



## **CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights**

**No 07 (204) 2021**

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### **BURNING ISSUE**

#### **Death toll of anti-abortion law in Poland**

On 29 October 2021 attorney J. Budzowska, who deals with medical error cases announced the death of 30 years old woman, Izabela. 22 weeks' pregnant woman was said to have been taken to the hospital with oligohydramnios (low level or lack of amniotic fluid). The woman was married and had one daughter. According to the information provided by the attorney, the doctors were to wait for the foetus to die and the woman died shortly after of septic shock.

The prosecutor's investigation into the circumstances of the woman's death is ongoing and there are no more information available at this point. The director of the hospital in its statement assured that

all medical decisions in this case have been taken in accordance with the Polish law. This is in itself not reassuring because Polish antiabortion law exposes women's lives and health into risk.

On 1 November, candles were lit across Poland as a part of the campaign called "Ani Jednej Więcej" ("Not One More") initiated by the Federation for Women and Family Planning in solidarity with the family of the diseased women. Protests were yet again held in front of the illegitimate Constitutional Tribunal that a year ago banned abortion on the grounds of "the severe and irreversible foetal defect or incurable illness that threatens the foetus life". As a result of this ruling legal abortion may be accessed when pregnancy constitutes a threat to the woman's life or health and if it results from the criminal act.

This is another victim of the Polish antiabortion law after in 2004 a 25 years old women died of pregnancy complications that could have been avoided by timely abortion.

"Instead of protecting the life of the woman, the doctors think of saving the foetus. This is the chilling effect of the Constitutional Tribunal's decision in action." said Kamila Ferenc, the lawyer at the Federation for Women and Family Planning.

Source: [Federation for Women and Family Planning](#)

*An addition from ASTRA Network coordinator, Antonina Lewandowska:*

On 1<sup>st</sup> November, crowds gathered outside of the Constitutional Tribunal in Poland and in town squares of tens of other cities.

A few days earlier a tweet was published, marking the moment we all feared since the abortion-banning so-called ruling was published. A pregnant woman died because she was denied medical care because doctors were terrified of the new law and decided to wait until foetal heartbeat had stopped. She passed away on 22<sup>nd</sup> September, due to sepsis.

Her name was Izabela. She was 30. She left behind a husband and a daughter.

1<sup>st</sup> November is All Saints Day in Poland – a day traditionally devoted to visiting graves of loved ones and silently contemplating life and death. The atmosphere of the day was almost palpable during the gatherings.

I was in Warsaw, outside the Constitutional Tribunal. At 7 PM people started pouring in from all directions – marching silently, some with tears in their eyes, other staring blankly ahead. Almost all were holding candles, which were later put behind rails separating the public from the actual fence of the Tribunal. Few were also holding home-made signs, with writings varying from anger at the medical professionals to calling the government and politicised judges of the Tribunal murderers.

On the strip of pavement between the two railings, police officers stood, just as silent as the gathering crowd. They looked at people putting lights behind the railing, among leaves that fell from the trees – it is autumn, after all. While watching that scene, I was sure the police will be picking up the candles and throwing them away claiming fire hazard. To my surprise, the opposite happened. Officers were kneeling down behind the railing, brushing the leaves away and making safe space for more candles, moving some away from the railing and making sure nobody gets burned.

The air was filled with indescribable sadness, silent fury and frustration.

While navigating the crowd, I heard a man saying “You know, with COVID getting so bad again I was planning on not buying a single candle and just staying at home this year. And look at me – I am so f\*\*\*g p\*\*\*d, I just cannot sit around”. With time, a murmur of emotional conversations grew and hanged above the crowd.

“They got what they wanted.”

“Honestly, let’s just move the fuck out of this hellhole.”

“Maybe now they will see that anti-choicers are just murderers.”

“They are killing people at the border, and now killing women in the country as well. Cathotaliban”.

I noticed some familiar faces in the crowd – those that I managed to spot among the tens of people cramped on the pavement. We only nodded to each other, mostly without saying a word. Everyone was overwhelmed with grief, feeling the cold knot in their stomachs. While a turmoil of emotions was happening inside of me, the only word echoing in my mind was “Why”.

Izabela’s family has released a statement, asking to not use her death politically. We will honour their request and carry her memory silently with us while going back to our work, only more angry and more determined. So that no woman suffers Izabela’s fate ever again.

Source: Antonina Lewandowska, [ASTRA Network](#)

## REGIONAL UPDATES

### **Slovakia rejected proposed anti-abortion bill**

On October 11, Slovakia rejected [an anti-abortion bill](#) proposed by Ordinary People, the senior party in the coalition government. The bill was rejected by one vote, with 67 of the present 134 lawmakers (out of 150 members of the Parliament) voting in favor of it.

Among changes the bill was to introduce a prolongation of the obligatory waiting period from 48 hours to 96 hours, a ban on public provision of information on abortion,

The bill was controversial from the start, bringing numerous protesters to the streets. The international community has also openly condemned the proposal, with an [open letter issued by the European Commissioner for Human Rights](#) and [an open letter to Slovak parliamentarians](#) endorsed by tens of civil society organisations, including ASTRA Network.

The rejected bill came after several failed attempts to restrict access to abortion in Slovakia. We wrote about disturbing anti-abortion bills presented to the Slovak Parliament back in [June 2021](#) and [October 2020](#).

Source: [ASTRA Network](#)

### **Polish anti-choice NGO files for a total ban on abortion**

A Polish NGO called Pro-Prawo do Życia (Pro-The right to life) filed a civil draft bill (reportedly signed by over 130 000 Polish citizens) in the Parliament today. If passed, the new law would ban abortion with no exceptions.

The draft bill proposes to criminalise abortion, meaning the person terminating their own pregnancy would be prosecuted. Currently the law bans any form of assistance in obtaining an abortion, but the pregnant person deciding to end their pregnancy is not a subject to prosecution.

In addition, the draft proposes to change the legal definition of a child, reframing it to cover the time from conception until legally coming of age at 18. Finally, Pro-The right to life wants to criminalise informing of possibilities of terminating the pregnancy – including providing evidence-based knowledge of medical abortion.

Poland already has one of the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe. After the [Constitutional Tribunal's "ruling"](#) banning abortion in case of foetal malformations, abortion is only legal in Poland

in case of the pregnancy being a result of a crime or if it poses a significant threat towards the mother's life or health. The majority of Poles stand against the current law, introduction of which led to [mass protests all over the country](#).

Source: [ASTRA Network](#)

### **EU Parliament condemns Poland's restrictive law on abortion**

A year after the Polish Constitutional Tribunal's ruling that de facto banned abortion, the European Parliament called on the government in Warsaw on Thursday (11 November) to lift the ban that puts women's lives at risk.

In a [resolution](#) "The first anniversary of the de facto abortion ban in Poland " adopted by 373 votes in favour, 124 against and 55 abstentions, MEPs called on the Polish government to ensure that no more women in Poland die because of this restrictive law.

The vote came following the death of a pregnant Polish woman in early November – who her family said died of septic shock after doctors waited for her unborn baby's heart to stop beating – which electrified the abortion debate in the country and beyond.

Following her death, [tens of thousands of people demonstrated on Saturday](#) (6 November) in Warsaw and dozens of other Polish cities to denounce a nine-month-old abortion law blamed for claiming the life of a pregnant mother, organisers said.

On 22 October 2020, the Polish Constitutional Tribunal ruled that the provision of the 1993 Act on Conditions of Termination of Pregnancy was unconstitutional.

This act allowed abortions to take place in cases where a prenatal test or other medical considerations had indicated a high probability of a severe and irreversible foetal defect or an incurable illness that threatened the foetus' life.

This entailed a de facto abortion ban, as the vast majority of legal abortions in Poland were based on these grounds.

Following the last 10 months, only 300 Polish women accessed abortion services in hospitals on the grounds of a threat to life and health.

Over the past year, Abortion Without Borders has helped 34,000 women from Poland access an abortion, which represents only a fraction of the total number of Polish women needing support to access this service.

On 20 October, during the plenary debate on the first anniversary of the de facto abortion ban in Poland, Equality Commissioner Helena Dalli, called on the member states to “ensure the respect of their obligations in line with international human rights law”.

“We stand in solidarity with the women in Poland who have shown resistance and resilience. Strong women’s rights are an asset for the whole of the European Union”.

The European Court of Human Rights has recognised the lack of access to abortion services as a violation of the right to family and private life.

Dalli also highlighted that the EU has no competence on abortion rights in a member state, and called on EU countries to “respect fundamental rights, which bind them by virtue of their national constitutions and commitments under international law”.

Samira Rafaela, a Dutch MEP from Renew group, said that “the anti-abortion law in Poland has been exceptionally harmful and changed the daily lives of Polish women and girls”.

“Thousands of women have crossed borders to Germany, England, the Netherlands and Belgium – amidst a pandemic, may I remind everyone. The Polish government has no respect for fundamental rights. They neglect women, they disregard our bodies, and they put women’s lives at risk,” Rafaela said.

Sirpa Pietikäinen, a Christian Democrat Finish MEP, called the Polish law “gross and aggravated offence to women’s rights” and warned that “we also need to keep a very close eye on what is happening in the other member states, for example in Slovakia”.

Therefore MEPs urged the Polish government to swiftly and fully guarantee access to safe, legal and free abortion services for all women.

EU lawmakers expressed concerns that, due to this restrictive legislation, women have to seek unsafe abortions, travel abroad to obtain abortions or carry their pregnancy to term against their will, including in cases of fatal foetal impairment.

Parliament thus called on member states to cooperate more effectively to facilitate cross-border access to abortion, for example by granting Polish women access to a free and safe abortion in other national healthcare systems.

Furthermore, MEPs condemned the increasingly hostile and violent environment for women human rights defenders in Poland and called on the Polish authorities to guarantee their right to express themselves publicly without fear of repercussions or threats.

They also strongly criticised the disproportionate use of violence against protesters by law enforcement and urged the Polish authorities to ensure that those who attack protesters are held accountable for their actions.

Highlighting that the ruling on abortion is yet another example of the political takeover of the judiciary and the systemic collapse of the rule of law in Poland, MEPs asked the Council to include this issue in its investigation into the rule of law situation in Poland by expanding the scope of its hearings.

*[Edited by Zoran Radosavljevic]*

Source: Giedre Peseckyte, [Euractiv](#)

### **Moldova ratifies Istanbul Convention**

Moldova has ratified the [Istanbul Convention](#), 4 years after initial signing of the document. The Convention is universally recognized as a vital tool for combating gender-based violence, coming with a comprehensive framework for systemic actions targeting violence against women and girls.

Moldova will now start the process of enforcing a set of legal and policy measures for preventing GBV and building victim-oriented support systems, as well as applying the blueprint for punishing perpetrators to the country's legal system.

As reported by the [Council of Europe](#): *The monitoring rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Inese Lībiņa-Egnere (Latvia, EPP/CD) and Pierre-Alain Fridez (Switzerland, SOC), stated the following:*

*“We congratulate the Republic of Moldova for the progress achieved on the ratification of the Istanbul convention: the Moldovan parliament took today an historical and decisive step to better protect women, combat domestic violence and build a society that values the respect for fundamental human rights in all spheres of life.*

*This is a first and important step, and we now encourage the authorities to raise public awareness about the convention and recall its very aim, which is first and foremost to prevent and combat violence against women. The Republic of Moldova will join 34 member states of the Council of Europe which, by ratifying this landmark convention, have undertaken together to secure more rights and better chances for their societies to live free from fear.”*

Back in May, we [reported](#) on the implementation of Istanbul Convention in Central and Eastern European countries. On that occasion, our member organisation (Family Planning Association of Moldova) wrote:

*There are no legal grounds for delaying the ratification of the Convention. Experts in the field say that the Republic of Moldova is ready to ratify the Convention. However, some comments by politicians and some manipulative speeches disseminated by conservative and ultra-religious groups could prevent ratification of the Convention. (...)*

*In March 2020 the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatovic paid a visit to Moldova. In her report about the visit she wrote that “the Republic of Moldova should ratify the Istanbul Convention, improve its response to hate speech and advance access to quality healthcare, affordable housing and social inclusion for all.”*

Source: [ASTRA Network](#)

### **Russia Announces Plan To Halve Abortion Rates To Spur Population Growth**

Russia's government has approved measures aimed at halving the number of abortions carried out in the country before 2025, according to a document published on its website.

The plan is part of the government's latest long-term blueprint for improving the demographic situation in the country through 2025, amid a recently resumed decline in population growth after a decade of sluggish but stable increases.

The blueprint also sets forward plans for a significant reduction in infant and maternal mortality, and a rise in general reproductive health.

As part of the new measures regarding abortion, the authorities plan to improve public access to legal, psychological, and medical assistance for pregnant women considering terminating their pregnancies.



The program also sets out the goal of ensuring that 80 percent of women considering an abortion undergo consultations with a doctor, with a focus on increasing the likelihood that they reject the procedure.

The official document, which was flagged by Russian media after its publication online, has elicited controversy among women's rights activists, who insist that abortion should be a universal right and that the state's role in regulating it should be minimal.

Many have also taken issue with the document's focus on "strengthening traditional family values," often seen in Russia as a euphemism for homophobic sentiment and advocacy of conservative policies. (...)

"Exiting this demographic trap is our historical duty," he [Putin] said. "The preservation and growth of our nation is the highest national priority."

One year later, in a videoconference with officials, he backed plans to proactively discourage Russian women from terminating pregnancies.

"Simply convincing a woman not to have an abortion is obviously important, but what's more important is creating conditions to help the woman and her family in raising the child, placing the child on its feet, and giving the child the possibility to receive a decent education," he said.

In March, Deputy Prime Minister Tatyana Golikova said that the number of abortions in Russia had declined by 39 percent since 2016. (...)

Source: Matthew Luxmoore, [Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty](#)

### **Activists Say Romania Has Been Quietly Phasing Out Abortion**

(...) In 1966, Romania's communist leader, Nicolae Ceausescu, banned abortion and contraception in an attempt to raise the nation's low birthrate. During his rule through 1989, an estimated [10,000 women died from unsafe abortions](#) and hundreds of thousands of children were put in overcrowded orphanages where they often suffered abuse and low nutrition.

In the early 1990s, after the overthrow of Ceausescu, the new government founded Romania's first family planning program. At that point, reproductive rights began to improve: Abortion was legalized up to the 14th week, contraception was free, and sex education was implemented in public schools.

But that didn't last long. Activists say that over the past decade, the government slashed funding for the family planning program, leading dozens of clinics to shut down. Gynecologists are [increasingly](#)

[refusing](#) to perform abortions by [invoking a conscientious objector clause](#), citing moral or personal reasons such as their religious beliefs, according to reports from activists and medical professionals. In 2011, the government took away subsidies for contraceptives. And sex education is no longer taught in schools.

### ***Romania's family planning work was once admired***

What's happening in Romania is part of a recent trend across Europe, as Christian organizations and conservative lobbying groups, [often bankrolled by U.S. funders](#), gain political influence.

Romania's [Orthodox Church is a powerful institution](#), particularly in rural areas. And so-called pregnancy crisis centers, run by various Christian groups, have popped up around the country to try to dissuade women from having an abortion.

"Up to the European Union accession in 2007, Romania was a leader and a model in Central and Eastern Europe from the point of view of reproductive health care," says Draghici. From 1992 to 2002, she was the family planning program manager at a U.S.-funded Romanian [nonprofit group](#). "Now, what I'm witnessing is the destruction of the network of family planning clinics. So, we've gone up and now we're going down."

### ***The coronavirus made it harder to get an abortion***

The COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated the problem, says activist Andrada Cilibiu, from the abortion rights organization [Centrul Filia](#). In March 2020, the government published a list of "essential emergency services" that public hospitals had to provide while they also treated an influx of coronavirus patients. That list did not include abortion.

"During the emergency period in Romania, there was only one hospital in Bucharest that was performing abortions, and it was a private hospital," Cilibiu says. "It was charging women 3,000 Romanian lei [\$720], and that's outrageous."

She says declaring abortion non-essential gave health care providers an excuse to refuse to perform them. After pressure from abortion rights organizations, in April 2020, the government told public hospitals to resume abortions. But Cilibiu says the damage had already been done.

"The hospitals are lying," she says. "They are telling me in [response to a Freedom of Information Act request] that they're providing abortion, but when I call, lots of them tell me they do not."

For the past few years, Cilibiu has been conducting an unofficial survey of public hospitals across Romania by calling and pretending to be a pregnant woman in need of an abortion. She then publishes the results on the organization's website.

According to her records, in June 2020, [55 public hospitals](#) out of the 134 questioned said they provide abortions. This June, only 28 public hospitals said they provide abortions. The National Statistics Institute [backs up this trend](#): The country's birthrate rose at the end of 2020 – nine months after the start of the pandemic – and the number of abortions fell by 35% from 2019 to 2020.

As a result, Cilibiu says, women need to travel for adequate service or find a way to do it themselves.

“Women continue to get abortions with sharp objects at home in 2021,” she says, evoking images of Ceausescu's 24-year abortion ban. (...)

*Note: this is only a part of an article by Lucía Belavides. To read the full version, please click below.*

Source: [NPR](#)

## FROM ASTRA MEMBERS

*ASTRA Network was a partner in this year's edition of September 28 campaign. The initiative is led by [International Campaign for Women's Right to Safe Abortion](#). Below, we present examples of actions undertaken by our member organizations to celebrate the occasion.*

### **The struggle for abortion rights during Covid-19: warning trends and the rise of anti-gender movements**

On October 28th, 2021 the Women's Resource Center, Armenia organized a webinar on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) issues. Panelists from Armenia, Central, and Eastern Europe came together to discuss challenges they have faced in the last two years as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The first group of panelists introduced the broader problems and challenges faced by Central European countries. The panelists talked about the rise of anti-gender movements and their impact on domestic policymaking. Neil Datta from the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights talked about anti-gender movements in Europe, their financing, and their influences. He particularly emphasized the trans nationalization of anti-gender movements over the past 10 years. Anti-gender groups have regular meetings and communications with each other which shows how organized and interconnected they have become.

The second panel consisted of representatives from Eastern European countries such as Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, and Armenia. Each discussed problems related to SRHR issues advocacy, violence

against women's rights defender sanctioned both by the state and anti-gender groups. They discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic was used to make abortion illegal or completely inaccessible. Krystyna Kacpura from the Federation for Women and Family Planning talked about the fight Polish women are in for their reproductive rights and how abortion was made illegal in the country. She highlighted the rise in illegal abortions in the country as well as how women have to travel to abroad to get a safe and legal abortion. Another panelist from Armenia, Nvard Piliposyan from the Women's Resource Center talked about challenges faced by reproductive rights advocates in Armenia. She talks about public discourse on the promotion of childbirth; the fight against sex-selective abortions and NGOs and initiatives promoting anti-abortion issues.

Overall, the webinar was a success in bringing together regional activists and human rights defenders to share their experiences and strategize for a better future.

Source: [Women's Resource Center](#)

### **Sarajevo Open Center educates the public with findings of the newest report**

Sarajevo Open Centre marked 28 September by posting information about the current abortion legislation and abortion reality in a series of infographics shared via the organisation's [Facebook page](#).

The data comes from the latest [Orange Report](#) on the State of Human Rights of Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2020. The publication covers legal and normative framework of sexual and reproductive health and rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on access to SRHR services, treatment of infertility with medically assisted fertilization, availability of contraception, accessibility of sterilization/vasectomy procedures, and the right to abortion, prenatal and postnatal care, availability of HPV vaccines.

*A separate input about the report can be found in the section "Resources".*

Source: [Sarajevo Open Center](#)

### **Federa calls to Polish Parliamentarians for 28<sup>th</sup> September**

The Federation for Women and Family Planning followed by women's rights organizations of the [Great Coalition for Equality and Choice](#) addressed a strong call to the members of Polish

Parliament, in which they demand the restoration of freedom to decide about their body, pregnancy and the future of the family.

Read it below:

***To the Members of the Polish Parliament, all political parties!***

***Today, on World Safe Abortion Day, the Federation for Women and Family Planning reminds you that your duty is to make laws that serve all individuals, regardless of your personal views.***

*All of you, members of Parliament are responsible for making laws in the field of health protection and public safety, which ensure healthy development and wellbeing of every person. You must not neglect these responsibilities for your own convenience, opportunism or for personal reasons. By taking up the mandate, you become our representatives and this means that you have to make decisions FOR US, not INSTEAD OF US. Your worldviews or beliefs do not count here, you are in service of general public. The good of us all requires from you to respect diversity of all views and lifestyles, and to respect the autonomy and private life of every person and every family.*

*It is not up to you to judge if and how many children, women and families will have.*

*It is not up to you to decide when a woman should continue or terminate HER pregnancy. You don't know her feelings, needs, experiences, emotions. You don't know what's best for her. You do not live the consequences of the situation in which she finds herself.*

*Your responsibility is to ensure that the laws you adopt provide us all with fair, empathetic and appropriate health care thanks to which everyone would feel safe. And this duty is on you, regardless of whether an individual decides to give birth to several children, to treat infertility, to postpone parenting or to terminate the pregnancy. We all deserve adequate protection in a democratic state.*

*The law serves to provide all citizens with a safe space for making our own decisions relating to our private lives, without the interference of the State. When State interferes with our intimate spheres, it becomes violence. The law is there to protect women here and now, women we know, whose needs are real, not abstract.*

*This is why we expect from you today to give us back what you have taken away for political interests in 1993. Give us back freedom to decide about our body, pregnancy and the future of our families.*

*We want access to legal, safe, free abortion without anyone asking us why. We need access to modern contraception, high-quality gynecological care and comprehensive sexuality education.*

*We demand the immediate adoption of the rescue draft bill on decriminalization of abortion (drafted by MP Magda Biejat). We also ask you to support the draft bill on access to safe abortion and other*

*reproductive rights (prepared by the Committee of the civic initiative “Legal Abortion Without Compromise”).*

[Rescue bill draft](#) (in Polish)

[„Legal Abortion Without Compromise” draft bill](#) (in Polish)

Source: [Federation for Women and Family Planning](#)

## RESOURCES

### **Funding opportunity for youth-led CCE organisations - Spark Fund from Global Fund for Children**

[Submit Your Application!](#) We are currently welcoming applications from youth-led and youth-focused groups and organizations in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine that are working to create transformational change and improve the lives of young people and their communities.

Applications are due by Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> November.

### **Orange Report 6: Report on the State of Human Rights of Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2020**

Since the last report that covered the three-year period from 2016 to 2019, the changes that have taken place have not significantly affected the improvement of the quality of life of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the fields and areas covered within this report. Quite the opposite happened: at the end of 2019, the world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected all aspects of human life, first of all health, and the economy, education, and politics. In this sort of situation, women bore a specific burden. Areas in which the majority of the workforce is made up of women have been directly affected by the crisis, women who are victims of domestic violence fell under the additional control of the perpetrators, access to certain medical and health services was further aggravated, and working mothers have, among other things, had to deal with the challenges of transitioning to online schooling, trying not to neglect their own business along the way.

The structure of the 2020 Report follows the continuity of past reporting and monitoring against the changes that have taken place. However, given the fact that 2020 was marked by the outbreak of the

COVID-19 pandemic, this year's Orange Report is primarily thematically oriented to its effects in the four areas: socio-economic rights, sexual and reproductive health, political life and decision-making, and gender-based violence against women and domestic violence.

Read the report in [English](#) or [BCS](#).

Source: [Sarajevo Open Center](#)

## **Report “Protecting defenders. How to improve the infrastructure protecting human rights defenders”**

From [the report](#):

*The situation for human rights defenders (HRDs) is an important indicator of the overall human rights situation in any given country. Changes in the space that defenders enjoy and the legal and operational restrictions that they face often serve as an early warning of the direction in which the country is developing. The preconditions for the effective work of human rights defenders are their ability to freely express their opinion, form associations, peacefully assemble, access information and funding, and be protected and appreciated as agents of positive change and development. Likewise, the impact that the local human rights defenders can have on the positive human rights developments depends, among others, on the rights they themselves enjoy. Unfortunately, the situation for human rights defenders has been deteriorating across the globe. Authorities in many countries view the work of HRDs as a threat to established power structures, and consider HRDs as their opponents, rather than allies. In many countries, the ill-informed traditional values narrative is used by the authorities to accuse HRDs of working against national interests, which over time has led to further isolation and stigmatisation of HRDs. To address the deteriorating situation for HRDs and encourage mutual learning, rethinking and strategizing for improved and more inclusive protection of human rights defenders, Human Rights House Foundation (HRHF) has decided to take stock of the existing protection infrastructure for HRDs operating in the former Soviet space. To do so, HRHF commissioned a study to “map” existing protection infrastructure for human rights defenders at risk in eight countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Ukraine). The aim of the study was to uncover any trends and to ascertain unmet protection needs. An important part of the study was to identify and suggest potential new actors and partners for future protection work, as well as to identify communities of human rights defenders at risk that are either left out or barely receive protection support.*

## UPCOMING EVENTS


### **30 November, a webinar: Reducing unsafe abortions: innovations and results from the 'She Makes Her Safe Choice' partnership**

Rutgers and DKT International invite you to an online event that will highlight results and innovations from the 'She Makes Her Safe Choice' partnership to reduce unsafe abortions worldwide.


We will discuss how our complementary approach has significantly contributed to reducing unsafe abortions. We will focus on:

- How the Ipas MVA® safe abortion technology is reducing maternal mortality.
- Why medical abortion is a game-changer to empower women to make their safe choice.
- Why combining online and offline solutions are essential to engage (young) women and respond to their needs.
- How unlikely partnerships in Kenya made the approach a success.

Don't miss this event on 30 November.

 Online event in English with French translations

 30 November 2021

 13.00 - 15.00 GMT

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

Prepared by Antonina Lewandowska

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