

URGENT ACTION

WOMEN'S ACCESS TO SAFE ABORTION AT RISK

The Slovak Parliament is currently debating a bill that if passed will impose new barriers on abortion care, endangering the health and wellbeing of women and girls, and all people who could be seeking an abortion, and violating their human rights. If enacted, the bill will create a dangerous chilling effect on the provision of lawful abortion care in Slovakia, and increase the harmful stigma surrounding abortion. 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 extremely concerned about the renewed attempts to vote on a harmful bill that will further obstruct access to safe abortion care in Slovakia. Measures included in the bill such as doubling the mandatory waiting period and extending its application before accessing an abortion; the imposition of a requirement of a second medical authorisation for abortions on health reasons; and the obligation to state the reasons for seeking an abortion, are unjustified and do not fulfil a medical purpose. Instead, they will violate the human rights of those seeking an abortion and delay access to timely legal abortion care thereby placing their health and lives at risk.

It is also deeply worrying that the bill intends to prohibit the so-called "advertising" of abortion, which will restrict doctors' ability to provide evidence-based information to women about abortion care and where to access lawful abortions in Slovakia.

The proposed bill is harmful to women and girls, and breaches Slovakia's international human rights obligations to respect and protect the right to health, privacy, information, the right to be free from inhuman or degrading treatment and the principles of non-discrimination and equality in the enjoyment of rights, and contradicts the World Health Organization guidelines and clinical best practices.

An extensive analysis of the concerns about this bill are outlined in the letter signed by over 100 organisations from all over the world and sent to all parliamentarians on 7 September, available at the following link: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur72/3021/2020/en/>.

I urge you to take into account the content of the above-mentioned letter and to take all necessary steps to ensure the Slovak Parliament rejects this retrogressive bill and refrains from further attempts to restrict reproductive rights in Slovakia.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Draft *Law which Amends and Supplements Act No. 576/2004 Coll. of Laws on Healthcare, Healthcare-related Services, and on Amending and Supplementing Certain Acts As Amended, and which Amends and Supplements Certain Acts (Print no. 154, 19.06.2020)*, was first tabled in the Slovak Parliament (National Council) in July 2020 by OLANO (Ordinary People and Independent Personalities), the biggest party of the government coalition.

The bill was passed in first reading in August and sent to three different committees for further debate in September. As of 9 September, the Constitutional and Legal Affairs Committee has supported the proposed bill and recommended for the legislation to be approved by parliament. The other two committees (Social Affairs Committee and Health Committee) should deliver their opinion in the upcoming days. The bill is expected to be voted in second reading during the plenary session starting from 16 September. If passed, it will be voted on in a third and final reading.

Abortions are permitted in Slovakia in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. However, over the last few years, the country has introduced laws and policies to make access to timely and safe and legal abortion services more burdensome. 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. This new bill will create additional barriers to health care and will have a heightened impact on women and girls from rural areas, living in poverty or victims of domestic and sexual violence.

It is not the first time the Slovak Parliament debates retrogressive legislation to obstruct safe access to abortion care. A bill tabled in November 2019 attempted to force people seeking an abortion to view an ultrasound scan of the embryo or foetus. The proposed measure was not justified by medical reasons and would have violated the person's privacy, personal integrity, autonomy in decision-making about health care. Following national and international outrage the bill did not get the required votes and was dismissed.

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

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 22 October 2020

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