000), the reverse of the 1981 data. Abortion rates among women aged 15–19 remained low (4.6 per 1,000). Indeed, abortion rates among Italian adolescents are considerably lower than those of other European nations. For example, in England and Wales, the abortion rate among women aged 19 or younger was 20.9 per 1,000; in Finland, the rate was 15.7 per 1,000 (1987 data).12

Legislative restrictions present barriers to legal abortion for women younger than 18 years of age. Parental consent is required...