

# When global pandemic isn't enough...



Our societies are struggling with the global COVID-19 pandemic, which causes thousands of deaths and tens of thousands of new infections every day. This tragedy affects us all. People lose their jobs and thus their livelihoods, the chance to be cured or to live longer having cancer, they struggle mentally with the consequences of complete social isolation or even more often experience various forms of domestic violence.

**In this difficult moment, when all of our resources serve the purpose of surviving another day, of making even the tiniest gesture of solidarity towards those on the front line in the fight against the pandemic, the Polish Parliament is using the situation to introduce cruel regulations.** Yesterday, we learned that to the schedule of the next parliamentary session, which is going to take place on 15th and 16th April, there have been **added the postponed draft amendments, provisions of which are to introduce further restrictions on access to termination of pregnancy and imprisonment for conducting sex education.**

**The first project concerns the limitation of already extremely restrictive - on both European and global scale - and impossible to realize conditions for terminating pregnancy in Poland.** Currently, legal termination of pregnancy is available only in three cases, when: 1) the woman's life or health is endangered by pregnancy, 2) there is a reasonable suspicion of pregnancy being a result of a criminal act, or 3) prenatal examinations or other medical reasons indicate a high probability of a severe and irreversible fetal impairment or an incurable illness putting its life at risk. However, if even one of the prerequisites is met, there are only a few doctors who undertake the procedure. Thus, women are pushed into the abortion underground, where they risk their health and lives. The current law is best illustrated by the voices of women in Poland protesting on this issue since 2016:

*'The compromise [the existing law] is binding only for the few. No matter the level of restrictions, some of us, living in big cities, will manage to get the pill for pharmacological abortion. These rich ones will pay a thousand zloty to have a procedure [abortion] in the doctor's private practice. And these who have contacts abroad will become abortion tourists. The poor women are left only with the proverbial coat hanger, a symbol of the underground and backstreet abortion (Wrocław/ 3.10.2016).'*

*'I'd like to add that because of limitations and lack of respect for women's rights in Poland, I don't feel safe in my own country.'*

*'I'd like to stop being afraid of living in my own country.'*

*'I consider the lack of the possibility to decide about my own body (and in extreme cases even life) barbaric and insulting to human dignity.'*

The aim of the 'Stop Abortion' project, which is going to be proceeded next week, is to erase one of the premises, which allows abortion 'in a case when prenatal examinations or other medical reasons indicate a high probability of a severe and irreversible fetal impairment or an incurable illness putting its life at risk'. It was placed in the 'parliamentary freezer' after the mass protests which took place on March 23rd 2018 at the initiative of the Polish Women's Strike in cooperation with feminist groups and organizations.

The current situation is all the more dangerous because the **Polish president in an interview for the Catholic weekly 'Niedziela' fully supported the project: '(...) If this project is on my desk, it will definitely be signed by me'.**

The whole situation is aggravated by the state of sex education, or rather the lack of it. There are no sex education classes in Polish schools, instead there is 'upbringing for family life' lessons. NGOs, sexologists and worried parents have been reporting the negative consequences of a lack of reliable education for years. Despite this, the government did not agree to implement the WHO recommendations on sex education.

**Instead, the 'Stop Pedophilia' Citizens' Legislative Initiative was created, the aim of which is to completely prohibit any form of sex education.**

In its examples of 'promoting or encouraging minors to engage in sexual activities', it lists educational activities on contraception, prevention of teenage pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases (e. g. HIV or AIDS), puberty and adolescence. The project is entirely problematic in terms of equality, tolerance, diversity, prevention of discrimination and different forms of exclusion, prevention of violence, homophobia, functioning of gender identity and gender itself. **In the proposed legal changes in this project we can read that:**

**§4. Whoever promotes or approves of a minor undertaking sexual intercourse or other sexual activity, acting in connection with the held position, profession or activities related to upbringing, education, treatment or care of minors or acting on the premises of a school or other establishment or educational institution or guardianship, is subject to the penalty of deprivation of liberty for up to 3 years.**

**Polish Association of Sexology alerts that if the project is voted through, the teaching of sex education will be equated with the pedophilic acts.** In the arguments of the supporters of the 'Stop Pedophilia' initiative one finds voices saying that teaching about non-heteronormativity is harmful to the child's psyche and that it threatens the traditional family model. This is done with a strong support of the hierarchs of the Catholic Church. One of the **Polish archbishops (Marek Jędraszewski) describes LGBT people as 'rainbow plague', being only a 'gender ideology'**. This term was adopted by the right-wing discourse. It has also become an explanation of behaviours and statements discriminating against people who do not identify themselves with such a vision of the country, Polishness and traditional gender roles, as is the case on the right side of the political scene.

**In order to manifest opposition to 'gender ideology', including 'LGBT ideology', Rzeszów's local government officials decided to make it 'an LGBT free zone', followed by attempts to ban the Equality March. This has also been followed by other local governments, which are becoming 'LGBT free zones' - today there are about 90 and this number is only increasing** (changes are monitored by Atlas of Hate: (<https://atlasnienawisci.pl/>)).

The anti-LGBT Charter proposes guidelines to defend, according to its authors, family values. It appeals to local authorities not to financially support organizations that undermine the identity of marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman. **What is more, these resolutions are inconsistent with the regulations, including the Constitution, and more precisely with:**

**§7. The organs of public authority shall function on the basis of, and within the limits of, the law.**

**§32.1. All persons shall be equal before the law. All persons shall have the right to equal treatment by public authorities.**

**§32.2. No one shall be discriminated against in political, social or economic life for any reason whatsoever.**

**Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is also unacceptable in the light of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights binding on Poland.**

**The current situation undermines our fundamental civil rights and freedoms.**

It is a disgraceful use of a global pandemic and social isolation to bring about legal changes that are frightening for citizens. At this rate and with the current behaviour of those in power, we will soon wake up in a totalitarian state, where every form of opposition and failure to fulfil the roles imposed on us will be punished.

**WE DO NOT AGREE TO THIS!**

**LET'S FIGHT TOGETHER FOR A BETTER TOMORROW.**

**Bunt Kobiet**

Aleksandra Trybalska, Julia Warmuz,  
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