

Polish Parliament Must Reject Regressive Proposals on Sexual and Reproductive Rights

14 April 2020

We are deeply concerned by relentless attempts to roll back sexual and reproductive rights in Poland. On 15 and 16 April Poland's Parliament will again debate two draft bills that would severely limit access to safe abortion care and would criminalize the provision of sexuality education. If enacted into law these bills would place women's and adolescents' health and well-being at risk and violate Poland's international human rights obligations.

We call on Members of Poland's Parliament to reject these regressive legislative proposals. Under international human rights law measures that undermine or restrict existing rights are not permitted and violate the obligations of states to ensure ever greater protection of human rights.

The first draft bill known as "Stop Abortion" seeks to further limit the already highly restricted access to abortion in Poland. Poland has one of Europe's most restrictive abortion laws. Abortion is only permitted to safeguard the life or health of women, in situations of severe or fatal foetal impairment or where the pregnancy results from rape or another criminal act. Even in those situations in which abortion is legal, multiple barriers combine to severely limit access to care in practice. As a result, most women in Poland who need abortion care travel to other jurisdictions to access safe and legal care or obtain abortion medication from medical professionals in other countries. Limitations on travel and transport imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic now compound the negative impacts of Poland's highly restrictive law and will increase the threats to women's health and well-being.

The second draft bill known as "Stop Pedophilia" seeks to introduce criminal penalties for providing any form of sexuality education and evidenced-based information on sexual and reproductive health and rights to adolescents. Poland already does not provide comprehensive sexuality education as required by international human rights and the bill will expose adolescents to risks to their health and make them vulnerable to exploitation.

In recent years there have been repeated attacks on reproductive rights in Poland and multiple attempts have been made to introduce total or near total bans on abortion. The government has in the past backed down from rolling back reproductive rights in the face of massive public protests, such as the Black Protests in 2016. However, in the context of restrictions on movement imposed to combat the COVID-19 pandemic such public protests against these bills cannot take place. We express our solidarity with Polish civil society during this difficult time.

Prohibiting access to safe, legal abortion care and criminalizing the provision of sexuality education violate a number of human rights enshrined in international law, including the rights to life, health, non-discrimination and equality, privacy, information, education, and freedom from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

Numerous international human rights mechanisms have repeatedly called on Poland to reform its abortion law to ensure access to safe and legal abortion and to remove all barriers to abortion care. They have also called on Poland to provide mandatory, age-appropriate, evidence-based and scientifically accurate comprehensive sexuality education across the education system.

Abortion Rights Campaign, Ireland
Abortion Support Network
AIDOS, Associazione italiana donne per lo sviluppo, Italy
AIED - Associazione Italiana per l'Educazione Demografica, Italy
Alliance for Choice, Northern Ireland
Amnesty International
an.schläge
Asia Safe Abortion Partnership
ASPEKT, Slovakia
Associação para o Planeamento da Família, Portugal
Association Défense de la Démocratie en Pologne
Association for Human Rights and Civic Participation PaRiter, Croatia
Association HERA XXI, Georgia
Association of Accredited Clinics for the IVE in Spain (ACAI)
Association of Women of Southern Europe (AFEM)
ASTRA Network
Balance Promoción para el Desarrollo y Juventud AC, Mexico
Catholics for Choice
Center for Civic Initiatives "Intelligence of Sumy Region", Ukraine
Center for Reproductive Rights
Center for Research on Environment, Health and Population Activities (CREHPA), Nepal
CESI - Center for Education, Counselling and Research, Croatia
Charitable Fund All-Ukrainian League Legalife
Coalition to Repeal the 8th Amendment, Ireland
Community Center New Generation, Ukraine
Concord Research Center for Integration of International Law in Israel
Corps écrits, Belgium
Creación Positiva, Spain
Democracy Development Center, Ukraine
Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)
Doctors for Choice Malta
Doctors for Choice UK
Dziewuchy Berlin, Germany
ECPI-Euroregional Center for Public Initiatives, Romania
European Alternatives
European Women Lawyers Association
Fédération des Centres de Planning Familial des Femmes Prévoyantes Socialistes, Belgium
Feminism UA, Ukraine
Feminist Association Unioni, Finland
Feminist Fightback
Femmes et Santé asbl., Belgium
Femmes Prévoyantes Socialistes, Belgium
Finnish League for Human Rights
FOKUS – Forum for Women and Development, Norway
Fondo de Aborto para la Justicia Social MARIA, Mexico
Freedom of Choice/ Možnosť voľby, Slovakia
Fundació Aroa, Spain
Furia vzw, Belgium
GenPol - Gender & Policy Insights

GPES, Ukraine
HERA - Health Education and Research Association from North Macedonia
Hivpoint, Finland
Human Rights Center ZMINA, Ukraine
ILGA-Europe
International Alliance of Women
International Campaign for Women's Right to Safe Abortion
International Commission of Jurists
International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network
International Women's Health Coalition
Ipas Development Foundation, India
Kazakhstan Association on Sexual and Reproductive Health (KMPA)
Kharkiv, Centre of the Gender Culture, Ukraine
Kherson oblast center «Successful Woman», Ukraine
Kherson regional center “Successful women,” Ukraine
KULU - Women and Development, Denmark
La Voix des Femmes, Belgium
Le Planning Familial, France
Lleisiau Merched Cymru / Women’s Voice Wales
Marie Stopes International
National Council of Women of Ukraine
National platform for reproductive justice, Croatia
National Women's Council of Ireland
NGO "FeminismUA", Ukraine
PATENT Association, Hungary
Pro-choice, rete italiana contraccezione e aborto, Italy
Profamilia, Colombia
Resistanta, Ukraine
Rutgers, Netherlands
safe2choose
Santé Sexuelle Suisse, Switzerland
Sensoa, Belgium
Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Platform (SRHRP), Turkey
Sexual and Reproductive Justice Coalition
SMARTA, Ukraine
Societatea de Planificare a Familiei din Moldova (SPFM)/Family Planning Association of Moldova
Society for Education on Contraception and Sexuality, Romania
Society Without Violence NGO, Armenia
The European Society of Contraception and Reproductive Health (ESC)
The International Federation for Professionals in Abortion and Contraception (FIAPAC)
The National Council of Women of Finland
The Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (RFSU)
Ukrainian Association for Research in Women's History
UN Women Finland
Union Women Center, Georgia
University Women of Europe
Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights
Voice for Choice - L-ghażla tagħha (Malta)
Vrouwenraad, Belgium

WIDE+ (Women In Development Europe+)
Women for Women's Human Rights – New Ways, Turkey
Women on Waves, Netherlands
Women on Web, Netherlands
Women's Link Worldwide, Spain
Women's Information Consultative Center, Ukraine
Women's Resource Center, Armenia
Women's Rights Foundation, Malta
Women's rights protection league "Harmony of equals", Ukraine
Zaporizhzhia charitable foundation "Unity" for the Future," Ukraine
Zhiva-Ya, Ukraine