



CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

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BURNING ISSUE

New anti-abortion legislative proposals presented in Slovakia

Two new anti-abortion legislative proposals have been registered in the Slovak parliament for the upcoming parliamentary sessions, which is to take place on 15 June – 2 July. Reportedly, the bills are expected to be discussed in the first legislative reading at this session. Later on, a vote on whether they should be moved to the second reading is to happen at the session. However, ASTRA was informed that “at the moment it looks unlikely that the bills would get enough support among MPs for them to be moved to the second reading (which would then take place in September).”.

The [first bill](#) was proposed by Martin Čepček (MP), a member of the leading governmental party OĽANO (Ordinary People and Independent Personalities). The bill aims to repeal abortion on request (currently permitted up to 12 weeks of pregnancy) and limit access to the procedure in other situations:

“(a) when the mother’s life cannot be saved otherwise; (b) when permanent and serious damage to the mother’s health cannot otherwise be prevented; (c) when the unborn child is unambiguously diagnosed with a severe impairment and the duration of the pregnancy has not exceeded 24 weeks; or (d) when the pregnancy has resulted from the criminal offence against the mother and the duration of the pregnancy has not exceeded 12 weeks.” Abortion on the grounds outlined in points (c) and (d) would not be possible to perform if “the mother’s health would be substantially endangered by it”.

The bill would introduce a set of new requirements to the current law, like a need to obtain “an independent medical certificates from at least two doctors to confirm grounds outlined in points (a) – (c) above” or “a written statement by the prosecutor confirming reasonable suspicion of the commission of a criminal offence to prove grounds under point (d) above”.

Moreover, the bill would impose a mandatory waiting period of at least 96 hours (except for the cases needing immediate medical care).

As we were informed, “the bill also seeks to prohibit “the promotion of abortion” and to mandate that the information on hospitals performing abortions shall be provided by the Ministry of Health upon the woman’s request after she had been provided with information on alternatives to abortion. The bill also inaccurately states that abortion “has serious negative consequences” and uses inaccurate terminology such as “unborn child” and “mother”.”

The [second bill](#) has been proposed by the far-right neo-fascist party Kotlebovci – LSNS (Kotlebists – People’s Party Our Slovakia), currently in the parliamentary opposition (this bill was already [discussed](#) and [rejected](#) by the Slovak parliament).

What should be noted is that both proposals aim to prohibit provision of abortion care to foreigners (except from the situation of the person’s life being at risk), what carries a significant risk especially for Poles, as Slovakia is one of their main destinations for obtaining an abortion after the [introduction of the Polish abortion ban](#).

Source: [ASTRA Network](#)

REGIONAL UPDATES

Women in Croatia fear further erosion of long-held abortion rights

(...) Abortion up to the 10th week of pregnancy was legalised in 1978 when Croatia was part of the former Yugoslavia. Since independence in 1991, numerous attempts have been made by the [Catholic Church](#) and ultra-conservative groups to change this inherited law.

In 2003 conscientious objection was established in the country, giving doctors the right to refrain from carrying out abortions. It's estimated 60 per cent of practitioners invoke this right today, meaning more Croatian women must travel to neighbouring countries for support or else undergo illegal abortions. (...)

The constitutional court reaffirmed the constitutionality of access to abortion in 2017 and tasked parliament with updating the law by spring 2019. This hasn't happened. The ruling means abortion cannot be outlawed although the revisions could make access even more difficult.

"The government is aware most people here still support a woman's right to choose," says activist [Sanja Cesar](#), "on the other hand, the Catholic Church and their associated organisations have strong influence on our government, so they are afraid to start a public debate on abortion."

About 86 per cent of Croatians define themselves as Catholic yet it's generally accepted that many do not attend Mass on a regular basis. Nonetheless the anti-abortion movement has become increasingly loud in public discourse.

In the past, the church was the primary creator of the anti-abortion narrative in Croatia. Today several ultra-conservative organisations such as Ordo Iuris, Vigilare and In the Name of the Family are leading the charge. These opaque groups are not only calling for more restrictive laws around women's reproductive health, but they are also contributing to the growing anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric sweeping the country.

Stjepo Bartulica, a far-right MP and ardent anti-abortion campaigner, feels people are not waiting for orders from the [Vatican](#). "Before you would expect a bishop in Zagreb to be the first to criticise something the government has done. Now they are more cautious so it's the lay groups who are bolder in action," he told The Irish Times from his office in the Sabor, Croatia's parliament.

The 51-year-old is annoyed that the ruling conservative [Croatian Democratic Union](#) (HDZ) government hasn't acted on the issue of abortion and firmly believes there is strong support for more restrictive measures. "This is something that Croatia's democracy has failed to address, we

have addressed many other human-rights issues, but abortion is still seen as taboo by our political class,” he argues.

The most pressing concern for pro-choice activists is the possibility of mandatory counselling being added to the law, which they argue would allow for more delays. [Lana Bobic](#), a theologian, also believes such a move would be a signal to the country that “women are not capable of making big decisions on their own”. (...)

Source: [Irish Times](#)

The EU takes bolder action against Poland and Hungary over vast abuses

We strongly welcome the decision of the Portuguese presidency of the Council of the EU to take action on the deteriorating situation in Poland and Hungary. For too long these EU member states have been allowed to get away with violations of the rule of law and of human rights. Women and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community, in particular, have seen their rights eroded. Citizens and media have been silenced, judges and academia have been exposed to attacks.

The Portuguese presidency is now set to move forward with proceedings against Poland and Hungary for violations of European values, by holding hearings under Article 7(1) TEU. In the case of Poland, European citizens want the European Union to seriously treat the [vast abuses of the rule of law and fundamental rights](#) by addressing: the erosion of judicial independence; the compromised Constitutional Tribunal, which is undermining human rights including women’s rights; violation of the right to peaceful protest and targeting of women’s rights organizations.

The abuses perpetrated by the ruling coalition in Poland can no longer be condoned by the EU.

“Polish citizens’ lives have been at stake for too long. From government-backed police brutality and smearing in right-wing media targeting peaceful protesters, to death threats against women’s rights defenders, a near-ban on abortion care and threats to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention that protects women from violence, all has led to an atmosphere of terror.” said Irene Donadio, Senior lead of strategy and partnership at the International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network (IPPF EN).

The Hungarian government declared a state of emergency – under the pretext of Covid -, seizing unlimited power to rule by decree without parliamentary and judicial review.

The government interfered with independent media and academia, launched an assault on members of the LGBT community, and undermined women's rights.

"Things have been escalating for some time now, and it all stems from the collapse of the rule of law in both countries" added Irene Donadio.

These hearings are a much-needed step, but only the beginning. We call on the Council of the EU to make full use of Article 7 to hold the two governments accountable, including to issue concrete recommendations on the rule of law which the Polish and Hungarian governments should urgently implement, and to move swiftly towards determining that there is a clear risk of a serious breach of the rule of law in both countries. The situation has in fact deteriorated far beyond the point of a mere "risk" of a breach to the rule of law.

Beyond Article 7, the EU must urgently use the new mechanism that links EU funding to respect for the EU's core democratic values. As the EU is preparing an historic financial package meant for post-COVID recovery, stronger steps need to be taken to prevent the political distribution of EU money that would cement authoritarian power in Poland and Hungary.

Poland and Hungary have been able to get away with too much for too long, trampling on EU values whilst receiving EU support. Enough is enough. The EU must stand up for itself, and these hearings are a strong signal in this direction.

Source: [IPPF](#)

New video about Albania from UNFPA

What's the biggest barrier you face in having a family and a career?

Women in Albania spend nearly five times more time a day on unpaid and domestic work than men. Meanwhile, dads in Kosovo get a fraction of the parental leave given to mothers. When the time comes for having children, too many women face a difficult decision: career or family. Limiting opportunities does not help - #ExpandingChoices does.

We spoke to men and women in the region about the biggest barriers they face in having a family and a career.

Watch the video on [UNFPA's Facebook page](#).

FROM ASTRA MEMBERS

Making Hungary carbon neutral, and even zeroing its ecological footprint is scientifically possible with BOCS Foundation's QFPS™ humanitarian climate protection

The BOCS Foundation developed its Quality Family Planning Standard (QFPS™) in 2017. Utilizing this climate innovation, Hungary could reach carbon neutrality, moreover, net zero ecological footprint within a year, by the most efficient humanitarian act: by supporting family planning globally.

Following the same path, the EU could reach the same state of carbon neutrality and zero footprint in 14 years, all OECD countries in 37 years.[1] Of course, the EU and the OECD could get there sooner, if they utilize other emission reduction methods to complement the prevention of unintended pregnancies worldwide.

The QFPC™ carbon credits based on the QFPS™ standard are social carbon credits. This means that the prevention of unintended pregnancies has a number of social effects beyond avoiding GHG emissions. It supports the attainment of all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Securing the human right of contraception (UN, 1968), the knowledge pertaining to it, and the tools to the general public greatly improves the chances of solving the global crisis.

“After being silent on the topic of family planning for more than twenty-five years, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) included access to reproductive health services in its 2014 synthesis report and pointed to population growth as an important factor in greenhouse gas concentrations. Growing evidence suggests that family planning has the additional benefit of building resilience...” According to the Drawdown study, the most efficient climate action (after analysing the top 100) is helping the 270 million women who currently lack access to contraceptives. It's not only key in the mitigation of climate change, but also in terms of climate adaptation. The British government recently published an economic study which states: “Family planning programmes ... offer an easy and effective route for governments to empower women, and yet they remain low on the development agenda. It is a paradox.”

The policy significance of our research is connecting a seemingly distant area of foreign policy, international development, into climate protection. Moreover, helping those lacking access to means of contraception, and preventing unintended pregnancies is beneficial for all countries, so debates about emission reduction could be avoided in this field. As „lowest-hanging fruits”, this opportunity is limited, only the quickest countries and companies can offset their emissions in such a cost-effective way. Improving the calculation accuracy of GHG emission reductions via family planning is of great

importance. The QFPS™ standard quantifies such reductions with an innovative methodology, based on databases, and scientific studies.

Source: [BOCS Foundation](#)

Women’s Resource Center publishes a report about women’s rights post-war

Women’s Resource Center prepared a comprehensive report on impact of Artsakh war and post war situation on women’s rights. You can find an interesting chapter how war effected on women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights – read the full report [online](#) (available in English).

Source: [Women’s Resource Center](#)

Georgian HERA XXI initiatives for improving access to SRHR services

Association HERA XXI champions enabling access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in Georgia and under the given competition, proposes to expand its existing sexual and reproductive health and rights services through innovative approaches.

Target groups: Women and Girls of Reproductive age; Ethnic Minorities; Girls and boys aged 14 to 25; Students, Girls and boys living under the poverty line; IDP girls and boys, women and men; Rural population; High risk groups;

The following services can be obtained through the HERA XXI’s Call Center (Hot-line - 20 11 221):

- Counseling with a doctor reproductologist on family planning, Menstruation, STI prevention...;
- Legal Counseling on sexual and reproductive rights and domestic/gender based violence;
- Counseling of a social worker for vulnerable youngsters, who will provide adequate referral to needed services ;
- Online counseling service (online chat) for reproductive specialists for young people is available on the platform – www.youth-counseling.ge.

HERA XXI has been strengthening digitalizing of gender sensitive SRHR and SGBV Services and implement an innovative model of service provision through digital services integrating online counseling and a telephone call-center with audio-recording, a V15.5. web client and an integrated web-meeting (video call).Through the current call center system, all three services (reproductive

health, legal counseling, social worker services) have their unique numbers to refer beneficiaries to a needed service, specific room to conduct virtual room counseling, while a web-analysis and audio recordings ensure monitoring and feedback evaluation.

While providing digital online/hotline counseling services, specific needs of clients is being considered through providing options of various communication channels (hot-line phone counseling, Skype/Viber meetings, online chat). Digital counseling services apply HRBA (Human Rights-Based Approach), gender sensitive- and youth-centered approaches and integrate gender, sexual and reproductive health and socio-economic dimensions.

Outreach counseling HERA XXI's doctor reproductologist and social worker conduct outreach field visits in IDP settlements and outskirts areas, for ex. Tserovani Settlement and others, to consult local women/girls, provide contraception and collect information about SRH needs;

Contraception Provision As contraceptives are currently not included in the list of Essential Medicines covered through state insurance health programs, HERA XXI supports the provision of modern methods of contraceptives for youth and integration of social aspects and approaches in the provision of SRHR outreach services in IDP settlements. To increase accessibility of contraception during lockdown, HERA XXI distribute contraception kits (Condom, informational brochures, pregnancy test) through courier services to vulnerable groups and oral pills after online counseling of a doctor-reproductologist determines their need.

Source: [HERA XXI](#)

RESOURCES

Inquiry on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina

This Report provides a brief overview and analysis of the respect for human rights related to sexual and reproductive health, carried out on the basis of the survey conducted in the course of 2019 and 2020.

The analysis was carried out by the BiH Institution of Ombudsmen for Human Rights, with technical assistance provided by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in BiH and proMENTE Social Research.

Source: [UNFPA](#)

IWHC's new report: *Care Denied: Year Three Impact of Trump's Global Gag Rule*

The Care Denied report is part of IWHC's ongoing commitment to document the harmful impacts of the expanded Global Gag Rule and advocate with US policymakers to permanently end this dangerous policy. IWHC works in partnership with grantee partners in Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, and South Africa to provide a comprehensive look at the impact of the policy on women, marginalized communities, health care providers, and civil society. In addition to this full report, IWHC's grantee partners have also produced country-specific reports on [Nepal](#) and [South Africa](#). You can view previous reports in this series for the [year one](#) and [year two](#) impacts of the policy. Read the executive summary of the report below and download the full report to learn more.

Source: [IWHC](#)

Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters launches a new podcast

The SRHM Podcast explores new research and emerging trends in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters or SRHM promotes sexual and reproductive health and rights globally. At the heart of SRHM is a multidisciplinary, open-access, peer-reviewed journal. SRHM also creates and participates in spaces that motivate improvements in research, policy, services and practice. It contributes to capacity building in knowledge generation.

Listen [online](#).

UPCOMING EVENTS

10 June – 12 years of quality education: How investing in sexual and reproductive health and rights helps keep girls in school

Baroness Sugg CBE, Baroness Hussein-Ece OBE and Pauline Latham OBE MP, Chairs of the UK APPG on Population, Development and Reproductive Health, and The European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual & Reproductive Rights (EPF)

Warmly invite you to attend the launch of the APPG's parliamentary hearing report on girls' education and sexual and reproductive health and rights in the developing world.

Register [here](#).

18 June – FIAPAC Webinar: Telemedical abortion during and beyond the pandemic - Lessons learned from implementing telemedicine?

Telemedical abortion during and beyond the pandemic - Lessons learned from implementing telemedicine? Presentations from selected European countries.

Free for paid-up (2021) members. If you are not an FIAPAC member, please arrange your [FIAPAC membership](#) first before registering for the webinar!

Register [here](#).

ASTRA Network Members: Albania - Albanian Center for Population Development; Armenia - Society Without Violence; Armenia - Women's Resource Center; Armenia - Women's Rights Center; Azerbaijan - Center "Women and Modern World"; Belarus - Women's Independent Democratic Movement of Belarus; Bulgaria - Bulgarian Family Planning and Sexual Health Association; Bulgaria - Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation; Bulgaria - Gender Education, Research and Technologies; Bulgaria - Demetra Association; Bulgaria - Gender Alternatives Foundation; Bosnia and Herzegovina – Sarajevo Open Center; Croatia - B.a.b.e.; Croatia – CESI; Croatia – PaRiter; Croatia - Women's Room; Georgia – HERA XXI; Georgia – Real People, Real Vision; Georgia - Women's Center; Hungary – PATENT; BOCS Foundation; Kazakhstan - The Legal Center for Women's Initiatives "Sana Sezim"; Latvia - Association for Family Planning And Sexual Health "Papardes Zieds"; Lithuania - Family Planning and Sexual Health Association; Moldova – Family Planning Association; Moldova - Reproductive Health Training Center; North Macedonia - Association for emancipation, solidarity and equality of women; North Macedonia – H.E.R.A.; North Macedonia – Shelter Center; Poland - Federation for Women and Family Planning; Ponton Group of Sex Educators; Romania - A.L.E.G.; Romania – AnA – Society for Feminist Analyses; Romania - Euroregional Center for Public Initiatives; Romania - The East European Institute of Reproductive Health; Romania – SEXUL vs BARZA/SEX vs THE STORK; Russia - Novgorod Gender Center; Russia – Russian Association for Population and Development; Slovakia – Moznost Volby; Tajikistan – Gender and Development; Ukraine - Women Health and Family Planning; Ukraine - SALUS Charitable Foundation; Uzbekistan - Future Generation

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