

Advocating ban and abortion opposition in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Organizations, initiatives and
individuals

Azra Husarić Omerović

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BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
ORGANIZATIONS, INITIATIVES AND INDIVIDUALS

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Azra Husarić Omerović

Sarajevo, 2024.

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Key findings summary

It was probably always more difficult for women in Livno, Ugljevik or Široki Brijeg than in other larger cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina to decide on an abortion and undergo the procedure. But today, apart from the obstacles of the traditional and religious environment, there are at least ten organizations supported by local public budgets and large international organizations against them. Although they try to present themselves as pro-life initiatives that want to give women all the information they need before making a final decision, in reality, they seek to limit women's choices and abortion options, which are guaranteed to them by law.

Thus, a local Catholic organization in Široki Brijeg puts up anti-abortion posters that try to impose a sense of guilt on women if they decide not to keep the fetus. They paid for the publication of a uterus illustration with a baby holding the mother's heart by the umbilical cord and with scissors underneath it. These posters saying "DON'T GIVE ME AWAY MOTHER!" were installed throughout Herzegovina in the same form both in 2019 and this year.

According to publicly available data, this organization received more than 10,000 BAM of support from the budget last year. In Ugljevik, the municipality also decided to provide budget support to an organization that opposes abortion.

Support also comes from international organizations from abroad that have offices in numerous countries around the world. Some of the organizations were founded by Catholic missionaries from the USA and they now connect B&H abortion opponents with the largest pro-life organizations in the world.

Sarajevo-based organizations that advocate not using abortion as an option are part of an international network of organizations whose headquarters in the US have been accused twice by prosecutors there of maliciously leading persons to wrong conclusions about medical facts related to abortion.

According to research by independent research media in the USA, significant funds are allocated from the budget without sufficient control for pro-life organizations that make it difficult for women in this country to access abortion. Their years of lobbying and the change in the composition of the US Supreme Court led to the rejection of the decision that guaranteed women the possibility of abortion in all cities.

They are now sharing their experiences with similar organizations around the world.

In smaller cities like Livno, they encounter like-minded people in institutions where they believe that abortions should not be performed and should be legally prohibited. In addition to this obstacle, women in B&H face inequality because the level of support and rights varies in different parts of the country.

Some of the organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina that oppose abortion often cite medical reasons, and at the same time, at least two organizations openly advocate anti-vaxxer positions contrary to the scientific consensus.

New international relations and local funding, alongside with increasingly conservative attitudes towards gender issues in Europe and the world, were among the reason why we wanted to make a refreshed overview of the initiatives to ban or hinder the decision to have an abortion.

The very decision on abortion remains a taboo in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Despite numerous appeals to women to share their experiences about how they made the decision to have an abortion, only ten of them responded.

Some shared their negative experiences but did not want to talk about it further, nor did they agree to have their stories published.

But it is not only anti-abortion initiatives and social stigma that affect women's bad experiences. Once they decide to have an abortion, it does not mean the rest of the process will go smoothly. When she got pregnant a few years ago, Zlata knew that she could not keep the pregnancy due to health reasons.

„My elder son is two years old, and because of the caesarean section, I could not risk the health of that baby and my life“, says Zlata, who agreed to speak in order to improve women's healthcare.

She was granted an abortion in public hospital in Brčko but she had to pay 300 BAM.

Following one of the examinations and determining the details on the abortion date, she was told the procedure would be performed without anesthesia. She did not want to agree to that, because she knew the pain and trauma she would go through and the consequences she would bear throughout her life. She decided to have an abortion in a private polyclinic where she paid 500 BAM.

After this experience, she says that she found out about several other women who struggled with the consequences of abortion without anesthesia for years, but also about women who had to do it because they were not able to pay a higher amount in private clinics.

She talked to them and found out they don't dare to speak about it publicly due to fear of condemnation and misunderstanding in society. Zlata wishes the healthcare service to be at a higher quality level, regardless of the stigma and the situation in society.

Introduction

The aim of this publication is to analyze individuals, formal and informal groups, organizations and foundations in Bosnia and Herzegovina that oppose the possibility of abortion on demand, and advocate its ban through changes in legislation, or try to influence the attitude towards abortion among decision makers or the general public through organizing public events, campaigns, protests or through communication on social networks.

In the first part of the publication, we briefly describe the laws related to abortion in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the competences of the cantons, entities and Brčko District, as well as compliance and differences in relation to international regulations.

Who are the individuals, informal and formal groups, organizations and foundations that advocate the ban of abortion on demand in Bosnia and Herzegovina or oppose the possibility of its provision, that is, the idea of abortion in general, we elaborate in the second part of this publication through a narrative description of who they are, what they primarily do through the statutes of registered associations, how they communicate and whether they use social networks, and whether they are financed from the budget. We collected data on budget financing from municipalities, cities and ministries using the right to free access to information, entity financial registers and other available data.

We dedicated the third part of the publication to the attitude of healthcare institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina towards the possibility of abortion on demand and its provision in practice.

During data collection and research of individuals, groups, registered associations and foundations and the media that oppose the right to voluntary abortion in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we focused on internet search using keywords or affiliated terms that can be related to the procedure of abortion, and a search of specialized press archives and posts on social networks.

Through such a search, we found more than ten matching organizations, websites or individuals who are publicly opposed to abortion. All of them directly spoke or advocated the abolition of the right to abortion on their websites or social networks, or indirectly questioned that right through statements and talked about the religious understanding of such a procedure.

In addition to ten mapped individuals and organizations, initiatives or sites on social networks, two websites from the region whose posts have a significant influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina were also added.

From the public registers of financial reports in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska, we requested information on organizations and checked

whether they are financed from the budget. We checked the same financing-related issues with other institutions, that is, in municipalities and cities where they are registered, governments and ministries for health, family and social welfare.

To promote their goals based on the organization's statute, among which is opposition to abortion, three organizations were financed from the budget with a total of 14,000 BAM. Two political parties that founded the initiative for life, which is fighting for the adoption of a law that would completely ban abortion, received more than 56,000 BAM from the budget.

The issue of abortion is regulated by laws in the Federation of B&H, Republika Srpska and Brčko District, while the right to sexual and reproductive health at the international level is guaranteed by conventions, charters and a declaration, which B&H is obliged to respect by its Constitution, and also adapt its laws in accordance to their provisions.

However, the possibilities of abortion in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not equal in all cantons. Due to this unevenness, women in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not have equal conditions for exercising the right to abortion on demand, because the possibilities differ among the cantons, as do the prices of the service, which in public healthcare facilities vary from 100 to 400 BAM.

The persons representing some of the foundations and organizations, i.e. the prominent individuals we have included in this publication, work in education – three of them at universities, while two persons teach in high schools.

It is important to emphasize that the way these individuals or organizations communicate about abortion is not always direct or clearly visible, but is being built around the issue of traditional values and the birth rate policy, or runs through their religious beliefs.

They mostly communicate through social networks. Social networks are important for these organizations to such an extent that one of the associations originated from a Facebook group. Most organizations have detailed websites where you can find out information about the types of abortion and its consequences, look at the confessions of some women who decided to have an abortion, but also those who decided to keep the pregnancy.

Significant part of the information about the unwanted consequences of abortion, possible complications or percentages for the disease and negative outcomes that these organizations refer to, are simply not accurate enough, are misused or completely inaccurate and without any medical or scientific stronghold. Some of those posts were marked as fake by Facebook, or flagged as posts with misinformation, while some claims are disputed by experts we spoke to for the purposes of this publication.

The most common claims of these organizations and groups are that abortion causes sterility, increases the possibility of breast cancer, cervical cancer, or severe forms of mental disorders, anxiety and depression.

Gynecologist Ives Šindrak explains that the correlation between abortion and damage to the uterus, breast cancer and mental illnesses is no greater than interventions such as tooth extraction where infection or bleeding can occur.

„The possibility of damage to the uterus in the context of chronic changes can also be caused by the placement of an IUD, which is a contraceptive. Put in a dental implant and something can happen”, explains Dr. Šindrak, additionally emphasizing that complications can occur during any intervention and that abortion does not differ significantly in terms of its risks.

She further accentuates there is a reason abortion is allowed by law up to the tenth week of pregnancy due to lesser risks and dangers, and that the negative consequences are minimal due to hospital conditions and the way abortion is performed today.

Negative psychological consequences, according to Dr. Šindrak, can also occur in women who are forced to keep the pregnancy.

We asked the entity and cantonal ministries of health for information on the possibility of performing an abortion on demand, the conditions, and their attitude to such a request made by patients. The results show unequal access and in some cases direct opposition to existing laws.

Only the institutions of the four cantons and Republika Srpska submitted their answers.

The Canton 10 Ministry of Labour, Health, Social Welfare and Deportees provided information that abortions, i.e. intentional termination of the “life of an unborn child” are not performed in this Canton, and expressed their belief that this issue should be completely legally prohibited.

Note

The list of individuals, formal and informal groups, foundations and associations that we highlighted in this publication is probably not final and is the result of the author’s sincere effort to collect as much available data as possible.

List of Abbreviations

B&H	Bosnia and Herzegovina	UCC RS	Republika Srpska University Clinical Center
FB&H	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina	UCH	University Clinical Hospital
RS	Republika Srpska	FIA	Financial-Intelligence Agency
BDB&H	Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina	APIF	Intermediary Agency for IT and Financial Services
SC	Sarajevo Canton	CEC B&H	Central Election Commission
CBC	Central Bosnia Canton		
BPC	Bosnian-Podrinje Canton		
TC	Tuzla Canton		
ZDC	Zenica-Doboj Canton		
HNC	Herzegovina-Neretva Canton		
WHC	West Herzegovina Canton		
C10	Canton 10		
USC	Una-Sana Canton		
SOC	Sarajevo Open Centre		
FMoH	FB&H Ministry of Health		
FPHI	FB&H Public Health Institute		
RSMoHSW	Republika Srpska Ministry of Health and Social Welfare		
UCCS	University Clinical Center Sarajevo		
UCCT	University Clinical Center Tuzla		

Research Methodology

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is no register of non-governmental organizations or less formal initiatives according to which would be possible to precisely find organizations that advocate fewer women's rights to abortion or its complete ban.

The problem with mapping such initiatives is they rarely clearly state they are in favor of banning abortion. Their messages rather “celebrate life” by imposing a sense of guilt on women who decide to have an abortion.

In 2023, Sarajevo Open Centre published a research on regulation, availability and practice of abortion in Bosnia and Herzegovina¹ which presented legal solutions on abortion in B&H, as well as practices of the procedure availability in healthcare facilities. The research showed uneven practice and laws, for which reason all women in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not have the same reproductive rights.

In 2022, the fact-checking platform “Raskrinkavanje” published an analysis of two Facebook pages that present themselves as places where women can turn for help in the event of an unwanted pregnancy, which in reality publish misinformation about abortion to discourage women who may need this medical procedure.

This publication is a result of a journalistic approach to the mapping of organizations through the use of several different methods of accessing data and information, and their unification.

The making of this publication had several stages:

1. Desk research includes the search for potential persons and groups that we have mapped, their media activities, collection of available data on the Internet and from their official websites and social networks. The list of groups and individuals that we have mapped is not necessarily final, so due to limitations in data availability, we cannot confirm their exact number in 2024.

In order to obtain data on financing of anti-abortion organizations and initiatives, in addition to their own proclamations, we used official data from entity agencies to which non-governmental organizations are obliged to submit annual financial reports (FB&H Financial-Intelligence Agency and RS Intermediary Agency for IT and Financial Services). We used official court registers and the register of non-governmental organizations at the B&H Ministry of Justice for information on founders and other administrative data on registered organizations.

¹ Hasanbegović, Delila (2023). Research on Regulation, Availability and Practice of Abortion in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Sarajevo: Sarajevo Open Centre (available at: <https://soc.ba/istrazivanje-o-regulaciji-dostupnosti-i-praksi-abortusa-u-bosni-i-hercegovini/>)

Not all the organizations we mapped are officially registered, so data about them is based on publicly available information from social networks or their websites.

2. We used **inquiries and requests** to collect data available in ministries, municipalities, cities, or in public registers. We used requests under the Freedom of Access to Information Act to obtain data on funding from the budget.

3. We used **interviews** to talk to the individuals and groups we wrote about or the experts we spoke with to gain a better insight into the problem of advocating anti-gender movements. Some of the interviews we used in this publication were conducted online via e-mail or video call.

4. We published a **questionnaire for citizens** on the “Detektor” website² in order to collect the experiences of women who have met or spoken to groups or individuals who oppose abortion on demand, which could have affected their final decision on abortion.

² Questionnaire available at: <https://detektor.ba/2024/07/15/da-li-ste-imali-iskustvo-abortusa-pomozite-nam-da-uradimo-pricu/>

Chapter

01



**Laws relating
to abortion**

The right to sexual and reproductive health at international level is guaranteed by a series of documents adopted at conferences – International Conference on Population and Development (1994), Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), Maternity Protection Convention (2000), European Charter of Patients' Rights (2002) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

According to the documents currently adopted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is no single law or strategy that covers issues of reproductive health or issues of right to abortion on demand. These topics are integrated through existing laws passed in the areas of healthcare, social protection, family relations, criminal and misdemeanor legislation.

Due to this unevenness, women in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not have equal conditions for exercising the right to abortion on demand, because the possibilities differ among the cantons, as do the prices of the service, which in public healthcare facilities vary from 100 to 400 BAM.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has ratified the most important international and regional treaties on human rights, which also include rights related to sexual and reproductive health. These documents guarantee non-discrimination, equal rights of men and women, right to life, prohibition of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, prohibition of interference with privacy, family and home, prohibition of forced marriages, freedom of expression, right to seek, receive and impart information and the right to access judiciary in case of human rights violations.³

In accordance with the obligations of Bosnia and Herzegovina arising from ratified international standards, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska and Brčko District have adopted laws in the field of sexual and reproductive rights.

3 Human rights in the Field of Sexual and Reproductive Health in Bosnia and Herzegovina; final report (2021). Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNFPA, Promente Social Research (available at: https://ombudsmen.gov.ba/documents/obmudsmen_doc2021041420064931ser.pdf)

The Federation acts according to the law taken from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, while Republika Srpska acts according to the RS Law on Requirements and Procedures for Pregnancy Termination. Pursuant to the principles of both laws, every woman has the right to decide on pregnancy termination up to the tenth week of pregnancy as per her own choice.

According to the laws, patients who cannot have an abortion in their local area, but have health insurance, can get the service in the nearest city or municipality.

Pursuant to the Republika Srpska law, termination of pregnancy is carried out at the request of the pregnant woman, while for pregnant women under the age of 16 or a pregnant woman without legal capacity, the request for termination of pregnancy is submitted by the parent, i.e. guardian or guardianship authority.

Article 10 of the **Republika Srpska Law** determines the conditions for termination of pregnancy up to the tenth gestational week of pregnancy, based on decision of gynecology and obstetrics specialist of the healthcare facility; between the tenth and twentieth gestational week of pregnancy, decision on termination of pregnancy is being made by the first- and second-degree commission of the respective healthcare facility; and upon completion of the twentieth gestational week of pregnancy, the ethical committee of the healthcare facility decides on requests for termination of pregnancy.

However, according to the RS Law, doctors have the right to refuse to perform a permitted termination of pregnancy if it goes against their beliefs, with this right being limited by the obligation to provide emergency medical assistance in case of acute danger to life or severe damage to health. This possibility makes it easier for anti-abortion organizations to influence doctors' consciences and their final decisions, and makes the process of finding a doctor who will perform an abortion more difficult and longer for the patients.

The FB&H Law does not stipulate the right to refuse termination of pregnancy due to moral or personal principles, but the doctor can refuse to provide this service if the medical conditions are not met.

Despite the existing laws, data from Sarajevo Open Centre's earlier research on regulation, availability and practice of abortion in Bosnia and Herzegovina show that this procedure is not available to all women, nor that monetary amounts of services are equal in all cities.

Some of the patients from B&H who shared their stories described the abortion experience as frustrating, discriminatory and unprofessional.

„Creepy, unpleasant, as if the situation is not difficult enough by itself, the 'experts' make it even more difficult”, is one of the experiences.

In Sarajevo Open Centre's research, 163 persons answered the questionnaire. When asked if they were satisfied with the service, more than 30 percent of women answered they were not, and as the most common reasons for abortion, they stated their demands (40 cases) or they had to do it for medical reasons.

Chapter

02

Who are the individuals, formal and informal groups, associations, foundations, media, websites in B&H that oppose abortion provision and availability or advocate its ban

How Anti-Gender Movements Function

The anti-gender movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina is gaining strength year by year. In Republika Srpska, they were the loudest in the past year through the initiative to block the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence and Violence against Women, when they insisted that protected grounds of discrimination such as gender identity and sexual orientation be removed from the law.

In addition, they justified the attack on members and activists of the B&H pride march in Banja Luka.

Željka Umičević, activist and representative of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Banja Luka and member of the "Citizens for Constitutional Changes" initiative says the impact of anti-gender movements in Republika Srpska has become visible in all spheres of society - from education to legislative institutions.

„Their impact is growing because the authorities use them, or give them legitimacy, to strengthen their ties with the church and to spread backward ideas through them and thus have an indirect influence on the public”, she explained.

Umičević adds that the continuous activity of such groups and individuals, their networking and close relations with the authorities bring negative consequences for the safety and protection of marginalized groups. As she says: “They call into question the level of achieved democracy, as well as women’s rights guaranteed by law.”

Selma Hadžihalilović, coordinator of the Women’s Network B&H, explains that movements wanting to destroy women’s rights and freedoms are primarily active in B&H and the region, aiming to limit women’s right to decide about their bodies, especially in terms of sexual and reproductive rights.

„These are movements that try to limit the female perspective on current socio-political issues, denying women the right to different priorities and perspectives. The very

fact that someone takes it for granted to make decisions on behalf of a woman and her body – directly violates the right to individual freedom and freedom of decision, without leaving the right to choose”, she says.

In their advocacy, anti-gender groups use religious messages, regulations and principles, the ultimate consequences that some phenomena can bring to an individual or society. They often communicate emotional messages to evoke regret or fear, which are some of the most intense human emotions.

„One of the ways they operate is to spread misinformation or half-truths in order to promote backward values that are directed against women, women’s rights and the rights of marginalized groups”, Umičević explains.

Some of the groups and individuals that we included in this publication as opponents of abortion are close to other anti-gender groups or they themselves have been vocal in advocating law blocking or removing gender identity from the law.

Their communication on the networks and in the media indicated they were against everything “that was imposed from the west” – LGBT+ communities, gender identity, abortion, women’s rights and freedoms, mandatory vaccination or protective measures during the coronavirus pandemic.

The most common arguments for banning abortion concern possible negative consequences for women’s health, such as, as they claim, sterility, higher chances of breast or cervical cancer, and mental difficulties.

How Can Misinformation on Abortion Affect Women’s Health and Rights

Individuals and groups who are loudly opposed to a woman’s right to abortion mainly use misinformation or claims that frighten pregnant women or society in their address on social networks or appearances in the media, because of the most extreme consequences that could arise, which they represent to be happening in a far greater number of cases than shown in practice.

Gynecologist Ives Šindrak says these claims are medically unfounded and that none of these individuals and organizations have a medical degree or education, and that such statements should be limited because of the consequences they can create for a woman’s health.

„When it comes to [social] networks, today everyone is allowed to say what they want. Now if I talk about agriculture and then destroy someone’s crops... That should be handled by an expert and there should be control”, she opines.

Dr. Šindrak further argues that gynecological practice shows that risks occur in a small number of cases and that sometimes there is no indication they may arise. She adds

that the law clearly prescribes ten weeks to decide on abortion, because the negative consequences are significantly less in earlier pregnancies.

These movements begin to collapse women's rights with the spread of misinformation about their rights and possibilities, followed by legal advocacy to completely ban women's rights, as is the case with abortion.

„Without information that brings knowledge on certain topics, we continue to create prejudices and stereotypes towards certain categories of society, which can ultimately lead to violence and limitation of basic rights”, Selma Hadžihalilović believes.

She further explains that the problem is also compounded by attitudes on what is considered a traditional family and their values, where certain communities in society are completely erased.

Hadžihalilović says the spread of misinformation on abortion goes unnoticed and unpunished due to constant threats of instability and wars in the country, and is getting neglected in comparison with other events in the country, but that it is important to emphasize it can create consequences.

„We are very carefully monitoring the actions of certain groups and note subtle attacks on women's rights. We are particularly concerned about the distortion of facts, spread of false information, as well as making false promises in terms of social support”, says Hadžihalilović.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are differences in the availability of abortion among the cantons, but also a significant price distinction that limits women who are not financially able to have an abortion if they want it.

Željka Umičević and Ives Šindrak believe that such uneven practice and bans in certain cantons lead to women's choice to have abortions in private clinics that are not registered and intended for abortion.

„It is a big problem when you ban legal abortion in such a way. The patient will find a way to terminate the pregnancy, and this will then be done illegally, which significantly increases the possibility of some complication occurring”, says Šindrak.

2.1. MLADO SUNCE / YOUNG SUN / Široki Brijeg [Organization]

A uterus illustration with a baby holding the mother's heart by the umbilical cord and with scissors underneath it with the words “Don't give me away mother!” appeared on dozens of billboards in Herzegovina in 2019. The project “Don't give me away mother” was initiated by “Mlado Sunce” association from Široki Brijeg.

Photos of the posters shared on social media received a lot of support, but criticisms for advocating for the abolition of a woman's right to abortion, i.e. to dispose of her body, were even more numerous.

Darko Bošnjak, the president of the association, said during one of his media appearances that the idea behind the poster came from an associate.

„Our associate desired to have exactly this image on these billboards. And he wanted to make a certain contribution to it. His wife did the graphic preparation, after that we contacted some people in Herzegovina who owned the advertising billboards“, he said during the interview.

Bošnjak further elaborated the association did not have any expenses for this project because everything was done from donated funds.

„With this poster, we primarily want to raise awareness of the local community with the aim of protecting individuals from their earliest age. We consider children to be the most vulnerable members in our society, those who cry, laugh and play among us, and even more those who are in their mother's uterus. Therefore, we want to be the voice of those who don't have it“, he said during another of his interviews.

The citizens' association Mlado Sunce has existed in Široki Brijeg since 2017. Before the association, an initiative/community of the same name was launched, which, according to the explanation on the website, is guided by Catholic and charismatic spirituality, and is a member of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the Holy Spirit of Bosnia and Herzegovina (CCRHS B&H).

They proudly point out they participate in charity actions, among which is the one “for an unborn life”.

Their website is full of content on abortion and the need for its ban, and explanations of how Catholicism views the very act of abortion. They criticize the increasing number of abortions on demand in B&H and Croatia.

„The most common cause of death in 2023 is intentional ABORTION. It killed 44.6 million people“, is stated at the beginning of one of their posts.

That post states they are not against women's rights and that they are fighting for the right of every woman to be protected and supported in all life circumstances, but at the same time they are fighting for those who “have no voice, those who cannot express their suffering and cannot defend themselves - the unborn”.

They point out that the number of abortions increased in 2023, reaching almost 8,000 in Croatia, adding the data is not correct because records from private clinics are missing. They also stated that data on the number of abortions in B&H is missing because there are no reliable statistics on the matter.

The organization refused to speak for this publication.

Who are the members of this organization?

Darko Bošnjak is the president of the Mlado Sunce association. He works as a teacher at the vocational high school in Široki Brijeg. In 2022, he was a candidate for the cantonal assembly of the West Herzegovina Canton in front of the Croatian Republican Party (CRP), but was not elected.

He used public space and media appearances to speak publicly about the need to ban abortion during the “Don’t Give Me Away Mother” campaign, initiated by this organization to encourage people to support the ban on abortion, but also to propagate moral and religious beliefs on abortion.

In 2017, Marko Topić was one of the leaders of the Mlado Sunce organization, but also the leader of the “40 days for life” initiative in Bosnia and Herzegovina – prayerful pro-life initiative for life, i.e. initiative to prevent abortion. This initiative was started back in 2004 in Texas, USA, from where it spread all over the world and in which more than a million people officially participated.

Since 2014, the goal of the initiative in Croatia is to spread the idea throughout the country, but also in Europe, “bringing the joyful news about the sanctity of every human life from conception.”

Their joint gatherings and prayers in public spaces are often secured by a large number of police officers, because citizens with banners opposing the ban of abortion and promoting woman’s right to make a decision gather together demanding that abortion be left as a decision for each woman individually. Protests are accompanied by loud music and slogans.

Since 2015, the “40 days for life” initiative has been held in front of the University Clinical Hospital in Mostar.

How they communicate?

In addition to the website, Mlado Sunce also uses Facebook, where they are followed by about 6,000 persons, and a YouTube channel where they have more than 4,000 followers and more than 600,000 views.

The content they post is mostly religious, using emotional content of other person’s confessions about the impact of religion, consequences of abortion or decisions about keeping the pregnancy and the baby.

Mlado Sunce engages in humanitarian work and helps families in Široki Brijeg. They usually communicate about concerts, humanitarian actions or fundraising via the website and Facebook, but also in other media in Herzegovina, and they post their media appearances on the YouTube channel.

They communicate directly against abortion, and advocate its ban. In media appearances or announcements related to “Don’t give me away mother” campaign, they talk

about the negative consequences of abortion and reach a larger number of persons in an emotional way.

How are they financed?

As an association, Mlado Sunce is connected with the informal initiative or community and the foundation through the persons who lead them. The association listed their bank accounts for donations on its website.

According to the publicly available data from the FB&H Financial-Intelligence Agency database, which contains an overview of financial statements of associations and foundations, this association was financed from the budget with 10,500 BAM in 2023. This database does not contain public information on the exact source of budget funding.

According to this report, total value of Mlado Sunce's assets amounted to more than 23,000 BAM in the last year, while the total income was more than 28,000 BAM.

The city of Široki Brijeg never responded to our request for information on the financing of this association.

According to the 2013 census, Široki Brijeg has a total of 28,929 inhabitants, of which 14,548 are women. The budget of this city was 19,679,500 BAM in 2023, while the year before it was two million less.

2.2. GLAS ZA ŽIVOT /VOICE OF LIFE/ Sarajevo [Organization]

The "Voice of Life" website stated their vision is to empower women and families through education and counseling on unplanned pregnancy: „Our desire is to be there, by your side, while you go through doubts and insecurities.“

This is how the organization "Glas za život" from Sarajevo communicated on its website in June 2024. After contacting the employees and asking for an interview, the information on the website was changed, i.e. removed – from quotes, messages, but also percentages of unwanted consequences of abortion, to a link to the international organization that finances them.

They also removed the phone number that linked them to the project "Sara Place for You" from the website, which is also mentioned on the websites of international organizations that support or finance them.

According to the president's interview, "Glas za život" has its own pregnancy center, and the organization was founded in 2017.

The description of their activities states they provide free and confidential education and assistance services, and that they are there for persons who face the challenges of

an unplanned pregnancy. According to information from their mission, they care about privacy and guarantee the protection of personal data.

„If you are confused, don't know what to do, need a conversation or emotional support, we are here for you. You don't have to go through this alone. We understand, we don't judge, and we're here to help solve any dilemma you may have“, they stated on their website, urging women to inform themselves before making a decision about their future.

In the “Pregnancy information” section detailed descriptions during the weeks of pregnancy are given. Among other things, it is said that the baby's heart starts to beat in the fourth week, that all the organs are in place during the seventh week, and that the fingers are formed in the eighth week.

These are the most common arguments of abortion ban advocates, who call abortion the killing of a living being, and instead of the words “embryo” or “fetus” they use the words “baby” and “child”.

Women who want to be informed can find on their website all types of medical terminations of pregnancy according to the weeks in which they are performed. Information on the abortion pill, vacuum aspiration, suction curettage, dilation and evacuation is provided, with additional details on how the procedures are performed, in what weeks, but also with what physical or emotional-psychological consequences.

For the abortion pill, it is stated that about five to eight percent of women who opt for this method will need a surgical procedure due to complications, such as increased or heavy bleeding. For other forms of abortion, statements of women who underwent this method of termination of pregnancy, and who experienced it traumatically, are also listed. At the very bottom of the website, video confessions of women talking about their experiences of pregnancy termination were shown, which can be rather disturbing.

„His little skeleton was still not formed... I think about this often... I feel quite empty“, states one of the confessions.

Despite claiming not to condemn women's choices, the website does not present experiences or arguments in favor of the decision to have an abortion.

In the “Life after abortion” section of the website they elaborate how healing and recovery are possible, but then describe the extremely negative psycho-emotional consequences for the person.

Through the “New beginning” section on this website, they review decisions and questions after the test is negative and after women determine there is no unwanted pregnancy.

In addition to the contact information and address listed at the bottom of the website, there is also a link to the website of Heartbeat International organization. This organization, based in the United States of America, advocates the ban of abortion and has more than 3,500 branches worldwide, boasting about saving more than 300,000 lives on their website.

Online fact-checking platform “Raskrinkavanje” reported this organization also operates a 24-hour “pregnancy help” line in the US, Option Line, which answers more than 600 calls a day. Although being described as counseling support about contraception and types of pregnancy termination on the websites, data from Open Democracy and Vice media research show pregnant women receive information that “abortion and certain types of contraception are murder and, if they decide to terminate the pregnancy, they will experience serious consequences such as PTSD”.

Heartbeat International is a network of pro-life organizations that was founded in 1971 to provide pregnancy support and advice at a time when there were initiatives to legalize abortion. On the official website, they emphasize the information they are available on six continents and have more than 3,500 branches.

According to research conducted by the fact-checking platform “Raskrinkavanje”, there are two Heartbeat International affiliate organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, namely “Glas za život” and “Svjetionik – Centar za život”, both located in Sarajevo.

„Heartbeat International offers interested groups of persons from various countries training and resources to build their own local anti-abortion organization. Heartbeat International charges 70 US dollars for these services. Heartbeat International generated revenue of 4.7 million US dollars in 2018, according to Privacy International's website”, states Raskrinkavanje in their research.

In May 2024, New York State Attorney General Letitia James sued Heartbeat and 11 crisis pregnancy centers for promoting an unproven treatment to reverse the effects of the abortion pill. Heartbeat, whose mission according to the Attorney General is to prevent access to abortion, advertised the reversal treatment as safe and effective and claimed it could reverse the effects of the abortion pill. In reality, abortion cannot be reversed and there is no scientific evidence to support the safety and effectiveness of the treatment, the Attorney General said. She further stated the only scientific study on this had to be stopped due to patient safety, adding that American Association of Gynecologists warns this treatment is not scientifically supported and does not meet the standards of clinical testing.

The Centers and Heartbeat advertised this treatment despite the dangers, so the Attorney General alleges that by persuading pregnant women to undergo the treatment, they committed fraud, deceptive business practices and false advertising under the State of New York laws.

„Heartbeat International and other crisis pregnancy centers are spreading dangerous misinformation advertising ‘abortion reversals’ without medical and scientific evidence”, said Attorney General James and added that attacks on reproductive health are becoming more frequent and it is necessary to protect pregnant women so they can independently make a safe decision based on quality information.

Her statement said Heartbeat aggressively advertised the treatment on its website, social media and other promotional materials, using false and misleading claims, which could lead patients to believe the treatment is safe and with minimal risks despite scientific evidence to the contrary.

At the time of printing this publication, the case was still not finalized in court, but the judge granted a temporary injunction allowing the organization to continue speaking out about the disputed treatment pending a final decision.

In a report from the 2023 conference posted on the Heartbeat's internet portal, it is stated that the successes of the treatment for reversing the abortion pill were presented and praised. The website explains that 4,500 lives have been saved through the APRN treatment. According to the photos published on the Pregnancy Help website, the founder of Glas za život organization, Anja Miroslavljević Bogdanić, attended the second live gathering in the USA in April 2023.

In the country index section of the Heartbeat website, out of a total of 20 countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina is also listed. In addition to B&H, the European countries include Italy, North Macedonia, Serbia, Spain and Ukraine. In the presentation of our country, the content of "Glas za život" association and the video address of the association's president, Anja Miroslavljević Bogdanić, were highlighted.

In a 2023 podcast for the Heartbeat portal, she explained that Glas za život works in a similar way to the American organization.

„We try really hard to have a similar approach that other centers have, especially centers affiliated with Heartbeat International, because you provided us with some great materials and we always use them with clients. The trainings we attended help us a lot”, said Anja Miroslavljević Bogdanić in a podcast in which she also underlined that religion is something that connects the centers in B&H and the USA.

„Centers in the US are something we strive for. All the programs and opportunities that people here in the centers can get for women and children is something B&H really aims to”, she said.

„There are many things [we do] like raising awareness in B&H on abortion and all its consequences”, Miroslavljević Bogdanić explained and added they primarily communicate through social networks.

„Our vision for Glas za život is to share the message of life and the dignity of life and to educate women on options other than abortion, because abortion is very common here unfortunately”, she said.

According to the information on the website, the counseling center is located at Radnička 3 in Sarajevo. The contact phone number previously listed on the website for information and advice is the same as the number listed on "Sara mjesto za tebe" website. When entering the phone number on Viber, it is registered under the name "Sara mjesto za tebe".

After sending an inquiry to this website, they replied that "Glas za život" is an association, while "Sara mjesto za tebe" is one of the association's projects through which they communicate.

How they communicate?

“Glas za život” organization from Sarajevo presents itself on the website, Facebook and Instagram profile as an organization that promotes the value of every life, from conception to natural death. Their primary communication is through support and counseling for those who find themselves in a situation of unwanted pregnancy and need to make a decision.

More than 700 people follow them on Instagram, while they are more active on Facebook and are followed by more than 7,500 people.

They promote the campaign “Walk with us” on their networks, in which they present a badge in the shape of a baby’s foot in the size that a fetus has during the period of 70 days of pregnancy.

„By wearing our badge you will express your support and be the voice for life! The voice of the small and weak, the voice of the unborn”, they stated on the website.

They have a telephone number listed on their profiles for information or counseling assistance, which is identical to the number available on the Sara mjesto za tebe website.

Upon contacting the organization at the number available on the website with the request for an interview, they refused a live interview and agreed to submit their answers via e-mail.

In their e-mail response, it is stated they are advocating for the possibility of a choice based on true information related to the beginning of life.

„We believe that every person’s life is valuable, from the moment of conception until natural death. Women need to be well informed in order to make the best possible decision. Most of our clients are women who have had one or more abortions, so we can say that we have equal treatment for women who decide to have an abortion and for those who carry the pregnancy to term”, stated their response.

The services they provide are described as constructive conversations with clients in person or online, which are reflected in the provision of assistance, referral to institutions responsible for solving social-status issues, psychological counseling, and education in the direction of women’s reproductive health.

„We encourage every woman to make her own decision because she will have to live with the consequences of same”, responded from this organization.

When asked about financing, they answered they did not receive funds from the B&H budget, and that they are financed exclusively from donations.

Who are the members of this initiative?

On Heartbeat International's Pregnancy News website, Jacque Baumgardner is listed as a representative of Glas za život, but she rarely appears publicly on behalf of the organization. On her YouTube channel or Facebook page Save One Europe posts, she stands out as a representative of the association.

In the interviews she posted online for herself and her family, she claims they are on a missionary journey in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the family of another pro-life organization in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Anja Miroslavljev Bogdanić is the president of "Glas za život" association in Sarajevo.

The most publicly available information about her can be found in the news from the pro-life organizations conferences. For several years, she has been a participant in conferences organized by Heartbeat International.

In July 2023, internet portal of this organization, Pregnancy Help, reported from the annual conference of Balkan "Pro-life" networks in Slovenia dedicated to the work and education of Heartbeat branches in the Balkans. In the podcast report from the earlier conference, it is stated that Heartbeat's international program expert Ellen Foell spoke with Anja Miroslavljev Bogdanić from B&H Glas za život about the ways in which this organization comes to information and women who are facing unwanted pregnancies. It is mentioned in the report that abortion is easily available and free of charge in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and is often used as a form of contraception.

In May 2023, Anja Miroslavljev Bogdanić also participated in the annual Heartbeat conference in Birmingham, the largest city in the US state of Alabama, which is considered to be mostly republican, i.e. conservative. In the last presidential election (2016), republican presidential candidate Donald Trump won more than 62 percent of the vote in Alabama. This is one of the US states where abortion is legally banned.

In the press release from this conference, it was stated that Miroslavljev Bogdanić also addressed the audience in regards to experiences in work in Bosnia and Herzegovina. „Women are much more responsive to online approach. In the past few years we have saved many babies, thank God”, she said at the conference.

According to the Pregnancy Help portal photos, she addressed the conference participants via video link in 2021 as well.

Four years ago, Glas za život in cooperation with Centre for Education and Culture Čapljina, organized the lecture "Sanctuary of Human Life" on unplanned pregnancy and recommendations that don't refer to abortion. Aljoša Bogdanić, Anja Bogdanić, Kat Moy, Husein Čosibegović, Jeffrey Jones and Lauren Jones spoke at this lecture.

Save One organization is also a member of Heartbeat's pro-life network. As stated on their website, this organization has branches in 32 American states, but also reaches to each of the 45 nations of Europe, where they have established the Save One Europe branch.

This organization states they have leaders in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, Croatia, Romania, Macedonia, Switzerland, Serbia, Slovenia and Hungary, while the leaders in Bulgaria, Netherlands, Ireland and Malta have taken steps to introduce the program in their respective countries. Anja Miroslavljević Bogdanić was introduced as the leader for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

How are they financed?

In a podcast for the Heartbeat organization portal - Pregnancy Help News - Miroslavljević Bogdanić stated this organization financed Glas za život.

She thanked Heartbeat International for their help.

„You helped us in so many ways, through prayers, financial support and encouragement. It means a lot to us”, she said in a podcast posted in July 2023.

There is no information on Glas za život in the publicly available FB&H Financial-Intelligence Agency database containing reviews of financial reports of associations and foundations in FB&H.

The FB&H Government, as well as 11 of the 16 ministries in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, did not finance this association from the budget, nor cooperated with it. The city of Sarajevo also had no cooperation with this association, nor supported it financially.

2.3. SARA MJESTO ZA TEBE / SARA PLACE FOR YOU/ Sarajevo [Initiative/Project]

According to their description, the Sarajevo-based and online counseling center “Sara mjesto za tebe” is a counseling center for girls, women and their partners who face the challenges of unplanned pregnancies.

Their communication on the website and networks presents this counseling center as a team there to provide advice, support and information in order to make the best decision for the future.

There is no information about the responsible persons on their Facebook and website, but there is a phone number available that women or couples can call if they need help. Their services are free and it is emphasized they care about privacy and protection of personal data.

On their pages, they directly address pregnant women who are thinking about abortion or were surprised by the information and knowledge about pregnancy and are considering their options.

„ You have many questions and emotions that are difficult to deal with. This is completely normal. You are not alone. Get informed before doing anything. Everything is easier when you have the right information and support“, says on their website.

For communication, it is possible to contact them on Viber and WhatsApp, or via their Facebook or Instagram pages.

In the abortion section of their website, options for performing an abortion are listed in accordance with the legal norms until when it is legal to perform an abortion at the request of a pregnant woman. They present four types of abortions, namely medication, manual vacuum aspiration, dilation and curettage, and abortion in the second and third trimester, with a few sentences describing each of the procedures. Through the “Advice and Help” section, this website offers several examples of unwanted pregnancies in situations where women may find themselves as students, when their partner does not want a child, or when it was not planned.

For each of the situations, they offer five ideas for thinking, which boil down to questioning the decision and rejecting thoughts about abortion, such as the right time for abortion; the responsibility and role of motherhood, created by the progress of pregnancy, and not by the woman’s realization that she is pregnant; putting plans on paper and imagining growing up with the baby; imagining yourself in the future and the decision you would be proud of, and your partner’s attitude towards abortion.

They dedicate a special section on the website to women who are pregnant again after a recent childbirth or abortion, in which they encourage, provide advice and recommendations to contact them for more information and help.

On the website, there is also a test when deciding on abortion in cases of unwanted pregnancies, containing about 15 questions, from informative questions about the knowledge of pregnancy, feelings that prevail after finding out, data with whom the information is shared, to planning or organizing the day during early pregnancy, but also questions about key values. After completing the test, pregnant women leave their contact information where they will receive the test results or be contacted by their employee for advice.

More than 900 people follow them on Facebook, where posts on unwanted pregnancy information, verification methods or other advice are shared several times a month, without much support or comments, while there is no public sharing of posts.

The organization that registered it is now not publicly available via search on this website, but in 2022, when the fact-checking platform “Raskrinkavanje” did their analysis, the organization listed was Voice for life.

According to their data, this website was registered in July 2021.

Voice for life is New Zealand’s oldest and largest pro-life organization with a national leadership team and regional groups across the country. This organization has been dedicated to advocating the abortion ban for more than 50 years.

How they communicate?

In addition to the website that serves to provide information about pregnancy, abortion and consequences, “Sara mjesto za tebe” also has Facebook and Instagram pages, which do not have many followers, but they regularly publish content on protection and the importance of preserving life, and also promote their counseling services.

A total of 933 people follow them on Facebook, while they have slightly more than 400 followers on Instagram.

They have a telephone number listed on their pages for the purposes of information or counseling assistance, which is identical to the number available on the Glas za život website.

Who are the members of this organization?

There is no information available on the Internet about the persons behind this website, nor the persons responsible for the counseling.

How are they financed?

The FB&H Government, as well as 11 of the 16 ministries in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, did not finance this website from the budget, nor cooperated with it. The city of Sarajevo also had no cooperation with this website, nor supported it financially.

2.4. CENTAR ZA ŽIVOT SVJETIONIK / PRO-LIFE CENTER LIGHTHOUSE/ Sarajevo [Organization]

“Centar za život Svjetionik” is one of the oldest organizations for counseling pregnant women that opposes abortion. Pro-life center for unplanned pregnancy and a counseling center for women were opened in Bosnia and Herzegovina by Bob and Eileen Pressler in 2001. According to data available on their website, they came as catholic missionaries from the USA to live in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1998. On their official website, they boasted about saving 15 babies from abortion during 17 years of work.

They held workshops on abortion and its consequences in the Sarajevo settlement of Dobrinja and in Visoko.

This organization promotes its materials and publications such as “Abortion Legalized Massacre” by Branko Erceg, the organization’s representative for Republika Srpska, as stated in their 2018 publication.

Their goal and vision is to educate people and establish awareness of the importance of every life from conception to natural death.

In addition to education and workshops held in Bosnia and Herzegovina to raise awareness and knowledge on abortion and its consequences, this center also works on encouraging childbirth due to the demographic situation, but also on social welfare and care for the family.

From their work portfolio, they present a number of offers to users, from pregnancy testing, confidential counseling and information about abortion, to help with post-abortion recovery and counseling about sexual health and diseases.

This association organizes a series of free workshops for pregnant women on the importance of pregnancy, information on the health of the mother and baby, up to preparations and advice for childbirth. In 2024, a total of six workshops were held from May to June in the association's premises.

In the "Pro-life network" section of their website, information is available on international organizations they cooperate with, such as Life International, Heartbeat, Pregnancy Help, Save One.

According to The Bridge International blog, "Svjetionik" participated in the organization of the first Balkan pro-life conference in Sarajevo during June 2022.

The blog states that directors and staff of pro-life and pregnancy centers from North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia and Croatia participated in a three-day training, prayer and encouragement. The work of "Svjetionik" was also presented.

According to published photos, the director of Heartbeat International, Jor-El Godsey, also attended the conference.

In addition to New York, the California State Attorney General also sued Heartbeat and one more organization in 2023 for spreading misleading content on APR, a treatment to reverse the effects of the abortion pill. Attorney General Rob Bonta explained to the media that Heartbeat advertised the treatment as a safe and effective way to reverse a medical abortion even though there is still insufficient scientific evidence and a high risk for patients who choose to have it.

„Those struggling with the complex decision to have an abortion deserve support and reliable help, not lies and deception”, said Bonta.

„Heartbeat International and RealOptions took advantage of pregnant patients at a deeply vulnerable time in their lives by using false and misleading claims to deceive them about the potential risks of the treatment”, added the Attorney General.

This case is pending before the court at the time of writing this publication.

How they communicate?

“Centar za život Svjetionik” has a comprehensive website with available data on the activities, content and confessions of other organizations and individuals, with goals, as well as invitations to participation and cooperation.

Their Facebook page was previously followed by more than 3,000 people. In the meantime, they created a new one, while they also have about 170 followers on Instagram. Their posts include emotional messages and address the mother directly, sometimes from the role of an unborn baby. The posts on these pages often contain advice during pregnancy or unplanned pregnancy.

The founder of “Svjetionik”, Eileen Pressler, who according to the posts of pro-life organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina has passed away, explained in her author’s text in 2014 what the organization stands for.

At that time, she claimed there was no “center for the fight against abortion” in Bosnia and Herzegovina before, and that in 2014 there were already eight of them.

„When my husband and I moved to Sarajevo in November 1999, we learned about generations of repeated abortions within many families and also about a large percentage of abortions during the war”, Pressler described and added that “Svjetionik” was founded because there were no centers for promotion and defense of life in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the neighboring countries.

In her text, she makes a series of claims that in countries where abortion is legalized, there is an increase in the rate of crime and violence against women, without citing the source of such claims.

She further elaborates that most relationships between men and women end shortly after abortion, and that studies around the world show an increase in breast cancer, premature births resulting in cerebral palsy, and even an increase in child abuse from “emotionally damaged parents who suffer the effects of abortion within the family.”

According to her explanation, “Svjetionik” also organizes seminars “on sexual abstinence before marriage and facts related to development of the human fetus and the negative effects of abortion” and publishes “brochures on the subject of abstinence, return to a morally clean life following a negative test for pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases”.

Who are the members of this association?

The director and representative for Sarajevo Canton is Sara Jurjević, a social worker. The representative for Zenica-Doboj Canton is Dejana Fejzanović, while the representative for Republika Srpska is Branko Erceg.

As stated in their 2018 publication, the administrative manager of this center is Robert Jurjević, while the administrative advisor is Robert Pressler.

How are they financed?

There is no information on “Centar za život Svjetionik” in the publicly available FB&H Financial-Intelligence Agency database containing reviews of financial reports of associations and foundations in FB&H.

Although they promised to submit responses to our inquiries in writing, they never did.

2.5. INICIJATIVA ZA ŽIVOT / PRO-LIFE INITIATIVE/ West Herzegovina Canton [Initiative]

In 2016, Cantonal representative from the Croatian Union HKDU-HRAST Deni Ćorić and a representative from HSP dr. Ante Starčević Marija Češkić drafted a law on protection of life from conception to natural death, in order to propose it at the session of the West Herzegovina Canton assembly. That law was supposed to strictly prohibit trade in fetuses, production of hybrid beings, euthanasia and abortion itself.

Ćorić then told the media that the law was written in cooperation with the «Pro-life» Civic Initiative in order to regulate the issue of banning abortion and prevent the application of the still valid Law on Abortion from the former Yugoslavia.

„This law allows the killing of unborn children up to ten weeks old, and even more if approved by a medical board. As representatives with the Christian worldview, we believe that such law is religiously, morally and humanely unacceptable“, he said back then.

Since the law did not reach the agenda of the assembly, a petition was launched six months later to call for a referendum, but without the desired results.

The Croatian Union HKDU-HRAST has existed as a political party for ten years. The program principles for fulfilling the goals of the Croatian Union HKDU-HRAST, stated on their official Facebook page, concern the creation of space based on peace and progress, protection of citizens, protection of dignity of the Homeland War and the Croatian Defense Council, but also direct opposition to abortion.

They state that the right to life is a fundamental human right determined by the UN Charter, and that for them the dignity and sanctity of life from conception to death is a determination that belongs to man and God.

„The Croatian Union HKDU-HRAST is most resolutely opposed to euthanasia, abortions and all other forms of endangerment and violent taking of life. The Croatian Union HKDU-HRAST wants to promote the culture and practice of life, not the culture of death, or material and spiritual destruction“, is stated on their website.

According to the B&H Central Election Commission financial report, this party did not generate any income in 2023, while in the election year 2022 they received 5,662 BAM from budget funds, which was their total income for that year.

The HKDU-HRAST representative club did not respond to a request for an interview.

According to the statute and program published on their official website, Croatian Party of Rights dr. Ante Starčević is a party of the Croatian people and all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, registered in 2009.

The party, as they state, strongly advocates for a European-organized Bosnia and Herzegovina in which the Croatian people, together with the other two constituent nations, will ensure their sovereignty and equality throughout the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and for complete constitutional reform and adoption of a new Constitution within the institutions and under constant public scrutiny.

„From the very beginning, Croatian Party of Rights emphasizes the right of the Croatian people to their own independent state in which they will achieve their full political and economic well-being”, is stated in the party program.

They announce to advocate for a social and just state, but also for the protection of the unborn: „Croatian Party of Rights dr. Ante Starčević maintains that the right to life is a basic and inalienable right of every human being. The right to life also means the right to life of an unborn child. Accordingly, Croatian Party of Rights dr. Ante Starčević stands for the protection of life from conception to natural death.“

According to the annual financial report this party submits to the Central Election Commission, total income amounted to 33,276 BAM in 2023, of which they received 30,276 BAM from the budget. A year before, total amount of their income was about ten thousand less, with 12,750 BAM coming from the budget.

Marija Češkić, graduate in law and former representative in the West Herzegovina Canton Assembly in the 2014–2018 mandate, and the president of the Committee for Justice, Administration, Human Rights, Freedoms and Gender Equality at the same Assembly, as well as a member of the Croatian National Assembly Presidency, refused the request for an interview with an explanation that she is no longer politically active.

2.6. ADMIR ČAVKA [Individual]

Admir Čavka is a member of the Union for a Better Future (UBF) Presidency and a former member of the Republika Srpska National Assembly.

In August 2019, on his Facebook profile he posted a photo of the billboard poster “Don’t give me away mother”, which is part of the Save the Unborn campaign. In the post description, he wrote that “abortion” should be banned by law, while the perpetrators should be severely punished and legal murders of innocent children should be resolved.

In the comments of this post, he encountered criticism from citizens, as well as journalists and representatives of civil society.

The “Save the Unborn” campaign and said posters were initiated by the “Mlado Sunce” association from Široki Brijeg. At the end of 2017, this association also organized a prayer in front of the University Clinical Hospital in Mostar for the protection of life.

The author of this publication was unable to contact Admir Čavka.

2.7. NINO RASPUDIĆ [Individual]

Nino Raspudić is a politician from Mostar who worked as a professor at the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb and Mostar. He wrote for Zagreb’s Večernji list and Banja Luka’s Nezavisne novine, and was one of the editors of the show Reflex on Sarajevo’s OBN television.

In 2020, he was elected as a member of the Croatian Parliament (Sabor) on the list of Most as an independent candidate, and voted against abortion.

Then, as a guest on the N1 television show, he talked about abortion.

„Abortion is murder, life should be defended. We need to be proactive, women need to be helped. Analyses show that economic reasons are common, the percentage of raped women who opt for abortion is small”, said Raspudic for N1 at the time.

This statement was strongly condemned by the civil and non-governmental sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. He later tried to explain he didn’t think abortion should be banned for raped women, as some media reported, but he maintained that every life should be saved.

Nino Raspudić did not respond to a request for an interview for the purposes of this publication.

Chapter

03



**Organizations
that oppose
abortion**

Several organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not explicitly advocate the ban of abortion in their activities, but through their statutes or public events they clearly express their opposition to abortion and the need to reduce their number.

Phrases used to describe abortion are intrauterine infanticide, child murder and intentional abortion, while instead of the term fetus or embryo they always use the word baby or child, which is a common way pro-life organizations that oppose abortion operate.

There are two organizations that indicate the harmfulness of intentional abortion through their statutes and proposed activities, offering legal solutions to reduce the number of abortions and preserve the family and family values.

One of the organization, primarily dedicated to children's rights, organized for students a screening of a film by a Russian director, which talks about the demographic decline of society as a result of abortion, asking young students to consider the moral issues of abortion.

3.1. FONDACIJA ZA PORODICU /PRO-FAMILY FOUNDATION/ Banja Luka [Organization]

According to its statute, the goals of Pro-Family Foundation are nurturing and promoting the values of the "natural family", representation of traditional family values, increase in the birth rate, decrease in the number of "intrauterine infanticide/abortions/miscarriages, establishment and construction of infrastructure to support families on a cultural, economic, educational, work and social level, humanitarian activities and monitoring developments in the field of bioethics".

Through its “Family Support” project, this organization signed agreements with tens of municipalities and cities in Republika Srpska to support the “Proud Cards” system, which are awarded to families with three or more children. With these cards, families have a discount on goods and services from businessmen and merchants who are friends of this project.

According to the statute, the activities they are working on concern, among other things, raising awareness and educating young people about the importance of family, family values, reproductive health, harmful effects of intentional miscarriage, i.e. abortion, early sexual relations, as well as proposing legal solutions to reduce the number of abortions.

According to the statute, the foundation is financed through voluntary contributions, gifts, bequests and by applying for projects with state authorities or foundations, as well as from other sources.

How they communicate?

The Foundation communicates through a website that is visually accessible and attractive, offering information about work, projects and goals of the foundation, as well as contact details.

This organization nurtures connections and support with a large number of local authorities. They signed cooperation agreements with a total of 32 cities and municipalities in Republika Srpska as part of the “Proud Cards” project intended for families with three or more children, in order to secure additional discounts for them. In addition to local authorities, they also partnered with RS Chamber of Commerce and Regional Chamber of Commerce of Banja Luka on this project.

This project also has its own “Pro-Family” app, where it is possible to check which employers, i.e. companies or stores, give discounts to families who have “proud cards”.

They are also active on Facebook, where more than 2,000 people follow them. Posts on this network are not frequent, and mostly refer to promotion of their activities and promotion of families with several children.

On Instagram, where they have a total of 120 posts that are similar to their Facebook posts, they have more than 600 followers.

Who are the members of this organization?

The founder and president of the foundation is Dragan Dakić, citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. Dakić is currently a professor at the Faculty of Law, University of Kragujevac. He previously taught as a professor at the Medical Faculty, University of Banja Luka, and the University of Business Engineering and Management.

As stated in his biography on the Foundation website, in 2017 he defended his doctoral dissertation at the Faculty of Law, University of Kragujevac, entitled “Challenges of European Regional Legislation in the Field of Life Protection”.

In an interview for this publication, he explained he is not in favor of banning abortion, because he believes it would not be possible due to the protection of human rights, nor would it prove effective in practice, as women could perform abortions in other cantons or states.

He explained they encourage family expansion through their work and don't carry out activities related to abortion.

„You don't even have to declare our stand on that topic because I wouldn't like to be classified either on the left or on the right. We simply stand there on some aspect where there must be freedom of choice, but we believe the freedom of choice should not be affected by anything and that there is nothing controversial in the creation of affirmative constitutions for a positive choice and we as an organization focus on reduction, but in the sense of eliminating the causes that lead to it”, said Dakić.

According to their statute, the foundation promotes the reduction in the numbers of “intrauterine abortions”. They are trying to achieve this by educating young people on the harmfulness of intentional abortion, and by proposing legal solutions that would reduce the number of abortions and “preserve families and family values”.

Dakić replied he would not support the initiative to ban abortion by law, stating it is pointless.

How are they financed?

In 2022, the Municipality of Ugljevik allocated 2,500 BAM from the budget for the work of this foundation through a grant to non-governmental organizations.

According to APIF data, this association was not financed from the budget or other funds in 2023. They had more than 38,000 BAM in donations, but APIF's report does not indicate more details on the type and sources of same.

Ministry of Family, Youth and Sports, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and the City of Banja Luka responded they did not provide financial support to the foundation over the past three years.

The founder of the Foundation, Dragan Dakić, previously signed a cooperation agreement with Ugljevik on the project of “Proud Cards” for families with three or more children in this municipality.

As reported by the media, Milorad Jovičić, chief of staff of mayor of Ugljevik, said during the cards awarding ceremony in 2022 that Ugljevik is recognized in the region for its family support.

“Our primary goal is to support the pro-natal policy,” said Jovičić at the time.

During the conversation, Dakić could not remember this donation. He explained he did not know the specific amounts of donations from the budget, but that he would provide the information by e-mail. He never did.

Ugljevik is a small municipality. According to the 2013 census, it has 15,710 inhabitants, of which 7,773 are women, while more than 5,000 of them are adults.

Current mayor of Ugljevik is Vasilije Perić, graduate in economics, member of the Serb Democratic Party, candidate for local elections in 2024 as well.

3.2. RODITELJI ZA PRAVA DJECE /PARENTS FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS/ Bijeljina [Organization]

The Bijeljina association "Parents for Children's Rights" maintains ties with similar organizations in other countries, of which at least one has pro-Russian views on gender issues. Thus, in February 2024, together with the organization "Savez za život" from Serbia, and with the support of the dean of the Faculty of Pedagogy, University of East Sarajevo, they organized a screening of the film for students called "The Right to Choose" by the Russian director Elena Piskareva.

After the film screening, professors Biljana Spasić and Radojko Ljubičić spoke at the event, while gynecologist Darko Marković was also a guest.

The association states the film is about a middle-aged surgeon Oleg Volkov, who is sent to a maternity ward where he tries to "change the consequences of abortion on society." The very title of the film speaks of the right to choose, but the film focuses on the demographic decline of society as a result of abortion.

„The association organized this event due to the importance of the topic, because according to demographic data, Republika Srpska is slowly disappearing“, the association stated at the time.

Their goal was to appeal to institutions to support young people in preserving their families.

„Without a responsible pro-natal policy, there will be no Republika Srpska in the future“, was emphasized by the association members, adding they intend to focus their future work on launching an initiative for family protection in Republika Srpska.

They also announced the creation of a national strategy for family preservation.

This association was registered after there was already a group with the same name on Facebook.

As they say, they originated as an expression of concern over the violation of children's basic rights during the pandemic, namely the right to life, health and education. They were actually against protective measures like face masks, disinfection, physical distancing, online classes and all other measures that were in place at the time.

„Very harmful and dangerous patterns of behavior were imposed on children in schools, which endangered the physical and psychological health of children in many ways,

namely: obligation to wear masks that denied their right to oxygen, daily and multiple exposure to disinfectants of unknown composition, which were applied directly to the skin and used to disinfect the premises and school furniture, so the children constantly inhaled harmful and dangerous vapors and liquids“, was said, among other things, by the association.

Through its work and written letters to Republika Srpska institutions, this association expressed its concerns on the Republika Srpska draft law on Protection against Domestic Violence and Violence against Women, because they believe this Draft offers protection to all those who identify as women.

“Parents for Children’s Rights” association is one of the signatories of the open letter against the aforementioned Draft Law, due to opposition to the introduction of gender categories in the text of the law. More than 20 associations signed this open letter demanding the withdrawal of the law.

„We are strongly against giving special rights to members of the LGBT community and providing opportunities to propagate LGBT and gender ideology to children in schools, which is the goal of non-governmental organizations and amendments in our laws in a negative sense“, stated the association.

In addition to opposing protective measures during the coronavirus pandemic, this association also opposes HPV vaccines for children through its activities, which is recommended by the latest amendments to the Law on the Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases in Republika Srpska.

Following their open letter and pressure on the authorities, the law was withdrawn.

According to their statute, this association provides equal conditions to everyone, without direct or indirect discrimination based on sex, race, sexual orientation, physical disability, marital status, skin color, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, connection with a national community, property, status acquired by birth, age or any other status, position or circumstance.

They undertake not to endanger the environment and basic human rights as defined by international conventions with their actions.

However, this association seeks to take away the rights of the LGBTIQ+ community through its work and deny them legal protection through a campaign to reject the draft law on Protection against Domestic Violence and Violence against Women in Republika Srpska.

They also oppose and try to limit women’s rights guaranteed by international conventions, such as the right to free choice.

How they communicate?

“Parents for Children’s Rights” association mostly communicates via Facebook. Before the association was registered, there was a group on Facebook with the same name. Unlike other organizations or foundations, this association communicates in a Facebook group and not on a public page. The group has close to 2,500 members, and the posts are mainly on the conditions and needs of children during schooling.

During the coronavirus pandemic, this group abounded with false or misleading content on protective measures, vaccines, and the consequences of the coronavirus. They argued for the abolition of all protective measures for children, as they believed this is how children are alienated and their health is affected.

In addition, they are also active on Instagram, where they only have 30 followers, and where they mostly post invitations or announcements about events or activities.

Their communication was not overly direct and public before, as they mostly used a closed Facebook group that was open to all users during the work on the publication. It is possible to access the Viber group from their website, where they publish content that is usually not available in the Facebook group.

There are currently close to 500 people in this Viber group, and information is being published on the lithium mine and its consequences where they are trying to create resistance, about the situation of children and their needs, and how public health is to blame for mortality in the coronavirus pandemic, and not the virus itself. This is where the members and sympathizers of this organization are most active, where they exchange tens of posts daily, mainly conspiracy theories on medical treatments, vaccines, invisible networks or similar conspiracies popular especially since the coronavirus pandemic.

Through these groups, members rarely communicate directly about abortion or a woman’s right to that choice, i.e. about propagating to ban it. However, that kind of advocacy is visible in one of the posts made by the most prominent member of the group.

One of the members of this association spoke on television against the law in Republika Srpska that would criminalize femicide. She stated it is more important to talk about the murders of children than the murders of women, claiming that in comparison of men and women, the number of murdered men is greater.

„Darko Marković, a gynecologist from Bijeljina, said the situation in Republika Srpska is identical to that in Serbia, while the number of abortions is assumed to be ten times higher than the officially reported 1,300. It means we have 13,000 abortions a year. If we don’t have responsible policies, there will be no Republika Srpska”, said Nada Vranes Ponjević on television, recalling the organization of the screening of the Russian director’s film.

She pointed out that the focus should be shifted from violence against women to abortions because “every victim is precious.”

„Let's talk about how to prevent these abortions. Biljana Spasić from the “Savez za život” organization said one fact that still rings in my ears today. It is assumed that three countries of Serbia disappeared in that suffering of their own children”, she said during the television appearance.

Who are the members of this association?

Nada Vranes Ponjević is the most active member of the “Parents for Children's Rights” group. She often speaks to the media on behalf of the organization about the conditions children have in schools, opposition to mandatory vaccines and protective measures during the coronavirus pandemic, and abortion.

Ponjević also shares anti-abortion content on her private but open Facebook profile, and texts marked as misinformation based on unscientific attitudes. On April 16, 2024, she posted a text from the portal “Ultrasound - Impact on the Health of an Unborn Baby”, which makes a number of unverified claims that ultrasound is harmful and should not be used during pregnancy.

The text states that ultrasound is used in pregnant women when determining the sex of the child or age of the fetus, confirming multiple pregnancy, and determining the position of the fetus in the uterus.

„Despite this, ultrasound is still being used for these purposes, although, apart from determining the sex of the child, all other information can be obtained through a routine examination by an experienced gynecologist and with the help of a fetoscope or a stethoscope that can detect heartbeats. Given that some animals, such as dolphins and whales, use ultrasound as a weapon to stun fish, it is truly unbelievable how recklessly we use it for diagnostics“, it is stated in the text.

This position is contrary to the consensus among doctors where ultrasound is considered to be a safe way of examination that does not cause harm.

Nada Vranes Ponjević's posts on Facebook are often labeled as misinformation by Meta, owner of Facebook. In this way, other users are warned about incorrect information.

Ponjević refused the request for an interview, stating she is not in favor of banning abortion, but for “information about the possible harmful consequences for the psycho-physical health of women”.

Jelena Lalić is employed at the Faculty of Pedagogy in East Sarajevo. She is the administrator and founder of the “Parents for Children's Rights” Facebook group. She created this group after Facebook introduced bans on the posts of certain content and other restrictions in the “Let's Get Children Back to School” group. During the coronavirus pandemic, members of that group posted content suggesting that the pandemic does not necessarily bring the consequences as presented by health organizations and institutions, and that protective measures are unnecessary for the children.

The post aimed at promotion of the new group states the goal remains the same regardless of the change of group and calls for inclusion.

After creating a new group and establishing “Parents for Children’s Rights” association in Bijeljina, Jelena Lalić called for a public discussion on “Health, Psychological and Legal Aspects of Anti-Pandemic Measures”.

The author of this publication could not get a comment from Jelena Lalić.

Jelena Sarafijan is a lawyer and chairwoman of the Founding Assembly of “Parents for Children’s Rights” Citizens’ Association. In 2015, she graduated from the Faculty of Law in East Sarajevo.

When asked for an interview, she responded that “Parents for Children’s Rights” Citizens’ Association does not advocate a ban on abortion, but “education of young people and other persons about the consequences of such an act on mental, reproductive and overall health”.

In her response, Sarafijan stated that no information can be found anywhere on their website indicating they support the ban on abortion, but refused to do the interview as the topic requires a “complex approach, not dividing into those who are for and against”.

How are they financed?

According to APIF data, this association was not financed from the budget or other funds in 2023. They had 22,000 BAM in donations, but the report does not contain more precise information about the type of donations or sources of same.

The City of Bijeljina responded to the request for access to information stating the association’s project “Zajedno za život” was co-financed from the budget with 1,000 BAM in 2024.

There is no information on “Zajedno za život” project on the association’s website.

Ministry of Family, Youth and Sports, RS Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and the City of Banja Luka confirmed they did not provide any financial support to the association over the past three years.

3.3. FONDACIJA ZA ŽIVOT /PRO-LIFE FOUNDATION/ Banja Luka [Organization]

Foundation “Za život”, established in Banja Luka in 2018, is an initiative of a citizens’ group for the “preservation of life, natural family and family values”.

They decided to take action and contribute to the protection of life and traditional family values due to changes in modern society and because of families that go through structural and functional changes due to scientific and technological development.

„Noticing that alienation, egocentrism and aggressiveness is becoming an increasingly dominant attitude towards others on all levels, and often towards the closest ones (unfortunately towards the unborn children in the mother’s uterus as well), we decided to initiate adequate actions and contribute to the protection of life and traditional family values”, they state on their official website.

According to their statute, their goals are to emphasize the value of the “natural family”, protection of traditional family values, increase in the birth rate, decrease in the number of intrauterine abortions, establishment and construction of a self-sustaining home for mothers and an orphanage for children, humanitarian activities, monitoring the development of bioethics, protection of rights of pregnant women and single mothers.

According to the statute, this organization carries out activities to raise awareness and educate, especially young people, about the importance of family and family values, reproductive health, harmfulness of intentional abortion, early sexual relations, and works on proposing legal solutions to reduce the number of abortions and preserve the family and family values.

In 2019, this Foundation held three lectures. In May 2019, Serbian Orthodox parish Mrkonjić Grad and “Za život” Foundation organized a lecture called “Crisis of the Contemporary Family”, in order to promote free support that the Foundation provides to families in Republika Srpska through counseling by psychologists, gynecologists, priests and lawyers.

In July 2021, a text about today’s problem in which girls go for abortions several times was reposted on the Foundation’s website. In that text, Vladimir Perendija, specialist in gynecology and obstetrics at Republika Srpska University Clinical Center, explains that complications of abortion, such as bleeding, damage to the uterus, intestines and other organs, as well as infections, can lead to death.

„Abortions are a significant factor in sterility. Some of the complications that can occur are the formation of adhesions in the uterus that can develop sterility, which in most of the cases cannot be cured“, he said in the text.

Groups and individuals who oppose the right to abortion often argue that abortion causes harm due to scarring of the uterus and damage to the cervix, that it brings the risk of getting breast cancer, contributes to sterility and increases the risk of depression, anxiety or other forms of post-traumatic illness.

There is no evidence accepted by the wider medical community that would indicate a connection between abortion and disease, while the research has found no connection between abortion and an increased risk of breast cancer or infertility.

The Healthline portal states in the text that experts mostly agree abortion does not cause breast cancer, nor does it increase the risk of its occurrence.

Gynecologist Ives Šindrak explains that the correlation between abortion and damage to the uterus, breast cancer and mental illnesses is no greater than interventions such as tooth extraction where infection or bleeding can occur.

The pro-choice organization Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, as an organization that advocates the possibility of choice, published a set of facts that abortion does not have permanent health consequences as claimed by groups that advocate its ban.

“Za život” foundation is followed by slightly less than 1,000 people on Facebook.

The foundation did not respond to an e-mail request for an interview.

Who are the members of this organization?

The founder and president of the Foundation is Boris Tubić, while the psychologist at the counseling center is Gordana Unčanin.

They did not respond to a request for an interview submitted through the organization’s contacts.

In June 2021, Nebojša Stupar launched an initiative on behalf of the Foundation to create and place a bust of Jelena Trikić, better known as Mother Courage, in front of the Banja Luka maternity ward.

There is a video on their YouTube channel called “For the Mother Courage Bust”, published three years ago, which illustrates the reading of a letter from her son, who she gave birth to despite recommendations to abort and seek medical treatment. In his letter, he tells her that he is an excellent student and a successful boy today, while the organization collects donations for the installation of the bust with this video.

Jelena Trikić died in 2012 as a result of a brain tumor, after she refused the recommended abortion and further treatment in order to give birth to the baby at the beginning of her pregnancy.

According to the media, her son is 12 years old today and lives in Prijedor with his father.

The foundation invited all those interested to help financially in setting up the bust to make a payment to the foundation’s bank account.

How they communicate?

“Za život” foundation communicates mainly on its Facebook page with posts about activities or promotion of its content. They promote exclusively traditional values aimed at preservation of life, natural family and family values.

Nearly 1,000 people follow them on Facebook, while they have 200 followers on their YouTube channel and only 15 uploaded videos. They post Russian commercials with translation on their channel, promoting the mission of preserving pregnancy and every unborn child.

Their motto is “I am a life, and not a choice”, in which way they promote the idea that maintaining a pregnancy should not be a decision and that every conception should result in a childbirth.

How are they financed?

According to APIF data, this association was not financed from the budget or other funds in 2023. They had more than 1,000 BAM in donations, but the report does not contain more precise information on the type of donations or the sources of same.

When asked if they funded the organization, Ministry of Family, Youth and Sports, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and the City of Banja Luka responded they did not provide any financial support to the foundation over the past three years.

Chapter

04

Regional organizations

Anti-gender movements that advocate banning abortion or oppose its performance in neighboring countries are influencing and spreading in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Croatia has dozens of organizations and initiatives that fight against abortion. In 2023, an initiative in which men kneel in squares across Croatia and pray, among other things, to ban abortion, became particularly viral.

Some more formal initiatives try to directly influence attitudes in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

4.1. STRANICA „PRAVO NA ŽIVOT” / “RIGHT TO LIFE” WEBSITE /

The “Right to Life” website wants to ban abortion and promotes the idea of protecting human life from conception.

They have more than 100,000 followers on Facebook, and in a prominent post they invite women who got pregnant but did not plan for it and do not know how to deal with it to contact them for help.

„Every life is valuable and precious! We should do everything to successfully bring the unborn child into the world, and then to take good care of him following the childbirth“, is stated in their announcement with a note that discretion is guaranteed.

The website was created in January 2022 and no information is available on the organization that launched it.

This website supports the “40 days for life” initiative in Croatia, which was transferred to Bosnia and Herzegovina by “Mlado Sunce” association from Široki Brijeg.

4.2. ŽENA VRSNA /WOMAN OF VIRTUE/

The online portal “Žena Vrsna” from Croatia presents itself as a new and first Croatian portal for Catholic women originated from desire to “discover the biblical face of women”.

The portal was launched to encourage female readers to excel in preserving marriage, raising children, careful home decoration, but also choosing clothes that, as they say, testify to God's harmony.

„The direction of the “Žena vrsna” portal will primarily be of a maternal and family character with an emphasis on the dignity and sublimity of the female vocation”, states the portal description.

Through texts and posts on the website, this portal strongly opposes abortion, conveying the confessions of families who decided to have an abortion and those who have given birth to a child and rejected the idea of abortion, but also referring to emotional texts about God's laws and views on abortion.

In one of the texts, they encourage families to talk to their children about abortion at an early age and suggest showing them photos of fetuses in the uterus so that children can create the image that this is a human life.

„You can take your children with you to organized prayer meetings in front of abortion clinics or to the Walk for Life. You can also encourage the children to set aside a portion of their pocket money for Catholic organizations that help pregnant women in need”, says one of the texts.

This page has more than 36,000 followers on Facebook, a significant part of which is from the region, i.e. Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to data from ahrefs.com website, 79 percent of followers are from Croatia, while 13 percent are from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In 2021, through their portal and social networks, they called for participation in the international conference “Life, therefore, choose!” of the “Croatia for Life” association, in order to initiate discussion and activities to solve the problem of abortion in the country and the region.

This conference is being held in Croatia this year as well.

Chapter

05

**Attitudes of
healthcare
facilities and
institutions**

Almost half of the cantons in FB&H responded to inquiries about the possibilities of abortion on demand and its application in practice. These responses show differences in attitude towards the possibility of abortion. While most cantons responded without additional comments, in Livno they made an effort to highlight private views in their official response.

We asked all ministries for information on whether the possibility of abortion is specifically regulated by law in their canton; which public and private healthcare facilities perform abortions on demand; are there any health guidelines they use.

5.1. Canton 10

The Ministry of Labour, Health, Social Welfare and Deportees submitted information that abortions are not performed in this canton, i.e. intentional terminations of the “life of an unborn child”.

„In Livno Canton, this matter is not stipulated by regulations, and we believe that the issue of abortion should be resolved in such a way that abortion gets completely banned in Bosnia and Herzegovina“, they stated in their response.

„Healthcare facilities that perform abortions lose their purpose of caring for the life of every human being from conception to natural death. Namely, life begins with conception, it is taught at school, at colleges and it is an indisputable fact, regardless of whether one wants to negotiate the time of the beginning of life“, opines the Ministry of Labour, Health, Social Welfare and Deportees, where they do not see abortion as a medical issue.

„Abortion is not a medical but a moral (spiritual, metaphysical) issue because it is a diabolical act and should be resolved, that is, abortion should be banned forever“, they emphasized in their response.

According to the 2013 census, 41,784 women live in this canton, more than half of them are adults.

5.2. Central Bosnia Canton

The Central Bosnia Canton Institute for Public Health provided information that abortions are performed in this canton in accordance with the adopted Law on Conditions and Procedures for Pregnancy Termination, which has been in use since 1977.

In this canton, apart from medically indicated abortions, abortions on demand are performed solely in Travnik Hospital, while Fra Mato Nikolić Nova Bila Hospital and Jajce Hospital perform only medically indicated abortions.

The Institute did not have information about private healthcare facilities, stating that according to data they have, they either do not perform abortions on demand or do not provide information of same.

According to the 2013 census, a total of 254,686 people live in Central Bosnia Canton, of which 127,420 are women.

5.3. Zenica-Doboj Canton

The Zenica-Doboj Canton Ministry of Health provided information that the Law on Health Care defines the rights and obligations of persons in exercising the right to health care, while the Law on Conditions and Procedures for Pregnancy Termination regulates the issue of abortion and their healthcare facilities comply with the legal provisions.

Pregnancy termination services, whether medically indicated or abortion on demand of the pregnant woman, are performed by two facilities in this canton - Zenica Cantonal Hospital and Tešanj General Hospital – while the private Polyclinic “Sunce” provides only medically indicated abortion services.

The Ministry emphasizes that Zenica Cantonal Hospital has clearly adopted procedures for performing pregnancy terminations, which prescribe the method of performing abortions and abortions in minors, and that the procedures were made in accordance with the quality standards for hospitals of the Agency for Accreditation and Healthcare Quality in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

According to the 2013 census, a total of 364,433 people live in Zenica-Doboj Canton, of which 183,653 are women.

5.4. Republika Srpska

The Republika Srpska Ministry of Health and Social Welfare did not provide precise responses to the inquiry, but instead referred to the provisions of the Law on Conditions

and Procedures for Pregnancy Termination and the Rulebook on Conditions for the Healthcare Facility Start of Work, which they apply in conducting their business.

This law ensures the right of women to have an abortion on demand up to the tenth week of pregnancy if all the necessary medical conditions are met, as well as a medically indicated abortion in later stages of pregnancy.

According to the 2013 census, a total of 1,228,423 people live in Republika Srpska, of which 625,396 are women.

5.5. Tuzla Canton

The Tuzla Canton Ministry of Health submitted information that healthcare facilities in this Canton apply the provisions of the Law on Conditions and Procedures for Pregnancy Termination, while the abortion procedure is performed by all private and public healthcare facilities that are registered to perform gynecology health services.

According to the 2013 census, 445,028 people live in this canton, of which 227,640 are women.

Chapter

06



Conclusions and recommendations

Every woman in Bosnia and Herzegovina should have the rights guaranteed by the law, regardless of which part of the country she lives in and in what kind of narrative, religious or political environment she grew up in.

Reproductive health must be available to every woman and under equal conditions, as well as the possibility of contraceptives if pregnancy is not an option for partners.

Željka Umičević opines that B&H society should discuss and demand better conditions and support system for childbirth, better conditions for married couples for whom it would be a stimulus for the decision to start a family, rather than going back decades and canceling the woman's right to decide for herself.

„Mere questioning and starting a discussion about the right to abortion is already an indication that society suffered a setback. If the secular state respects and promotes the views of the church, then society is well on its way to going back hundreds of years”, she says.

Using religious beliefs as grounds for passing laws leads to practices that are against secular values and are based on specific religious interpretations. According to Umičević, this has the consequence of limiting the right to choose, freedom of conscience and autonomy of women, creating social pressure to impose certain religious beliefs on women.

„With the support of the regime media in Republika Srpska, these [anti-abortion] organizations imposed an anti-gender narrative in a short period of time, using untruths and arbitrary interpretations of scientifically based facts. Also, their actions under the pretext of children and family protection is a suitable ground for winning over the public”, considers Umičević.

She says that the right to freedom of choice, childbirth and deciding on one's own body is one of the fundamental women's rights and that we cannot talk about freedom, democracy and equality if a woman is not the

owner of her body and if the laws are sought to be amended in order to deny her the already realized right. Umičević emphasizes that civil society organizations do not stand for abortion as stated by anti-gender movements, but rather defend women's right to choice and integrity.

Gynecologist Ives Šindrak says she is also not a supporter of abortion and is not happy when that option comes up, but that every woman consciously made that decision with serious consideration of her situation, possibilities, needs and desires, and that no one should deny her that right.

„The goal should be to raise awareness on the part of healthcare workers about the importance of contraception and the use of condoms, to prevent infections. Of course, if the doctor sees that there are more abortions, regardless of whether the woman asks for contraception or not, he should advise her about it. Doctor can tell her to get an IUD or pills, but what if she can't afford it”, says Šindrak.

Based on her many years of experience, she says that unwanted pregnancies also occur with the use of contraceptive methods, in marriages and in stable relationships, and that not every unwanted pregnancy occurred in the way advocated by anti-abortion groups who condemn those women who decide to terminate the pregnancy.

„I had patients who came with bad prenatal test results, with certain problems and who eventually decided to carry the pregnancy to term, despite knowing they were carrying a child with a genetic anomaly. That's OK, it's the fairest way to present the pros and cons to the patient, and she ultimately has the right to decide”, Šindrak further elaborates.

She says it is more important to point out the shortcomings in society and the importance of regular health examinations for women in order to prevent mortality due to breast and cervical cancer, than to try to take away rights guaranteed by law.

Pregnancy terminations existed and will always exist regardless of advocacy or legal regulation, reminds Selma Hadžihalilović, explaining that women have always found a way to terminate a pregnancy, but that the conditions were inhumane and very risky. Therefore, it is important that abortion is allowed, available and treated in hospital conditions.

„Pregnancy termination must remain and will remain a legally regulated medical intervention that is legal, accessible, safe and free. Learning on love, sex education, menstruation and other aspects of sexual reproductive health must be part of the general education of our children. Prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections must be part of our general education. Otherwise, young people will be informed on these topics from questionable sources, making wrong decisions for themselves”, says Hadžihalilović.

About Sarajevo Open Centre

Sarajevo Open Centre (SOC) works on promoting human rights, particularly the position and human rights of LGBTI people and women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, by interpreting, presenting and representing the authentic experiences of persons suffering from human rights violations and inequalities, and by advocating for legal, political, economic, social and cultural changes in all areas of life. We will mention only some of the achievements related to the equality of LGBTI people and women.

In addition to psychosocial and legal counselling, we continued running the only LGBTI medium in the country – www.lgbti.ba portal. We organised training for the police, prosecutor's offices and courts, with a focus on hate crime, hate speech and the application of anti-discrimination law; for medical professionals and health workers, with a focus on trans-specific and trans-inclusive gender reassignment; for LGBTIQ community. We have worked intensively on creating a local institutional support network for LGBTI people in Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zenica, Mostar, Prijedor, Bijeljina, improving sexual and reproductive health and rights, the rights of workers in relation to maternity/parental leave, introducing gender-sensitive language in parliaments and universities, adopting and implementing cantonal gender action plans, but also raising awareness of gender-based violence in B&H.

Over the past years, several of our legislative and policy initiatives have entered government or parliamentary procedure. We focused our advocacy activities on policies for equality of women and LGBTI people in B&H, reproductive rights of women and men, parenting in the context of reconciling private and business life, freedom of assembly of LGBTI people, improvement of the institutional framework for the protection from violence and discrimination, and we intend to continue working on issues concerning transgender persons, intersex persons, same-sex partnerships, their social inclusion, but also the position of LGBTI people in education, health, work and employment. We have carried out media campaigns that have reached over one million citizens of B&H, and we also organised LGBTI film festival Merlinka, which, in cooperation with Tuzla Open Centre, became the local festival Kvirhana in 2021.

For more information about our work, see www.soc.ba. This publication is part of the Human Rights edition, published by Sarajevo Open Centre.