

# BULLETIN

SRHR NEWS FROM CENTRAL  
AND EASTERN EUROPE

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Burning issue:  
**Broken Promises and Lost  
Lives: Examining Poland's  
Restrictive Abortion Laws  
Under Prime Minister Tusk's  
Unfulfilled Reforms**

astra  
network

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# BURNING ISSUE

## **Broken Promises and Lost Lives: Examining Poland's Restrictive Abortion Laws Under Prime Minister Tusk's Unfulfilled Reforms**

Amnesty International illustrated the surge of civic engagement via voter turnout that led to the inauguration of Prime Minister Tusk in 2023. According to the British Broadcasting Corporation, voter turnout was recorded to be as high as 74% (Rainsford, 2023). Anna Błuś, Amnesty International's Gender Justice Researcher, added demographic detail by highlighting the, "Unprecedented," records of young individuals and women amongst voters (Błuś, 2024). These individuals have likely been, in part, influenced to vote from the now seemingly ambiguous promises made by Prime Minister Tusk. Tusk has since spoken out about his promises to liberalize and legalize the abortion law in Poland. In August, Mr. Tusk made constituents aware that his efforts are not foreseeable at this time, attributing his recent failure to do so to parliament

members unsupportive of his efforts (Euronews & AP, 2024). Abortion laws remain restrictive, dangerous and oppressive in Poland. These unfulfilled promises are extremely harmful and have led to outrage in the Polish community, especially amongst the previously described demographic groups.

Dorota Lalik, a 33 year-old Polish woman recently lost her life as a result of the restrictive law and the chilling effect related to the criminalization of those assisting with abortion, including healthcare providers (Strzyżyńska, 2023). Despite the former hospital director of the John Paul II Hospital, where Lalik tragically lost her life, denying performance of any abortions on religious grounds, Marek Wirzba, current director, denied religious or political influence on Lalik's death. Ms.

Lalik's husband shared that he and Dorota were left completely uninformed about the status of her pregnancy and risks she was facing by its continuation. Dorota's life could not be saved due to broader societal issues in Poland, especially those linked to the restrictive abortion laws. Life-saving measures were not applied because they were considered too similar to abortion procedures. Ambiguous medical interpretation of the law, likely rooted in fear of legal consequences if abortion services are provided, has played a significant role in the tragic loss of Dorota Lalik.

This anecdote is not merely another number or addition to a statistic, this is the life of an individual lost due to Poland's restrictive abortion law. Lalik, amongst any other individual seeking reproductive care in Poland should be afforded the right to receive quality abortion care without fear of legal consequence or judgment. Providers should also not fear arrest if life-saving care is performed. The repercussions of these anti-abortion and frankly anti-women policies, rhetoric, and regard will continue to be combated by strong-willed individuals within and outside of the Polish community.

In addition to the advocacy for a necessary change in policy, a vast amount of Polish individuals have contact with or knowledge of Abortion without Borders. This organization is a "Cross-European initiative," focusing on providing support, information, access to abortion pills and connection

to abortion abroad for Polish women (Abortion Without Borders, n.d.). While access and connection to initiatives with the same or similar goals as Abortion without Borders is certainly something the ASTRA Network supports, it is inadmissible that, "Everybody," as The Guardian described it, has their contact on hand. Polish women should be able to seek these services domestically. Ultimately, Lalik lost her life because of the unacceptable Polish abortion services and this underscores the repercussions of Tusk's inability to reform Poland's restrictive abortion law.

Poland's restrictive abortion law and practice have been repeatedly condemned by international human rights bodies. Most recently, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) issued an inquiry report finding that Polish abortion law is causing grave and systematic human rights violations (CEDAW/C/POL/IR/1, 2024). The inquiry was initiated following submissions by the Center for Reproductive Rights, the Foundation for Women and Family Planning (FEDERA), and the Karat Coalition. The CEDAW's findings address the grave and systematic harm that has been caused over many years and continues today. The CEDAW recommended that Poland legalize and fully decriminalize abortion recognizing abortion as a fundamental right and placing women's autonomy at the center of its policy. It is time for the Polish government and lawmakers to take action to implement

these recommendations and to ensure women's reproductive rights in Poland.

**Written by Katelynn Takacs**

## **Women's Rights in Armenia: Progress, Challenges, and Ongoing Advocacy**

In recent months, the Women's Resource Center (WRC) of Armenia has driven key advancements while navigating complex challenges in advocating for women's rights. Major progress was made in July 2024 with the legalization of at-home medical abortions up to the eighth week of pregnancy, a legislative shift achieved after years of WRC-led advocacy. This new law, effective since August 6, is accompanied by WRC-developed guidelines for medical professionals to ensure safe and accessible reproductive care. Additionally, WRC's strengthened influence in health policy is supported by its re-election to the Ministry of Health Public Council and recent accreditation to train healthcare providers in inclusive reproductive services, emphasizing rights-based and non-discriminative care.

Responding to recent crises, WRC met with Deputy Prime Minister Ms. Zhamakochyan to highlight the gaps in Armenia's social protection systems exposed by events such as the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the severe floods of May 2024 in Tavush and Lori. These crises

have disproportionately impacted women, particularly those tasked with caregiving, and increased their risks of gender-based violence. WRC is now collaborating with the government to bolster these social systems for greater resilience in future emergencies. In addition, WRC has been a key player in addressing gender-based discrimination in the labor market. Partnering with Solidarity Center Armenia and 14 other organizations, it hosted a strategic meeting with MPs and the Deputy Minister of Labor to present 2024 research and recommendations for reforming labor policies, reinforcing gender equity and fairness in the workforce.

### **Expanded Access to Medical Abortions in Armenia**

On July 12, 2024, the National Assembly took a significant step forward by adopting draft amendments that allow women to undergo medical abortions in out-of-hospital settings up to the 8th week of pregnancy. This milestone reflects the relentless advocacy efforts of the Women's Resource Center and represents a major advancement in women's reproductive rights in Armenia. Under the new legislation, medical abortions can now be performed in licensed medical organizations, both in hospitals and out-of-hospital facilities, greatly enhancing accessibility and providing women with more choices regarding their reproductive health.

While this legislative change is a crucial

improvement, it is important for the Armenian government to prioritize informing medical professionals and women about these new regulations. Increased awareness and understanding are essential for the effective implementation of the law, empowering women to make informed decisions about their reproductive health.

To further enhance the safety and accessibility of abortion services, we urge the Armenian government to adopt World Health Organization (WHO) adapted standards on medical abortions. This includes promoting self-managed medical abortion as an option, allowing women greater autonomy and empowerment in their reproductive health decisions.

Despite these advances, significant barriers remain. The draft Law on Ensuring Legal Equality and Protection from Discrimination has yet to pass Parliament, marking the third delay since 2017. Civil society, including WRC, is pressing for critical updates, such as protections for sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) and coverage for private-sector discrimination, yet recent ministry changes have stalled progress. Concerns also surround new amendments to reproductive health laws, which expanded state-funded reproductive services and raised the age limit for surrogacy to 38. WRC warns that the lack of research on surrogate mothers' health and well-being risks overlooking preventive health approaches, like addressing

environmental causes of infertility. Another area of contention is the government's draft rehabilitation program for domestic violence offenders, released in September 2024. The program has raised concerns about its effectiveness and the potential safety risks for survivors. WRC and other rights advocates argue that resources would be better spent on direct support for survivors rather than offender rehabilitation. These systemic gaps underscore the need for prioritizing victim-centered approaches in Armenia's response to domestic violence.

As Armenia prepares for its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) by the United Nations in 2025, WRC and its partners have submitted joint reports on gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and labor issues to influence international dialogue on Armenia's progress and areas requiring urgent reform. Through collaborations both within Armenia and internationally, WRC continues its mission to drive meaningful changes in women's rights and protections across the country.

Source: [WRC Armenia](#)

## **A.L.E.G. Champions Youth Protection and Gender Rights Through Key Initiatives**

The first of these is the Gender Equality Festival® 2024, now in its 19th edition, which will take place from October 30

to November 2 in Sibiu, Romania. This year's theme, "BE BOLD!," focuses on the fragility of women's rights won over the last century and the ongoing need to defend them. The theme serves as a reminder of the continued struggle to uphold these rights in the face of various challenges.

The event will also address current issues such as access to reproductive health and will feature debates, workshops, and civic actions aimed at inspiring young people to support and promote human rights. These activities are designed to encourage attendees to actively contribute to the maintenance and promotion of human rights within their communities. A.L.E.G. believes that educating and mobilizing the younger generation is crucial to fostering a culture of respect for rights and freedoms.

To learn more about this year's festival, please visit [A.L.E.G.'s official page](#).

In addition to the festival, A.L.E.G. is running the project "Effective Prevention of Exploitation and Trafficking of Persons among Vulnerable Young People," supported by the British Government. This project aims to increase the capacity of social institutions to prevent human trafficking and exploitation of young people.

The project included two training sessions, the first held in Sibiu in May 2024, where educators from care centers learned to use interactive methods to educate young people about

risks, rights, and developing healthy behaviors. The most recent session took place from October 7-9, 2024, in Braşov, targeting both child protection professionals working directly with young people and NGO specialists. Experts from Romania and the UK conducted practical workshops on preventing exploitation and trafficking, further strengthening efforts to protect vulnerable youth.



Notably, in September 2024, the project also welcomed the visit of Christine Smart, a safeguarding expert from the UK Government, who participated in one of the practical educational activities carried out by educators trained by A.L.E.G.

More information about the project can be found here: [Project Page](#).

Source: [A.L.E.G. Romania](#)

# **Empowering Vulnerable Communities and Promoting Reproductive Health: SECS Romania's Latest Initiatives**

## **New Project to Empower Marginalized Roma Youth in Bucharest**

In September 2024, The Society for Education on Contraception and Sexuality (SECS) launched a new and impactful project within a marginalized Roma community in Bucharest, entitled "Through Play and Education for a Healthy Community." Focused in the Ferentari neighborhood, the project is dedicated to reducing gender-based violence and combating ethnic stereotypes among young people. It also aims to address the pressing issue of unwanted pregnancies among minors in this vulnerable area. Through this initiative, SECS is working to empower young people to identify, report, and respond effectively to situations of violence, helping to foster a foundation of resilience and awareness in the community. Additionally, the project seeks to improve access to reproductive health resources for adults in the area, ensuring they receive essential information and services.

To achieve these goals, SECS has organized an extensive program that includes training 10 community workers in alternative teaching and learning methods designed to foster social dialogue. Through this training, the workers will be equipped to engage and educate the community effectively.

SECS is also running educational sessions aimed at empowering at least 120 children and young people to challenge discrimination and resist ethnic and gender stereotypes. Over the course of the next seven months, SECS will host eight health-focused sessions, reaching 20 children, 20 young people, and 40 adults from Ferentari. These sessions will provide crucial information on health and wellness tailored to the community's unique needs. The project will also ensure access to reproductive health resources by providing condoms to over 200 community members and facilitating gynecological services for 20 women. Additionally, SECS has launched a public awareness campaign expected to reach over 8,000 people, raising awareness on sexual and reproductive health issues and advocating for non-discrimination, specifically in relation to the Roma community. Through these integrated efforts, SECS is working to create a more informed and resilient community in Ferentari, where young people and adults alike are empowered with knowledge and resources to lead healthier lives.

## **Marking World Contraception Day with Nationwide Support**

To commemorate World Contraception Day, SECS has taken bold steps to address the ongoing shortage of contraceptive resources across Romania. Family planning clinics in the country have been without state-supported contraceptives for over a decade, a gap SECS is committed



to bridging. As part of its efforts, SECS distributed 32,000 condoms and over 200 lubricants to family planning centers and NGOs nationwide. These resources aim to provide immediate support for contraceptive needs, particularly in underserved communities. Continuing this effort into October 2024, SECS distributed an additional 12,000 condoms to further expand access and ensure that essential supplies reach those who need them. Looking ahead, SECS plans to distribute a total of 80,000 condoms over the next several months, affirming its commitment to reproductive health access and family planning support. Through these dedicated actions, SECS continues to advocate for informed and accessible reproductive health choices across Romania.

Source: [SECS Romania](#)

## **Freedom of Choice Sees Gender Training as a Long-term Investment in Defending SRHR in Slovakia**

Over the years of offering in-depth, interactive gender training to diverse groups of people, Freedom of Choice (Možnosť voľby) has educated a few hundred individuals. These include healthcare professionals, journalists, activists, social workers, teachers, artists, and people from many other professions or fields of study. To maintain connection and support

ongoing education, cooperation, and networking, every person who participates in any of the gender training sessions offered by Freedom of Choice has the opportunity to join the Alumni Club. The Alumni Club is free of charge for every attendee and provides an online library of additional resources, a mailing group for quick contact with other alumni to share research, calls to action, or interesting events, and at least once a year, an in-person gathering at a specialized Alumni gender training session.

The most recent Alumni training was held at the end of September, where members reunited over three days and participated in a range of topics while enjoying the company of like-minded people. In addition to the Alumni members, Adriana Lamačková from the Centre for Reproductive Rights joined online, and together with Freedom of Choice advocacy expert and gender trainer Adriana Mesochoritsová, they presented on the current state of SRHR in Europe. They discussed contraception access, obstetric violence, abortion care access, and the general state of sexual and reproductive healthcare. They also reviewed the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights' report on SRHR and what their recommendations mean for Slovakia. Additionally, the first results of new research on anti-gender movement strategies were presented.

In previous Alumni sessions, a variety of topics were presented by and for Alumni members. These included a lecture

on setting up a humanitarian first-response center in Ukraine after the start of the full-scale Russian attack in 2022, a presentation on research about the participation of women politicians in Slovak political parties and elections, a workshop on the most recent WHO abortion care standards, a presentation on a feminist student art installation, and an introduction to a linguistic approach to gender inclusivity in translation.

Alumni training sessions offer more than just extended education—they have proven to be a space to build friendships and foster new partnerships. Various members of the Alumni Club have ended up collaborating on multiple projects, even starting NGOs. For example, NGOs started by some of the Alumni members have conducted research on women’s roles in the Slovak National Uprising during World War II or studied the stigma associated with assisting refugees.

Freedom of Choice focuses on interactive, in-depth gender training sessions that typically last for several days. In their experience, this is the time needed for participants to experience a lasting shift in their attitudes and mindsets, making these training sessions a valuable long-term investment in the future of SRHR and human rights in Slovakia.

Source: [Možnosť voľby \(Freedom of Choice\)](#)

## **Empowerment through Self-Defense: Daniela Draghici’s September Initiatives and**

## **Upcoming Events**

In her role as Vice-President of the SEX vs The STORK Association / Asociația SEXUL vs BARZA and as an Empowerment through Self Defense (ESD) Level 3 lead trainer, Daniela Draghici continues to make a significant impact on the lives of young people in Romania. September was a particularly active month for Draghici, marked by a series of empowering workshops and public engagements that focused on self-defense, reproductive health, and comprehensive education.

Supporting the Voices of Institutionalized Youth In early September, Draghici led an ESD workshop as part of the fifth annual “Our Voice” Summit, organized by the Council of Institutionalized Youth / Consiliul Tinerilor Instituționalizați. This event, aimed at fostering an open and collaborative environment for 60 young individuals within Romania’s special protection system, enabled participants to voice their experiences, gain crucial information, and interact with experts from NGOs and child protection agencies. The workshop, which involved 22 adolescents and young adults, received high praise from attendees. Participants emphasized the importance of self-defense techniques, particularly for those in child protection, noting that these skills are valuable not only for themselves but also for their peers outside the system.

Promoting Reproductive and Mental Health at the Ladies Run Sport & Expo

Village On September 21, International Day of Peace, Draghici took part in the LadiesRunSport&Expo Village, powered by Vichy, where she engaged the public at the SEXUL vs BARZA Association booth. The booth, dedicated to reproductive and emotional health, HPV prevention, and ESD, offered individual and group self-defense sessions led by Draghici herself. Attendees also had the chance to discuss the intersection of reproductive and mental health, thanks to a multi-disciplinary team, including a psychologist, a family planning doctor, and a preventive medicine expert. The event was part of the “Stronger, Healthier” initiative, a project supported by MSD Romania, and provided an inclusive platform for the general public to access information and resources at no cost.

Raising Awareness at Nicolae Bălcescu Secondary School As part of World Contraception Day on September 26, Draghici was invited to Nicolae Bălcescu Secondary School in Ploiesti, where she addressed a group of 22 parents. In this unique session, Draghici advocated for the reintroduction of health and sexuality education in schools and introduced the concept of Empowerment through Self-Defense as a proactive measure against school bullying. Engaging parents in exercises on both subjects, she received enthusiastic feedback, with participants expressing appreciation for the workshop’s relevance and interactive format. Draghici extended her gratitude to the school’s principal and the parents for their participation,

marking this event as a meaningful milestone in community collaboration.

Looking Ahead: October and November Events Draghici’s commitment to promoting empowerment through self-defense continues into the coming months. In October, she will be part of an advanced ESD training session in Albania, organized by ESD Europe and ESD Albania, with partners from ANAIS Association, Sensiblu Foundation, A.L.E.G. Association, and the WHO Constanta. Additionally, on October 25, Draghici and her colleagues from ANAIS and Sensiblu Foundation will host an ESD workshop at ANAIS Hub in Bucharest. In November, to commemorate the 13th Annual Fodada International Women’s Self Defense Day, Draghici is set to lead three ESD workshops on November 5 and November 8, also held at the ANAIS Hub on Marcel Iancu Street.

Through her work, Daniela Draghici continues to champion a proactive, informed, and collaborative approach to empowerment, health, and self-defense, creating spaces for education, safety, and mutual respect within communities across Romania.



Source: Daniela Draghici

## **Exclusive Partnership and Informational-Educational Resource for the Education System in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan**

Since 2022, Association HERA XXI has been the exclusive partner of Amaze in Transcaucasia. This partnership has created an unprecedented opportunity to make visual informational-educational material on SRHR accessible throughout the region, helping to foster a positive environment toward Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE). It also ensures access to comprehensive and visually engaging information for ethnic groups and for deaf and hearing-impaired people living in the region.

In partnership with AMAZE, Association HERA XXI has dubbed 48 videos into Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani, as well as into sign language. Given that many SRHR topics are taboo and stigmatized, young people are often embarrassed to discuss sexual and reproductive health and rights. These videos help to alleviate embarrassment and encourage open, in-person communication among young people, fostering a positive environment toward SRHR. The videos are simple, engaging, and age-appropriate, making them suitable for a broad audience. These unique, modern resources for child and adolescent sexual development enable open and honest dialogue with young people, while supporting a positive environment

among adults in their communities.

The Amaze resources advance accurate, age-appropriate, and honest sexuality education in Georgia and are available online, especially for vulnerable groups such as young people living in rural areas, mountainous villages, ethnic minorities, and young persons with disabilities. These videos fill a critical gap in CSE in Georgia and help young people make informed choices. Moreover, young people in Armenia and Azerbaijan can also benefit from this invaluable resource.

Source: [HERA XXI](#)

## **The Contraceptive Implant Now Available for Free in the Republic of Moldova**

One of the most effective modern contraceptive methods is now available to women in the Republic of Moldova for the second consecutive year. The contraceptive implant, which contains only one type of hormone (progestin), can be used by many women, including those who breastfeed or cannot use estrogen-based methods. It is more than 99% effective in preventing unplanned pregnancies and is provided free of charge to individuals from 12 vulnerable population categories through family doctors in their locality.

According to Victoria Ciubotaru, an obstetrician-gynecologist at the Center for Reproductive Health and

Medical Genetics and Coordinator of the National Program on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, the contraceptive implant was registered in the Republic of Moldova in 2020. It is one of the contraceptive methods offered at no cost, funded by the state budget, to 12 vulnerable population groups. In 2023, 100 implants (Levoplant) were purchased for women from these groups, and this year, based on an assessment of women's needs and preferences, over 400 implants have been procured.

Currently, the contraceptive implant is available free of charge at 41 youth-friendly health centers (Youth Clinics), reproductive health clinics, and primary healthcare institutions. Using eligibility criteria established by the World Health Organization, a doctor assesses whether the contraceptive method is suitable for a woman based on her health status. If she falls into one of the 12 identified population categories, she will receive the implant free of charge, along with the necessary medical assistance for insertion or removal. Over the past two years, approximately 300 obstetricians and gynecologists throughout the country have been trained in contraceptive counseling and in the insertion and removal of the contraceptive implant.

Women who do not qualify under these 12 specific categories can still purchase the implant from pharmacies or order it through certain suppliers if it is unavailable at local pharmacies. They can then consult their local gynecologist

for assistance. Following a recent revision of healthcare tariffs, the cost of implant insertion is comparable to that of inserting an intrauterine device (IUD) – just over 200 MDL (approximately 11 Euros), according to Victoria Ciubotaru.

In the Republic of Moldova, access to contraceptives remains a significant unmet need for many people. According to the 2020 Generations and Gender Study, about 17% of women of reproductive age (15-49 years) have an unmet need for contraceptives, with the rate nearly twice as high in rural areas (20.2%) compared to urban areas (11.9%).

Medical personnel report that some women from vulnerable groups, in an attempt to prevent unplanned pregnancies, resort to harmful methods such as vinegar, lemon juice, and wormwood infusion, which negatively impact reproductive health.

For more details, visit: [UNFPA Moldova](#)

Source: Family Planning Association of Moldova

## **Empowering Women Through Community: HumanDoc's Women's Support Clubs Across Poland**

At HumanDoc, we are proud to offer a safe and empowering environment for women through our Women's Support Clubs, which are currently active in six cities across Poland: Warsaw, Opole, Gdańsk, Zielona Góra, Łódź, and

Lublin.

These clubs, specifically designed for women with migration experience, offer vital support by providing a space where participants can discuss issues related to gender-based violence (GBV), domestic violence, and their legal rights in Poland. Led by experienced facilitators, including certified WenDo trainers, the clubs focus on key topics such as self-worth, personal boundaries, assertiveness, and recognizing signs of domestic violence.

Participants also learn how to access local support services, equipping them with the knowledge and confidence to take control of their lives in a new country. Meetings, which take place twice a month in small groups, ensure that every woman feels seen, heard, and supported.

Our clubs do more than just provide information. They create a strong sense of community and solidarity among women. Success stories from our participants show the transformative impact of these clubs: from overcoming addiction and escaping toxic relationships, to finding employment and regaining self-confidence, the support these women receive helps them rebuild their lives.

By offering this safe and intimate space, HumanDoc helps women not only identify and combat violence but also empowers them to make positive changes in their personal and family lives. This is more than support; it is a journey toward self-realization, resilience, and

empowerment. The Women's Support Clubs programme is implemented by the HumanDoc Foundation in collaboration with Plan International.

### **You can contact HumanDoc Women's Support Clubs:**

Women's Support Club in Opole;  
klubkobiet.opole@humandoc.pl

Women's Support Club in Lublin;  
klubkobiet.lublin@humandoc.pl

Women's Support Club in Zielona Góra;  
klubkobiet.zielonagora@humandoc.pl

Women's Support Club in Gdańsk;  
klubkobiet.gdansk@humandoc.pl

Women's Support Club in Łódź;  
klubkobiet.lodz@humandoc.pl

Women's Support Club in Warsaw;  
klubkobiet.warszawa@humandoc.pl

Source: [HumanDoc](#)

## **Key Developments from the Albanian Center for Population and Development (ACPD)**

The Albanian Center for Population and Development (ACPD) has recently undertaken significant initiatives in Albania to support reproductive health, demographic awareness, and to develop policies addressing the evolving needs of Albanian society. A major development

includes the Albanian government's launch of a public consultation for a new law on sexual and reproductive health. This proposed legislation introduces amendments concerning the interruption of pregnancy and, for the first time, provisions related to surrogacy. Although ACPD is an established member of the National Committee on Reproductive Health, the consultation process with stakeholders has been limited. To address this, ACPD has expressed concerns regarding several elements of the proposed legislation and has submitted formal recommendations to the Ministry. The public consultation has generated strong reactions, notably from anti-choice groups, who have been vocal in the media. Despite these challenges, ACPD remains steadfast in advocating for the reproductive rights of women and girls, ensuring that their health needs are addressed.

On July 18, 2023, the Parliamentary Voluntary Group on Population and Development was established with financial support from the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (EPF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). ACPD plays a vital role in supporting the group's operations, focusing on policy advocacy, awareness campaigns, and driving impactful changes in population health. This group has been instrumental in launching awareness activities on HPV and the necessity of vaccination. These efforts span multiple school settings and health

centers across Durrës, Fier, and Tirana, engaging communities in the HPV vaccine rollout. Visits to health centers in Durrës and Fier have been valuable for evaluating the current HPV vaccination efforts, discussing both successes and challenges, and fostering public engagement in this vital health initiative.

The ACPD has also been proactive in fostering collaborations with local governments. In a recent meeting with Durrës Mayor Emiriana Sako, the organization explored potential partnerships to address the challenges associated with an aging population. Among the key initiatives is a pilot program for an aging registry in Sukth, which aims to enhance services for elderly residents and address their specific needs. Additionally, ACPD has extended its awareness campaigns to law enforcement and the elderly. A campaign at the Fier Police Directorate emphasized the importance of HPV vaccination, routine health screenings, and early diagnosis. Supported by the Public Health Institute (PHI), ACPD also distributed free HPV tests, facilitating early detection to improve health outcomes for those in underserved areas.

Beyond field activities, ACPD has organized policy advocacy and training initiatives to address broader demographic issues. A recent workshop on "Demography and Population" provided a platform to discuss critical topics such as migration and the implications of the national census on population policy. This workshop

highlighted the need for data-driven policies to support Albania's demographic stability. The initiative will conclude with a comprehensive "Policy Paper" that outlines detailed recommendations to improve Albania's demographic health.

ACPD's efforts underscore its commitment to advocating for inclusive policies and raising public awareness. Through these initiatives, the organization is dedicated to advancing reproductive rights, enhancing public health, and supporting Albania's societal development.

Source: [Albanian Center for Population and Development](#)

## **Empowering Women in the Context of Migration in Central Asia**

In Shymkent, Kazakhstan, on October 18, 2024, a training was held titled "Protecting the Rights of Migrant Women Against Domestic Violence." This event was made possible as part of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) project "Protection of Vulnerable Migrants with a Special Focus on Empowering Women in the Context of Migration in Central Asia," supported by IOM Kazakhstan and funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This training was planned following a research study, which focused on the impact of migration on the rights and

opportunities of migrant women, and aimed to study the specific features of domestic violence within the social environment of migrant women. The relevance of this research is defined by key factors: domestic violence remains a latent and stigmatized issue, meaning that official data on the prevalence of violence against migrant women is often inaccurate. Reliable information on opportunities and empowerment of women in the context of migration is fragmented, making it challenging to objectively assess the situation of migrant women in their host country. There is a critical need to protect migrant women who find themselves isolated and vulnerable.

According to survey results from migrant women, female labor migrants face double vulnerability – as women and as individuals involved in migration. Since most migrant women have limited qualifications, they are often forced to work in the informal sector, trade, or as service personnel. A large portion of these women, working in the informal sector, lack work permits, employment contracts, or any formal documentation for their individual labor activities. Over 46% of survey respondents reported regular domestic violence against themselves, while 20% experienced violence not only toward themselves but also their children. Social isolation in the host country is a major factor that increases the vulnerability of migrant women. Stereotypes around remaining silent about family violence persist: in traditional societies, girls and young



women are often raised with the notion that domestic violence is a “normal” part of family life. Most women have little or no source of personal income, making them fully dependent on their husbands. Women are often hesitant to report their husbands to authorities, as this could result in losing the primary source of livelihood for themselves and their children. In cases of divorce, husbands often cease financial support for children, and court-ordered alimony is frequently unenforced.

The study revealed that women who are victims of violence usually seek help from their close circle – 36.7% turn to family and friends – since they are essentially socially isolated in their host country. In addition to physical and psychological violence in migrant families, women also experience economic abuse, which is not only reflected in limited funds provided by their spouses but also in the need to work low-wage and low-skilled jobs. Many migrant women are divorced, widowed, or migrate to earn income to support themselves and their children. Increasingly, migrant women become second or even third wives, undergoing only a Muslim marriage ceremony. These unions do not carry legal responsibility, as religious marriages are not officially institutionalized by the state. This increases the vulnerability of migrant wives, as it prevents them from accessing legal protection and assistance in the event of a divorce. Without legal proof of marriage, migrant women have virtually no legal rights to claim child support (alimony).

Since the project aims to transform negative beliefs, values, attitudes, behaviors, norms, and practices toward women affected by migration at the community level, the project organized a meeting and training on access to and provision of services for migrant women, targeting staff from government organizations, crisis centers, migration services, and police officers from divisions protecting women against violence. At this meeting, research findings were shared, including the level of trust migrant women have in the aforementioned staff. During group work, participants had the opportunity to discuss situations they encountered when providing services and to work on interagency cooperation when offering services for the presented cases. This training provided an opportunity not only to establish contacts among government organization staff for future collaboration but also to review research findings, which showed the extent to which migrant women trust government organizations authorized to protect and support people in difficult life situations in Kazakhstan. This event allowed participants to see migrant women from a different perspective, to understand their needs and challenges when addressing family issues within the migrant community in Kazakhstan.

Source: [Sana Sezim](#)

# **A Special Contribution: Examining the 2024 U.S. Presidential Debate and Its Implications for Reproductive Rights and International Relations**

**By Katelynn Takács\***

The United States Presidential debate garners an abundance of attention from the international community. As an American citizen, watching the debate is critical for both my personal and professional endeavors. As a Hungarian citizen, tuning in is crucial for gaining prior insight into potential policy changes upon inauguration. As much as this is true for the country of Hungary, it is also true for the other 18 member countries of the ASTRA Network. Many topics within the debate are relevant to the mission of ASTRA Network; however, the discussion about American abortion policy and platforms is undoubtedly the most applicable.

Linsey Davis, American broadcast journalist and co-moderator of the 2024 United States Presidential debate, delineated Trump's previous "touting" on "killing Roe v. Wade" while later claiming to be the most pro-life President in American history (Muir & Davis, 2024). During his presidency, Mr. Trump appointed three Supreme Court justices, composing one-third of the United States Supreme Court (Trump SCOTUS Watch, n.d.). These justices played an impactful role in overturning the 1973 Roe v. Wade landmark decision,

which previously deemed restrictions imposed on abortion accessibility from individual states unconstitutional. Following this decision, individuals living in the United States have attested to the obstacles they face in accessing abortion healthcare in many states.

In the 2024 United States Presidential debate, Vice-President Harris discussed the Trump abortion bans in 20+ states. In one state (not mentioned), Vice-President Harris reported Americans facing prison for life if the outlined policy is not followed (Muir & Davis, 2024). This policy does not allow exceptions for rape and incest. In an attempt to justify the implementation of his six-week abortion ban, former President Trump claimed that the United States allows abortion in the 9th month (Muir & Davis, 2024).

In further fabrication, Former President Trump also claimed that Minnesota Governor Tim Walz (also Vice-President Harris's running mate for the 2024 election) stated that, "Abortion in the 9th month is absolutely fine," and that, "Execution is okay." Davis, refuting Trump's argument, informed the seemingly uninformed former President that there is no current state in the United States that has legalized killing a baby after it's born. These remarks are dangerous for constituents to be fed. False information about policies in an attempt to advance a political platform is not isolated within the United States. Ambiguous remarks on critical stances derived from the desire to accumulate ample support are not isolated within

one of the two major American presidential parties either. As previously alluded to, an agenda consistently adhering to these two tactics also has a substantial impact on diplomatic relations United States officials nourish.

On the opposing side of the debate, Vice-President Harris emphasized that following Congress's passing of a bill to reinstate outlined rights in *Roe v. Wade*, she would sign it into law as future president. This federal decision would construct a baseline policy each state must comply with. Each state would have discretion in the provision of further rights but would legally not be able to restrict beyond the parameters of the federal decision. Referring back to the debate, Vice-President Harris shared her belief that former President Trump would sign a national abortion ban and support policies further exacerbating reproductive rights restrictions for American people. Former President Trump, however, denied any claims of signing a future ban.

To conclude this section of the debate, Vice-President Harris shared her belief that the government should not be making decisions about individuals' bodies. This is a statement that has been echoed throughout international reproductive rights protests, namely in Hungary following the introduction of the fetal heartbeat policy.

All statements and policies considered, this article does not have the intention of swaying American voting decisions

or influencing alignment of individuals outside of the United States' loyalties or support. It has the intention of informing readers about policies that concern crucial human rights and reproductive policies. As somebody concerned about how American presidential administrations may impact domestic and international policies, I hope the recent 2024 United States Presidential debate elicits imperative conversations on a local and global scale.

**\*Katelynn Takács** is a Hungarian-American dual citizen studying social work at The Ohio State University, actively involved in advancing human rights locally and globally. In Columbus, OH, she volunteers with Community Refugee and Immigration Services, supporting new Americans, and interns at the Columbus Free Clinic, providing community resources and behavioral health screenings. Additionally, she works as a resident assistant at Creative Living, helping individuals with physical and developmental disabilities. Excited to volunteer with the ASTRA Network, Katelynn aims to deepen her understanding of global women's health and reproductive rights and hopes to contribute valuable perspectives as a dual citizen.

## Guest contribution by Veronika Povž\*, Director of Communications at My Voice, My Choice: A Citizens' Initiative for Safe and Accessible Abortion in the EU

**Sign like someone's life depends on it—  
because it does.**

Your signature can change the fact that over 20 million women across the European Union still face serious barriers to accessing safe abortion care. Women are dying in Polish hospitals, being threatened with prison in Malta, and are suffering unnecessarily because they are denied their basic rights.

This is why we, along with partner organizations across Europe, launched the European Citizens' Initiative "My Voice, My Choice." Our mission is clear: to secure the right to safe abortion for every individual living in the EU.

You can sign it even before finishing this article: <https://eci.ec.europa.eu/O44/public/#/screen/home>

### **A Movement That's Making Waves**

On September 28th, International Safe Abortion Day, we reached a turning point in our campaign. In the largest in-person signature drive in European history, over 1000 volunteers and 300 organizations united across more than 20 countries. They weren't just collecting signatures; they were sparking

conversations and spreading awareness.

Belle from Malta described the scene perfectly: "International Safe Abortion Day in Malta was incredible. We had a bigger turnout than ever before, and the spirit was electric. It felt like a powerful protest for change, a real statement that people won't stand for these barriers any longer."

During the campaign in Ostrava, Czechia, Svařka shared an inspiring encounter: "I met a group of Polish-speaking people, and one lady turned out to be an activist for a women's rights campaign in her country. She loved the 'My Voice, My Choice' idea, signed on the spot, and even promised to get her colleagues to join."

Dar, another volunteer, found more than just allies: "I met a great bunch of like-minded women who I can now call friends. Some of them joined our efforts and are excited to help out in other cities too."

### **Sign today, shape tomorrow**

On International Safe Abortion Day, collected over 35,000 signatures, which is a great result. But we're not done yet—we still need 300,000 more signatures to make sure our demand for safe and accessible abortion across Europe is heard.

This is why we're preparing two new in-person signature collections all over Europe. The first between October 21st and 27th, to commemorate the death

of Dr. Savita Halappanavar in Ireland in 2018. The second one starts on the 25th of November, The International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. We hope these two signature collections will bring us a step closer to the required 1 million signatures and making abortion safe and accessible for everyone in the EU.

### You too Can Join the Cause:

Learn More: <https://www.myvoice-mychoice.org/>

**Become a Volunteer:** Join our team of passionate advocates across Europe: <https://community.myvoice-mychoice.org/>

Together we can do it.



\***Nika** is the Director of Communications for the My Voice, My Choice campaign, where she leads a team dedicated to amplifying the campaign’s impact. After more than a decade as a copywriter in advertising—where she mixed creativity with strategy to tell stories that stick—she’s now using those same skills to support causes she’s passionate about. From catchy ads to meaningful advocacy, Nika believes in the power of a good story to make a difference.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### 1. 4-10 NOVEMBER 2024: Digital Health Week

is a global week of action that brings stakeholders together to explore the opportunities and challenges of digital health and highlight the critical role it plays in achieving universal health coverage. There are many ways to take part – from hosting an event, workshop or training to launching a new report, briefing or campaign.

[Registration](#)

### 2. 14TH NOVEMBER: Integrating Action on Climate Change and Nutrition

MOMENTUM Country and Global Leadership conducted a desk review to identify national policies in eight USAID priority countries for nutrition that could guide nutrition and climate adaptation actions. This webinar will share major findings and recommendations from this review; highlight opportunities for integration within national climate, health, and nutrition policies; and engage participants and encourage sharing of country experiences and learning on nutrition and climate.

[Registration](#)

### 3. International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

will mark the launch of the UNiTE campaign (Nov 25-Dec 10) – an initiative of 16 days of activism concluding on the day that commemorates the International Human Rights Day (10 December).

[More information](#)

**4. 1ST DECEMBER: World AIDS Day** brings together people from around the world to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS and demonstrate international solidarity in the face of the pandemic. The day is an opportunity for public and private partners to spread awareness about the status of the pandemic and encourage progress in HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care around the world. It has become one of the most widely recognized international health days and a key opportunity to raise awareness, commemorate those who have died, and celebrate victories such as increased access to treatment and prevention services.

[Find out more about the event here](#)

### 5. 3RD DECEMBER: International Day of Persons with Disabilities:

Preliminary findings from the forthcoming UN Disability and Development Report 2023 indicate that the world is even more off-track in meeting several SDGs for persons with disabilities.

[More information](#)

### 6. 12TH DECEMBER: International Universal Health Coverage Day

Universal Health Coverage Day on 12 December is the annual rallying point for the growing movement for health for all. It marks the anniversary of the United Nations' historic and unanimous endorsement of universal health coverage in 2012.

[More information](#)









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