

Protecting Abortion Access in Europe – A Call to Action

The decision by the United States Supreme Court in *Dobbs vs. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* overturns *Roe v. Wade*, thereby dismantling the U.S. constitutional right to abortion. The decision will have a profound and devastating impact.

As local and global women’s rights, human rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights organisations working in Europe, we express our profound solidarity with the millions of people in the United States whose right to essential reproductive health care has been taken away by this decision and with all of those who have sought to protect and uphold this right. We are deeply concerned about the devastating consequences this regressive judgment will have for the lives, health and wellbeing of people across the United States. The impacts will fall hardest on people who already face discriminatory obstacles to

health care, including people of colour, people in rural areas, young people, and those living on lower incomes.

Across the European region, decision makers in numerous European countries have expressed their deep dismay and concern in reaction to this ruling.

We welcome their expressions of solidarity with all those who need reproductive health care in the United States and applaud their commitment to defend reproductive rights. We urge them to take concrete steps to turn this concern into action that is designed to advance and protect access to abortion in their own countries.

In 2022 abortion is legal in almost all European countries. However, a range of harmful barriers and restrictions on access to abortion care also remain in place in most countries.

Many countries retain laws and regulations that:

- Criminalise abortion outside the scope of the law, threatening individuals seeking abortion care or medical professionals and others who assist them with criminal prosecution.
- Impose biased counselling requirements, mandatory waiting periods and restrictive time-limits on abortion.
- Restrict where and by whom abortions may be provided, for example requiring care to be provided in hospital settings or only allowing medical doctors to provide abortion care.
- Prevent the provision of medication abortion entirely or do not allow patient-centred decision-making regarding medication abortion in early pregnancy, including by legalising telemedicine for medication abortion and self-administration.
- Impose third party authorisation requirements for abortion on certain grounds, requiring approval by multiple doctors or medical committees or prosecutorial authorities.

Such barriers and restrictions reflect outdated medical practices and harmful gender stereotypes and violate human rights. They contradict the recommendations of international human rights mechanisms and the guidance of the World Health Organization. They serve no purpose but to delay access to time-sensitive care, reinforce abortion-related stigma and prevent patient-centred care by stymieing healthcare professionals' ability to provide care in line with international best practices.

Current events in Europe have highlighted the grave impact of these outdated requirements and barriers. The COVID-19 pandemic has showcased the importance of eradicating requirements that oblige people to take unnecessary trips to health care facilities or needlessly undergo mandatory hospitalisation. The war in Ukraine is illustrating the serious harm that is caused by harsh legal restrictions and barriers to abortion, as refugees

from Ukraine who seek access to abortion care in neighbouring countries are confronted by a range of legal and policy barriers that severely impede access to time-sensitive care.

For decades, the general trajectory across Europe has been to improve laws and policies on abortion, remove restrictions and move regulations closer to compliance with human rights standards and public health guidance. Even in recent months, several European countries have enacted reforms to remove barriers and further legal reforms are underway in a number of countries. We welcome these important efforts by lawmakers.

Indeed today only a very small number of European countries – Andorra, Liechtenstein, Malta, Monaco and Poland - maintain highly restrictive laws in disregard of international human rights obligations and public health evidence. However, the need to reinforce and protect reproductive rights and abortion access across Europe is ongoing. In recent years, regressive attacks on reproductive rights in Poland have shocked the public conscience, and new procedural barriers to abortion have been introduced by lawmakers in some other Central and Eastern European countries.

The time is now to turn support for sexual and reproductive health and rights into action. We call on European decision makers and legislatures to galvanise efforts and spearhead new initiatives to repeal barriers in access to abortion care.

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We call for the reform of laws and policies in line with WHO Guidelines order to:

- **Fully decriminalise abortion and the provision of evidence-based information about abortion.**
- **Eradicate mandatory waiting periods and biased counselling requirements prior to abortion.**
- **Revise restrictive time limits on access to abortion and repeal harmful third-party authorisation requirements.**
- **Amend regulations on who can perform and manage abortion and where abortion care can be provided in order to ensure care can be provided in line with clinical best practice and WHO guidance.**
- **Remove regulatory barriers regarding medication abortion and legalise telemedicine delivery as well as self-management of medication abortion care in line with WHO guidance.**

Signatories:

- Abortion Rights Campaign, Ireland
- ActionAid International
- Agate Rights Defense Center for Women with Disabilities, Armenia
- alliance F, Switzerland
- Amnesty International
- AnA Society for Feminist Analyses, Romania
- Association for Human Rights and Civic Participation PaRiter, Croatia
- Association HERA XXI Real People Real Vision, Georgia
- B.a.B.e. Be active. Be emancipated, Croatia
- British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS), United Kingdom
- Bureau Clara Wichmann, Netherlands
- Center for Reproductive Rights
- Centrul de Instruire în Domeniul Sănătății Reproductive / Reproductive Health Training Center, Moldova
- Centrul Euroregional pentru Inițiative Publice / Euroregional Center for Public Initiatives (ECPI), Romania
- Centrul FILIA / FILIA Center, Romania
- CESI – Centar za edukaciju, savjetovanje i istraživanje / CESI - Center for Education, Counselling and Research, Croatia
- Doctors for Choice Germany, Germany

- Community Safety and Mediation Center, Romania
- Eesti Seksuaaltervise Liit / Estonian Sexual Health Association, Estonia
- EuroMed Rights
- European Society of Contraception and Reproductive Health (ESC)
- European Women's Lobby
- Federación de Planificación Familiar (SEDRA-FPFE) / Family Planning Federation (SEDRA-FPFE), Spain
- Fondazione Pangea Onlus / Pangea Onlus Foundation, Italy
- Fundacja na Rzecz Kobiet i Planowania Rodziny FEDERA / Foundation for Women and Family Planning FEDERA, Poland
- Gender five plus
- Građanke i građani Rijeke / Citizens of Rijeka, Croatia
- HERA – Health Education and Research Association, North Macedonia
- Human Rights Watch
- ILGA-Europe
- International Federation of Abortion and Contraception Professionals (FIAPAC)
- International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
- Irish Family Planning Association, Ireland
- La Strada International
- Le planning familial / Family Planning, France
- Legal Center for Women's Initiatives Sana Sezim, Kazakhstan
- Libera Associazione Italiana Ginecologi non obiettori per l'Applicazione della 194 (LAIGA) / Free Italian Association of Non-Objecting Gynaecologists for the Application of Law 194 (LAIGA)
- Možnosť voľby / Freedom of Choice, Slovakia
- MSI Reproductive Choices
- National Women's Council of Ireland, Ireland
- NGO-Coordination post Beijing Switzerland
- Österreichische Gesellschaft für Familien Planung (ÖGF) / Austrian Family Planning Association, Austria
- Papardes zieds / Latvian Association for Family Planning and Sexual Health, Latvia
- Patent Egyesület / Patent Association, Hungary
- PICUM - The Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants
- Pink, Armenia
- Platform for Reproductive Justice, Croatia

- PRIDE Košice, Slovakia
- PRIZMA - community and counselling center for LGBT+ people in Košice, Slovakia
- pro familia Bundesverband, Germany
- Real world, Real people, Armenia
- Riksförbundet för sexuell upplysning (RFSU), Sweden
- Romanian Women's Lobby, Romania
- Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, United Kingdom
- Rutgers, Netherlands
- Santé Sexuelle Suisse, Sexual Health Switzerland, Switzerland
- Sapliq, Slovakia
- Sarajevo Open Centre, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Sensoa, Vlaams expertisecentrum voor seksuele gezondheid / Sensoa, Flemish Centre of Expertise on Sexual Health, Belgium
- Sex & Samfund / Danish Family Planning Association, Denmark
- Sex og Politikk, Norway
- SEXUL vs BARZA / SEX vs The STORK Association, Romania
- Societatea de Planificare a Familiei din Moldova / Family Planning Association of Moldova, Moldova
- Society for Education in Contraception and Sexuality (SECS), Romania
- SOS Rijeka – Centar za nenasilje i ljudska prava / SOS Rijeka – center for nonviolence and human rights, Croatia
- Társaság a Szabadságjogokért / Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, Hungary
- Udruga Domine / Domine - Organization for Promotion of Women's Rights Split, Croatia
- Women's Empowerment Center, Armenia
- Women's Link Worldwide
- Women's Rights Foundation, Malta
- Women's Resource Center, Armenia