



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

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### **BURNING ISSUE**

#### **Justyna Wydrzyńska found guilty of aiding an abortion, sentenced to 8 months of community service**

On 14 March 2023, at its sixth and final hearing Warsaw Praga Południe District Court convicted woman human rights defender Justyna Wydrzyńska of “aiding to perform an abortion” and sentenced her to eight months of community service for 30 hours a month.

On 22 November 2021, she was charged with aiding an abortion under Article 152.2 of the Polish Penal Code and “possession of unauthorised drugs with the aim of introducing them to the market” under Article 124 of the Pharmaceutical Law. In 2020, Justyna Wydrzyńska provided abortion pills to

a woman who was carrying an unwanted pregnancy. When the woman's partner found out, he reported Justyna Wydrzyńska to the police.

The supporters of the woman human rights defender gathered in front of the courthouse carrying banners with the slogan "I am Justyna" before the hearing. Anti-abortion groups were also present, accompanied by a truck carrying a billboard with a photo showing a dead fetus and the slogan "Abortion pills kill".

During the hearing, the prosecutor asked the court to sentence the woman human rights defender with 10 months of community service and 10,000 PLN (approx 2125 EUR). The anti-abortion organisation Ordo Iuris who joined the case as amicus curiae asked for a heavier sentence of one year imprisonment for the woman human rights defender. When Justyna Wydrzyńska's lawyers objected, arguing that the organisation isn't entitled to comment on the judgement, the organisation responded saying that it was not a formal request but rather a statement of the position of the organisation.

In her closing statement, the woman human rights defender stated, "for me this trial is symbolically a trial for anyone who ever provided support to a person in need. I feel I do not stand here alone."

She told the court that she had the support of many human rights organisations with expertise in their field who define her as a human rights defender and they and many others appealed to the court to not to prosecute her. She added, "I believe that helping another person who asks for support as they fight for their freedom is our duty. It is what makes us human. And I will not abandon it, I will not be ashamed of it or believe that it is a crime."

She finished her statement saying that it is the State who was guilty for abandoning women across the country and she asked for her acquittal.

Following the verdict, the woman human rights defender and her lawyers announced that they will appeal the decision.

Source: [frontlinedefenders.org](https://frontlinedefenders.org)

## REGIONAL UPDATES

### **Macedonia's Church Accused of 'Interfering' in Gender Equality, Sex Education Debate**

The Church, in a secular state like North Macedonia, should stay out of women's rights and not interfere in laws that do not concern its own affairs, gender equality activists say.

It comes after the biggest religious community in the country, the Macedonian Orthodox Church, MPC, stepped up its criticism of government plans for a gender equality law and the introduction of comprehensive sexual education in schools.

"This kind of action attacks the constitutional order according to which North Macedonia is a secular state," the Platform for Gender Equality, an umbrella association of gender equality NGOs, said in a press release.

The friction is over a proposed more comprehensive draft Law on Gender Equality, pushed by the Social Democrat-led government, which is still in the phase of public debate.

Additionally, the Education Ministry, in 2019 launched a pilot project and in 2021, presented the new concept of primary education reforms, which envisages comprehensive sexuality education as an optional subject for pupils aged 13-14. This has yet to be implemented in all schools. The [plan is to introduce optional sexual education classes](#) to all elementary schools by 2025.

On Friday the Church organised a debate in the town of Strumica, "Why NO for sex education classes in schools", at which the local bishop, Jakov Stobiski, said he was concerned about the gender equality draft law, which he said "brings danger for society" and infringes on basic human rights.

The Church also sent a letter this week to the Social Policy Minister Jovanka Trencavska in which it accuses the government of being a "hostage to gender ideologists" and of disregarding the will and interests of the majority of the population.

The Church wrote that without a consensus on these reforms, "any imposition of the reform would be a direct attack on the freedom and constitutionally guaranteed right of parents to decide how to raise and educate their children".

"So far we can see that it is suggested to children that they can start sexual relations at any age and can experiment with sexual partners, so there is a need to be tested for sexually transmitted diseases. This does not fall into the category of 'responsible behaviour' at all, which you claim will be the benefit of comprehensive sex education," the letter said.

The Platform for Gender Equality responded by saying that the Church had a vested interest in promoting “anti-women, anti-humanist and unconstitutional” policies.

“The Church does not do this without interest, and the affirmation and preservation of chauvinist values according to which women are subordinate to men allows the Church to consolidate its political and economic power by spreading religious dogmas, manipulating people’s fears and controlling the political discourse,” it added.

“With this conduct, the MPC establishes itself as an organisation that spreads misogyny and works to preserve and reaffirm the subjugated role of women in society,” the reaction added.

After the Church letter, the Social Policy Minister Jovanka Trenevaska said she would try to set up a meeting with Church leaders of Strumica diocese to discuss the differences.

However, on Wednesday the ministry took a sharper line and said the Church’s attitude would set society back, not improve the quality of life and strengthen stereotypes and prejudices, hate speech, discrimination and xenophobia.

“Sexual education will enable young people to be supported in maturing, to build their own system of values and self-respect that will enable them to make responsible decisions and behave responsibly, to prevent premature and unprotected sexual relations, to prevent numerous unwanted consequences from ignorance and prejudice, abuse and violence and to contribute to the development of tolerant and quality relations between boys and girls based on mutual respect,” the ministry wrote.

By Sinisa Jakov Marusic, published on [Balkaninsight.com](https://www.balkaninsight.com)

### **“LGBT ideology” responsible for child suicides, says Polish education minister**

The rise in attempted suicides by children in Poland is caused by the “brainwashing” of “LGBT, neo-liberal and neo-Marxist ideologies”, says the education minister. His proposed solution is to reinforce traditional values, including attending church, to help young people better distinguish between good and evil.

The last two years have seen Poland [record its highest even number of attempted suicides](#) by minors, with 1,496 in 2021 followed by 2,031 last year. The latter figure was more than double the average registered in the years before 2021.

Experts have pointed to Poland's [underfunded, overstretched and outdated mental health support system](#) and the [effects of the pandemic](#) as major factors behind the rise. But education minister Przemysław Czarnek, an outspoken conservative figure, places the blame elsewhere.

Speaking to Polsat News, he said that, while the educational authorities can make efforts to combat youth suicides, these are “only sticking plasters”.

The root of the problem is the “powerful crisis of the family, the attack on it, on Christianity, on the church, on religion, on everything that distinguishes good from evil”, said Czarnek.

“It is necessary to protect the values of family and marriage, and not to attack [them] with Marxist and LGBT ideologies that wreak havoc in the minds of children,” continued the minister.

“These attempted and, unfortunately, successful suicides are the result of the minds of young people being clouded by LGBT, neo-liberal and neo-Marxist ideologues, brainwashing them and leaving them to fend for themselves,” added Czarnek.

However, he claimed that “in smaller localities, where people go to church, the distinction between good and evil is at a better level”.

Czarnek's remarks were condemned by the Empowering Children Foundation (Fundacji Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę), one of Poland's largest NGOs supporting children's mental health, including [running a helpline](#).

“The minister's statement, which has not been supported by any data, is harmful and disregards the growing problem of mental crisis among young people,” the foundation's spokeswoman told news service naTemat.

“We believe that the minister's statement leads to stigmatisation and diminishes the suffering of young people who face mental health problems and may discourage them from asking for help,” she added.

(...)

By Daniel Tilles, published on [notesfrompoland.com](#)

## FROM ASTRA MEMBERS

### **A groundbreaking win for FEDERA – mental health recognized as a reason for accessing abortion in Polish hospitals, says the National Patients' Ombudsman**

Foundation for Women and Family Planning FEDERA won a clear position on abortion in public hospitals from the Ombudsman for Patients' Rights. Today there is no doubt: the refusal to terminate the pregnancy, despite the threat to the patient's mental health identified by the psychiatrist, is a violation of the law.

FEDERA's Legal Team represented a 26-year-old woman before the Patients' Ombudsman. The woman was refused an abortion in December 2021 by the University Clinical Hospital in Bialystok. She had full documentation of the diagnosis of fetal acephaly and two medical certificates certifying that the continuation of the pregnancy constituted a risk to her mental health. Despite this, the hospital authorities refused to perform the procedure. In the written refusal, there was a quote: "Depression is not dangerous for a pregnant woman." The decision of the hospital management was supported by the position of the ultra-conservative Ordo Iuris Foundation, known for its bill punishing women for abortion. From our perspective, a position that is completely non-medical and inconsistent with applicable law.

Forcing anyone to carry a pregnancy to term can lead to serious mental health effects, including adaptation disorders, post-traumatic stress, or suicidal thoughts. We can only imagine how difficult the mental state of a woman is when she finds out about a serious genetic defect in the fetus.

The patient, who was refused an abortion, contacted FEDERA seeking support.

*I filed a complaint on her behalf and conducted proceedings before the Patients Ombudsman, who reacted strongly to such a blatant violation of the law. From his decision issued after examining the case, it follows that "health, the threat of which may constitute a premise for legal termination of pregnancy, should also be understood as the mental health of a pregnant woman (the legislator does not directly limit the possibility of terminating pregnancy only to cases when it poses a threat to physical health women)" – says Kamila Ferenc, the Patient's attorney.*

This is a great win, and the first step in recognizing that women's well-being is above ideology, mental health is an equal part of it, and forced continuation of pregnancy is mental torture.

From now on, every patient who has a certificate from a psychiatric specialist that further pregnancy threatens her mental health may report to a public hospital and refer to the decision of the Patient Rights Ombudsman of March 13, 2023, ref. no. RzPP-DPR-WPZ.431.362.2021.PS.

*As FEDERA, we are aware that this is a temporary solution until we achieve full liberalization and decriminalization of abortion. Forcing women to see a psychiatrist so that they can decide about their bodies and futures is an anachronism. But we have to manage somehow and use what little law we have left. We say clearly to every person in need of help: do not be afraid. FEDERA is always on your side.* – adds Krystyna Kacpura, FEDERA’s President.

Source: [federa.org.pl](https://federa.org.pl) (in Polish only)

### **Raise of anti-abortion campaigns in Armenia**

It is highly concerning how the anti-choice groups in the country are increasingly targeting the public as well as healthcare professionals with anti-abortion campaigns through social media (for example, this [petition](#) on Change.org), print ads, and workshops.

On November 2022 another attempt by the anti-choice group was initiated. A group of lawyers prepared a draft law on unborn child’s life and sent the [petitions to state bodies](#) (Government, Parliament) asking for an amendment of the legislation and abortion ban in Armenia.

Fortunately, the Government rejected their demands.

Although the government rejected this draft law, these trends are very disturbing because they are repeatedly initiated by the same group.

Another worrying trend is that these groups are working with doctors to fight against sex-selective abortions, and banning abortions is the main topic of the meetings.

Source: [Women’s Resource Center](#)

### **Youth-oriented projects launched by Association HERA XXI in Georgia**

One of the strategic directions of Association HERA XXI is the empowerment of youth and increasing their role as advocates for SRHR. Through the youth outreach component, 6 Youth Groups from Shida Kartli, Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Imereti, Samegrelo, and Abkhazeti, young activists, volunteers, and peer educators work with the most vulnerable groups of youngsters including rural girls and boys, ethnic minorities, socially underserved youngsters, internally displaced persons (IDP’s) and young people living in conflict zones. Young activists discuss the problems and challenges faced by local girls and young women.

The outreach campaigns, informational and face-to-face meetings, and thematic webinars with interactive multimedia resources like AMAZE adapted videos are the activities, by which regional group members provide qualified information on SRHR and youth-oriented [services offered by HERA XXI](#).

During the meetings held in the region, young people mention that they are left in an information vacuum regarding topics related to sexual and reproductive health, lack information about puberty, or how to protect themselves from unprotected sexual intercourse. They say that Sexuality-related stigma often restricts women's access to the information, services, and products they need especially in ethnic minorities regions.

Young people note that they feel comfortable and safe during the meetings because of the stigma-free environment and attractive visual material provided by Youth Group Members & Peer Educators.

The girl aged 17, from the ethnic minority community, who took participation in the HERA XXI's event, outlines:

"In my region, women very often become victims of discrimination. Many rights are restricted, especially in education and work. The family believes that their only job is to be a housewife. Unfortunately, most women are so used to this situation that they do not even protest and consider it a norm."

As a result of HERA XXI work, 3028 volunteers, 271 activists, and 673 peer educators are registered and 5445 sessions were held. Through the youth component, HERA XXI creates an equal environment and opportunities for both girls and boys. The activities of youth groups contribute to strengthening the culture of volunteerism, developing leadership skills, and filling the information vacuum on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

Source: [HERA XXI](#)

## RESOURCES

### **Silence & Omissions: A Media Guide for Covering Gender-Based Violence**

Gender-based violence is a human rights violation that, in its extreme form, is fatal. Violence is part of a continuum of gender-based discrimination, harassment, and exclusion that debilitates women and deprives them of their ability to thrive and be equal members of society. Violence perpetrated against women because they are women happens in all corners of the globe and is committed by individuals, state, and non-state actors. Ultimately, from a journalistic point of view, a survivor-centered approach



is about recognizing survivors' agency, as well as relaying the infinite range of their suffering, their experiences, and their perspectives.

The report is available [online](#).

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### **18 May, online: Unpacking CSW67 Regionally & Upcoming Engagement Opportunities**

From the invitation:

*Join us for our May Monthly Meeting where we will unpack the [CSW67 Agreed Conclusions](#) and accountability measures through regional perspectives!*

*Facilitated by feminists from the regions and UN Women regional office representatives, we will have breakout rooms for each region (Africa, Arab States/MENA, Asia Pacific, Europe & North America, and Latin America & the Caribbean) to respond to some of the following questions:*

- *What do you feel worked and didn't work at CSW67 including the negotiations process?*
- *What regional priorities were addressed or not addressed in the Agreed Conclusions?*
- *How are you or how do you plan to use the Agreed Conclusions in your region and/or nationally? (Ex- advocacy and local awareness-raising activities, etc.)*
- *Given the low rating from our survey, do you think the regional caucuses are effective and/or necessary to have during CSW67?*
  - *How can we make them more effective and/or useful for you?*
- *What actions are you inspired to take leaving today's meeting as far as the CSW67 outcomes?*

*Date: Thursday, 18 May 2023*

*Time: 8 - 10 am EDT [Find your timezone here](#).*

*Interpretation will be available in English, Spanish, and French.*

*Register [here](#).*

## **18-23 June, Moldova: SDG Summer School**

From the event's website:

*Civil society plays a crucial role in achieving the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To maximize its impact and effectively address the challenges ahead, civic activists must enhance their knowledge and skills in advocacy and campaigning.*

*We are thrilled to announce the launch of the Advocacy School 2023 in Moldova, taking place in June. This open call invites advocates from across the region to apply with their innovative ideas and connect with partners from Germany, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine. Through the program, participants will gain insights into different advocacy approaches and identify those best suited to their political context and available resources.*

### ***Who can participate?***

*Civic actors, representatives of NGOs and grassroots initiatives, researchers, and experts from **Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine** who are currently planning or running advocacy activities that are connected to the SDG topics locally, nationally and/or internationally.*

***[Submit the application form by May 24, 2023.](#)*** Confirmation of the participation will be sent to elected participants by 30th of May, 2023.

Source: [soin-network.org](https://soin-network.org)

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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