

URGENT ACTION

ABORTION RIGHTS AT RISK IN SLOVAKIA

Slovak MPs are debating a bill that aims to further restrict access to abortion. If passed, it would require women seeking abortion care to fulfil a number of mandatory requirements that are not justified by medical reasons and would undermine women's privacy, personal integrity, autonomy in decision-making about health care and will subject them to harmful stigma, humiliation and degrading treatment. The Slovak Parliament must urgently reject this bill.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

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Dear Member of the Slovak Parliament,

I am writing to express my deep concern about the foreseen vote on a bill that aims to restrict access to legal and safe abortions in Slovakia.

If passed, the bill will require women seeking abortion to undergo a mandatory ultrasound scanning, to view and obtain an ultrasound image of the embryo or the foetus, and where technically possible, to also listen to the "heartbeat of the embryo or the foetus."

I am very concerned that these measures will harm women's health and well-being and will in turn obstruct their access to safe abortion. In addition, the bill will undermine women's privacy, personal integrity, autonomy in decision-making about health care and will subject them to harmful stigma, humiliation and degrading treatment.

I would like to remind you that according to the World Health Organization (WHO), there is no medical reason for routine ultrasound prior to abortion. Instead, the WHO has underlined that women's decisions to access abortion care should be respected and that safe abortion should be "delivered in a way that respects a woman's dignity, guarantees her right to privacy and is sensitive to her needs and perspectives."

I urge you to take all necessary steps to ensure the Slovak Parliament rejects this regressive bill, that breaches international human rights law, and to refrain from further attempts to restrict reproductive rights in Slovakia.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The *Draft Law amending and supplementing Act No. 576/2004 Coll. on health care, services related to the provision of health care and amending certain acts as amended, and which amends and supplements certain acts* was first tabled in the Slovak Parliament (National Council) last September. The bill is scheduled for discussion and adoption in the ongoing plenary session that runs until 13 December. Please see here for a complete list of Slovak MPs:

<https://www.nrsr.sk/web/?SectionId=60>

If the legislation is adopted, Slovakia will be the only EU member state to impose on women a requirement to undergo mandatory ultrasound, view ultrasound images or listen to the “foetal heartbeat” for obtaining abortion care. If adopted, the legislation is expected to come into force in March 2020, setting a dangerous precedent for other countries in the EU.

The bill also seeks to prohibit “advertising” on abortion and to impose a fine of up to 66,400 Euros on those who order or disseminate it. This prohibition risks a chilling effect on the provision of access to information on sexual and reproductive health, including safe and legal abortion, by medical providers.

In line with the international human rights law and standards, everyone should be able to make their own decisions about their bodies and pregnancies and have access to sexual and reproductive health services including safe abortion.

On 18 October 2019, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights noted that women in the Slovak Republic already face multiple barriers to sexual and reproductive health services, including access to safe abortion and contraceptives. It warned against the bill currently in the parliament, which would further restrict these rights and create further barriers to healthcare.

On 18 November in a [joint letter](#), more than 30 organisations from several countries called on all Slovak MPs to reject the bill aiming at restricting access to abortion in Slovakia. Similarly, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe has [called](#) for the rejection of the legislative proposal and any other legislative proposals that could limit women's access to their sexual and reproductive rights.

Under the European Convention on Human Rights, Slovakia is under a positive obligation to create a procedural framework enabling a pregnant woman to exercise her right to access lawful abortion. It is the responsibility of the MPs to ensure they protect the reproductive rights of women and girls in Slovakia.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 13 December 2019

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.