



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

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### **BURNING ISSUE**

#### **Statement of solidarity on the ruling of the USA's Supreme Court**

ASTRA Network expresses solidarity with our colleagues from the USA after the Supreme Court's heart-breaking ruling.

Judges of the Court took a drastic blow at basic human rights and freedom of choice. Their decision to give the power of full policy-making regarding abortion into the hands of state authorities opens the door for fundamentalists and opponents of reproductive rights. Our hearts go to all Americans,

especially those living in states that have already banned access to abortion or are planning to do so in the near future.

As Eastern Europeans, we know and understand how it feels to be stripped of rights so violently and suddenly. Poles have suffered this blow recently, but the law remains fiction in other countries of the region, like in the case of Croatia.

We stand arm in arm with our colleagues, friends, and sisters from across the ocean. Yet again, life proves how fragile human rights are and how vigilant we need to stay in order to protect ourselves.

We are sure that the ruling is just a setback in the long fight for reproductive rights, and the people of the United States of America will see the law protecting them universally in all parts of their country in no time. There is nothing we cannot do when we come together – and the world is with you.

## REGIONAL UPDATES

### **Romania: abortion, mission (almost) impossible**

(...) Romania has around 220 public hospitals with a gynaecology section where women can in principle have abortions. In fact, however, every year fewer and fewer hospitals offer this service. The evolution of numbers is brutal. In 2019, an investigation by The Black Sea revealed that 60 of the 190 public hospitals contacted said they did not do abortions – almost one in three. With the Covid-19 pandemic, the situation became "very concerning", stresses Andrada Cilibiu of Centrul Filia. Of the 112 public hospitals contacted, only twelve practised abortions in April 2020, and none in Bucharest. In November 2020, the Ministry of Health collected data from 134 public hospitals and sixteen private clinics: 58% of them denied abortions. In September 2021, out of 128 public hospitals contacted by Centrul Filia, 69 did not offer abortions, or 54%. Over three years, there has therefore been a rise from 32% to 54% of public hospitals that do not practise abortions. At this rate, what will the situation be in 2025?

In 2013, Romania had one of the highest abortion rates in the EU (14.9 per 100 births). Five years later, the percentage had dropped to 8.6. The fall was even steeper after the first wave of Covid-19. According to data from the National Institute of Public Health, between 2019 and 2020 the number of abortions fell by 40%, from 26,862 to 15,595. In the first nine months of 2021, 10,429 abortions were

performed, with an average even lower than in 2020. However, this decline is not the result of public policies that promote contraception or sex education. In fact, in 2011 the Romanian government stopped funding contraception subsidies, making access to birth control much more difficult, and stopped teaching birth control in public schools.

This sharp decline is due instead to the fact that in Romania it is increasingly difficult to have an abortion. The same statistics show that more and more hospitals report zero abortions on their balance sheets. A striking example of this development is the Polizu, the largest maternal hospital in Bucharest, which no longer practises abortions... More and more gynaecologists and obstetricians are using the "conscience clause" to refuse this operation. Of 802 gynaecologists called by Centrul Filia, only 275 said they agreed to perform abortions. "Most of those who refuse put forward religious and moral reasons", reports Andrada Cilibiu. "But sometimes it's a hospital directive, which is illegal". It should be noted that doctors have insurance that covers any negligence, but abortion is not covered. (...)

Source: [Balkanicaucaso.org](http://Balkanicaucaso.org)

### **Mirela Čavajda: Misdemeanor Procedure Initiated Against KB Sveti Duh**

(...) The case of Mirela Čavajda, a 39-year-old pregnant woman whose request to have an abortion during the 26th week of pregnancy after the fetus was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor was rejected by four hospitals in Zagreb, and caused enormous outrage across the country last month, with demands for the reproductive rights and healthcare rights of Croatian women to be respected.

Considering that omissions of non-compliance with the Law on Protection of Patients' Rights, such as the right to complete information, were established during the investigation into Mirela's case, the Health Inspectorate has now initiated misdemeanor proceedings before the competent misdemeanor court, reports Telegram.hr. (...)

The Health Inspectorate determined that the first-instance commission of KB Sveti Duh decided on Mirela Čavajda's request to terminate her pregnancy on May 3 this year, but did not submit its decision to the patient. Additionally, the patient was not informed that she had the right to contact the second-instance commission of the University Hospital Centre Zagreb.

The inspection found that this violated the Law on Patients' Rights, which stipulates that "patients have the right to be fully informed about the course of treatment when healthcare is being provided to them."

For these offenses, a fine of 10,000 to 50,000 kuna is envisaged for the hospital, and the requirement to pay a fine of 5,000 to 10,000 kuna is imposed on the responsible person, in this case, the director of the hospital, Ana-Marija Šimundić. KB Sveti Duh was one of four Zagreb hospitals that refused to terminate Mirela Čavajda's pregnancy in the sixth month of gestation after the fetus was found to have an extremely serious brain tumor.

The medical procedure will finally be possible for Mirela in neighbouring Slovenia, and the costs of the procedure will be covered thanks to donations from 1,472 natural persons and 16 legal entities, who donated 220,687 kuna and 37 lipa through the SOLIDARNA foundation, and with the cooperation of CESI, RODA, and PaRiter. The cost of the medical procedure in Slovenia otherwise stands at 5,000 euros. (...)

Source: [Total-Croatia-News.org](https://www.total-croatia-news.org)

### **Moldova: Romani Refugees from Ukraine Face Segregation**

Moldovan authorities are deliberately housing most Romani refugees separately from others fleeing the war in Ukraine, in a manner that constitutes unequal and discriminatory treatment, Human Rights Watch said today. Amid pervasive discriminatory attitudes toward Roma, government authorities have permitted and, in some cases, directed staff and volunteers to deny Romani refugees housing at government-run facilities.

“Moldovan authorities have offered critical support to people fleeing Ukraine, but that does not excuse segregation of Romani refugees,” said Anastasiia Kroupe, assistant Europe and Central Asia researcher at Human Rights Watch. “Regardless of the economic and social problems Moldova faces, the government has a responsibility to ensure that refugees are not discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity.”

Since February 24, 2022, more than 471,000 refugees have crossed into Moldova from Ukraine, the highest per capita influx to a neighboring country. About 87,700 refugees have stayed in Moldova, one of the poorest countries in Europe. (...)

Moldovan authorities should urgently end any policy, official or unofficial, to segregate Roma, and take steps to counter discriminatory attitudes toward Romani people, including Romani refugees from Ukraine, Human Rights Watch said. The authorities should ensure equal access to reception centers, housing, and all services and humanitarian aid for Romani and non-Romani refugees, and provide all refugees with equivalent information and options regarding housing. The EU and international and

regional organizations should urge Moldova to ensure fair and equitable treatment of Romani refugees. (...)

Source: [Human Rights Watch](#)

### **Bosnia and Herzegovina is the next possible target of anti-abortion fundamentalists**

In an extremely important and engaging article published by Raskrivanje.ba, activists and journalists from Bosnia and Herzegovina paint a picture of American fundamentalists stepping into the country's abortion debate by posing as local organizations aiming to help women in need. Meanwhile, the social media pages and hotlines ran by said organizations turned out to be of anti-choice character, moreover – registered in Kentucky in the United States. Local anti-choice activists are also active within the organizations, providing their faces, language, and insight into the culture and politics of Bosnia and Herzegovina – all key factors for the creation of a successful social campaign.

Despite the article's authors' efforts to obtain financial records from the organizations, both sources and details of the financing remain unknown. However, the authors managed to discover some sort of connection between one of the organizations – namely Glas Za Život – and Heartbeat International, also operating from the US.

The fact of the BiH anti-choice scene being actively supported by American fundamentalists plays a role in the region's rising anti-women's rights sentiments. We need to monitor their actions and publicise them to protect both individuals and legal systems from being hijacked and twisted to do the extremists' bidding.

Source: [Raskrinkavanje.ba](#) / co-authored by Delila Hasanbegović-Vukas of ASTRA Network's [Sarajevo Open Center](#) *NOTE: the article is only available in Bosnian, but can be translated by online tools*

## **FROM ASTRA MEMBERS**

### **A groundbreaking new facility opens in Tbilisi, Georgia**

Union Women's Center has opened the first "Behavior Correctional Center" in all of Georgia, Tbilisi. The Center provides psycho-social rehabilitation and consultation (both on-line and in the facility) for

violent perpetrators and people of all ages and genders that are struggling with aggression – all free of charge.

The Rehabilitation Center operates thanks to the coordinated work of several organizations. They aim to increase motivation to engage with abusers in the program at an early stage in order to prevent further harm. The Center also conducts abusive behavior correction programs for schoolchildren.

The contact details for the Center are as follows:

Hot-line: (032) 2 32 12 06

Consultation:(+995)591 29 57 84

Source: [Union Women's Center/Iatamaze Verulashvili](#), ASTRA Network's Board Member

### **Empowerment through Self Defense**

In the May 20-27 interval Advisory Board member from Romania, Daniela Draghici attended the Empowerment through Self Defense (ESD) Teacher Training in Prague, together with a team of fantastic instructors and participants. It was a great opportunity to become an instructor.

The training was also attended by Milena Kadieva from Bulgaria, also an ASTRA member.

30 human rights professionals, activists and change makers from 21 different countries worldwide, between 18 and 68 years old (the ASTRA Network representative), were trained as trainers to empower their communities to counter verbal, psychological and physical attacks.

Empowerment Self Defense is an innovative violence prevention educational tool that has been proven to effectively reduce the incidence of abuse. Through the 5 principles of ESD, ESD Global teaches a set of skills that can be used to de-escalate violent situations and defend ourselves and others.

Participants got more insight into how to teach ESD in a trauma-informed way to support survivors of violence and contribute to their healing process through ESD.

Studies demonstrate that ESD can effectively help in the healing process by reducing the stigma and decreasing the feeling of shame and self-blame.

The intensive seven-day training program in Prague focused on physical and mental capacity building, while modernizing the thinking and the approach of human rights professionals, educators and martial artists, as well as government employees, visioning gender equality and a world free of violence.

Every single day has been a celebration of courage, strength, resilience, tenacity, empathy, energy & synergy.

As a result, Daniela is preparing an ESD training session of a group of Ukrainian refugees in Romania, as part of a workshop titled “Leadership and Community Organizing against Sexual Violence and Human Trafficking”, on behalf of the SEX vs The Stork Association, an ASTRA Network member.

### **Sexuality education legislation in Romania**

On June 8, the Romanian Parliament has finally approved the legislation that they have been contesting for the last two years: Law no.272/2004 on the protection and promotion of children’s rights.

The more conservative insisted on calling it "sanitary" education, not even knowing the difference between sanitary and sexuality education, starting in 8th grade and pending upon parental/legal guardian approval. This is a setback from the initial health education program approved by the government in 2004, the content of which is still to be found on the Ministry of Education website.

Romanian activists will have to continue and intensify their advocacy efforts for whatever is going to be implemented next academic year.

Source for two previous entries: Daniela Draghici, ASTRA Network’s Board Member

### **Federa comments on the so-called “pregnancy-register” that is being introduced in Poland**

“Pregnancy Register” is a project of the Ministry of Health, which in the form of regulation entered into force on 3 June 2022. It consists of collecting information about the patient in a nationwide digital data system, including information about diagnosed pregnancy.

*Although the Ministry explains its aim is to facilitate the work of doctors, in today’s Poland, every change in reproductive health, especially related to the collection of sensitive data gives rise to suspicion of malicious intent. Women in Poland are accustomed to receive moralizing comments and interference in their private lives, while their concerns and needs are completely ignored – comments Krystyna Kacpura, President of the Board of the FEDERA Foundation for Women and Family Planning.*

Polish reality shows that medical community, the prosecutor’s office and officials have a tendency to make life difficult for Polish women and to create new barriers for them. The “pregnancy register” may be another temptation to do so. It is easy to imagine a situation where a doctor who examines a patient who is no longer pregnant could start asking questions about the pregnancy. One thing is certain: no

matter what her answer would be, neither the doctor nor anyone else can take any legal action against a woman.

*Luckily, people in Poland are still not punished for their own abortions. If someone shares with the gynecologist during the visit that they she terminated the pregnancy (no matter how or where), the doctor would not be able to do anything about this information. Even if he/she called the police, it would be a waste of time, because the proceedings against the woman after abortion could not be initiated. However, it is up to every woman to decide whether she wants to talk about abortion or rather say that she has had a natural miscarriage – says Kamila Ferenc, lawyer and program director of FEDERA. Both physiological processes leading to termination of pregnancy are almost identical. Moreover, in the early stages of pregnancy, miscarriages are not uncommon.*

Therefore, in the case of the so-called “pregnancy register” FEDERA recommends to remain calm and vigilant. A woman needs to remember that existence of such register may not lead to “search for a disappeared pregnancy” or cause any legal consequence for a woman.

### **„Legal abortion. Without compromise” civic draft bill rejected by the Polish Parliament in the first reading**

The draft bill initiated by civil society organisations was rejected by the Sejm in the first reading on 23 June 2022. 265 MPs supported the rejection, 175 MPs were against and 4 MPs abstained.

Despite phenomenal speeches of the representatives of the civic initiative’ s legislative committee which contributed to the ongoing debate on abortion, the deputies decided to uphold their hypocritical vision of reality from which abortion is erased.

At FEDERA we know that abortion is a part of life. We will not cease in helping women and families to obtain access to abortion care by all possible means most adequate in the individual situation: medical abortion, abortion abroad and in Polish hospitals whenever possible.

Politicians don’t scare us with their medieval laws and inhumane views. Times will change.

We stay united and don’t give up.

### **The following were the main provisions of the *Legal Abortion Without Compromise* bill:**

- abortion is available under the public health scheme until week 12th week without asking for reasons;



- abortion is available under the public health scheme after the 12th week in the case of fetal defects or when pregnancy is a result of a criminal act;
- strict deadlines as regards providing abortion services and sanctions on doctors for abusing of the refusal of care on the ground of conscience;
- duty for the directors of hospitals to hire subcontractors in the event of refusal of care on the grounds of conscience by all doctors working in the facility;
- decriminalization of abortion: no criminal penalties for doctors and persons assisting in abortions in violation of the provisions of the restrictive anti-abortion act;
- simplification and acceleration of the “objection procedure” serving to challenge refusal of service/doctor’s opinion (24 hours deadline for reply);
- prenatal testing programme will cover specialist tests such as PAPP-A and  $\beta$ hCG for all patients which are performed in the 1st trimester of pregnancy to detect potential illness of the foetus.

Over 200,000 Polish citizens signed the draft bill, which made it possible to present it to the Parliament for discussion and subsequent vote.

On June 22, FEDERA [called on](#) Polish MPs to adopt the bill in the first reading.

Source for two previous entries: [Foundation for Women and Family Planning “Federa”](#)

## RESOURCES

**VOICE’s new report: *Waiting for the Sky to Close: The Unprecedented Crisis Facing Women and Girls Fleeing Ukraine***

New, seven-part assessment of the Ukraine crisis, and its impact on women and girls.

The global humanitarian community is failing to meet the needs of women and girls displaced by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and adequately support women- and girl-led organizations on the frontlines of the emergency response, according to a new, seven-part regional assessment from VOICE, in partnership with [HIAS](#).

The reports were developed by VOICE’s 10-member assessment team, who spent four weeks speaking to women’s rights organizations, frontline workers, local NGOs, government

workers, United Nations agency actors, and internally displaced and refugee populations in Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. VOICE also conducted virtual interviews with women's rights groups and other local organizations in Ukraine.

The reports paint a vivid picture of the challenges faced by women and girls who have been displaced by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as the need to ensure that women's rights organizations and other local actors are integrated into response design and leadership from the beginning.

Read the [regional report](#) and national overviews for [Moldova](#), [Poland](#), [Romania](#), [Hungary](#), [Slovakia](#), and [Ukraine](#).

Source: [VOICE. Amplifying Women and Girls in Crisis](#)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

***Conference: Threats to the Rule of Law in the European Union, from the Polish & Hungarian case to France. Protecting fundamental rights and the Rule of Law by strengthening civil society links across borders***

A roundtable discussion is to take place on Friday, 8 July, from 9 am to 1 pm in Paris. Among the participants, there will be representatives of the French League for Human Rights who will share their views on the challenges to the rule of law and fundamental rights within the European Union. The speakers will also feature Urszula Grycuk from Federa, Malgorzata Szuleka from Helsinki Committee in Poland, Marta Pardavi from the HHC and MEP Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield.

The conference will focus on the situation of the rule of law and fundamental rights in Poland and Hungary while drawing a parallel at the French level, and will aim above all to raise awareness among French civil society on this issue, at a time when no EU member state, in Central as much as in Western Europe, appears immune to democratic backsliding. The event will also be an opportunity for civil society and other actors to share experiences and good practices and strategize together on new, more effective, innovative ways to address the deterioration.

Register here: <https://forms.gle/g3M6XiECFvVJFySi6>

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 - Novogorod 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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