



European Society of Contraception
and Reproductive Health

How to Improve Access to Abortion in Eastern Europe

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No conflict of interest to declare

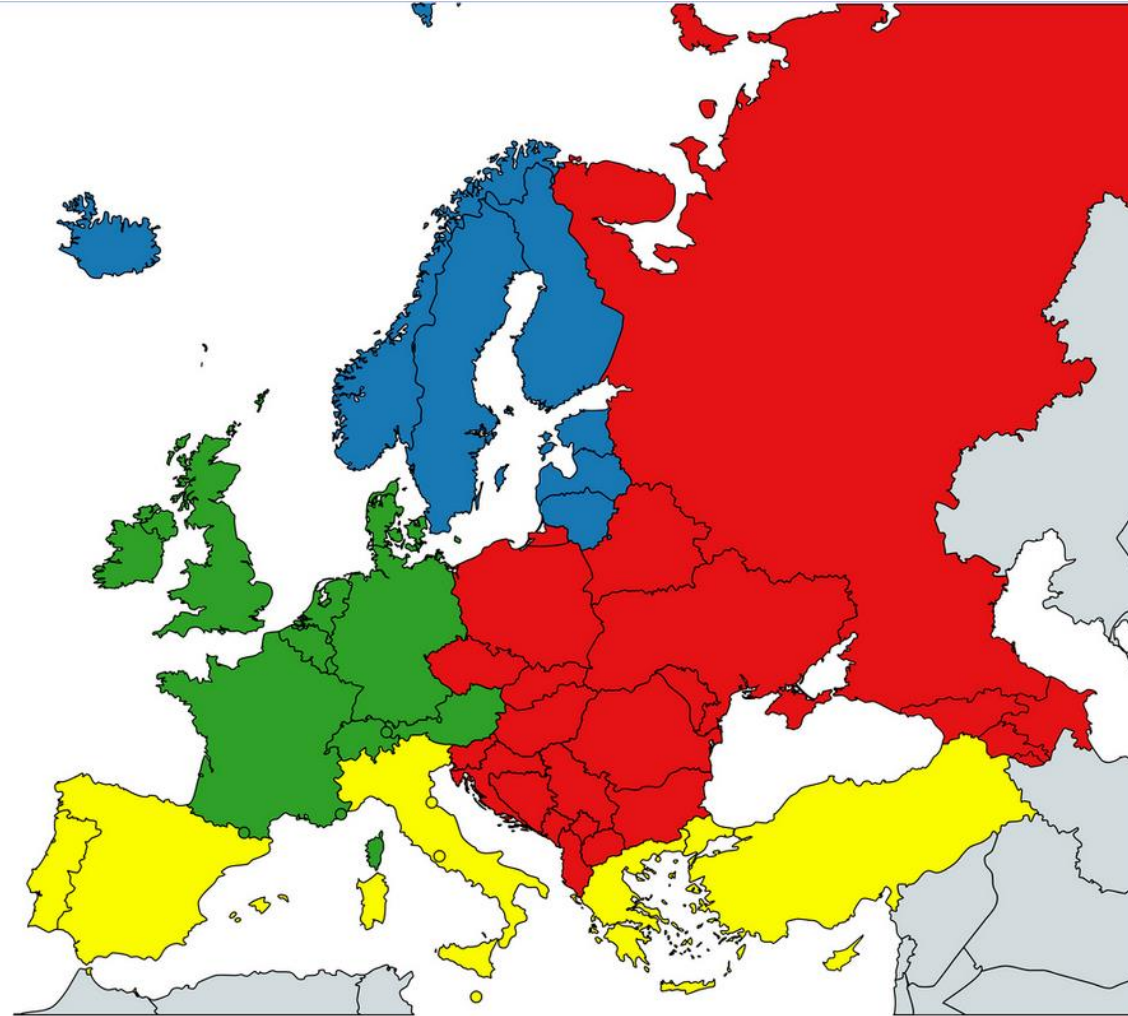
Safe abortion

WHO: Access to safe abortion is critical for health of women and girls

- Nearly **every death/injury** from unsafe abortion is entirely **preventable**
- **Safe abortion:** using **method recommended** by WHO, **appropriate** to the pregnancy duration and used by someone with the **necessary skills**
- Lack of access to **safe, timely, affordable and respectful abortion care** poses a risk to physical, mental and social well-being of women and girls



Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)



according to EuroVoc  Central and Eastern Europe  Western Europe  Southern Europe  Northern Europe

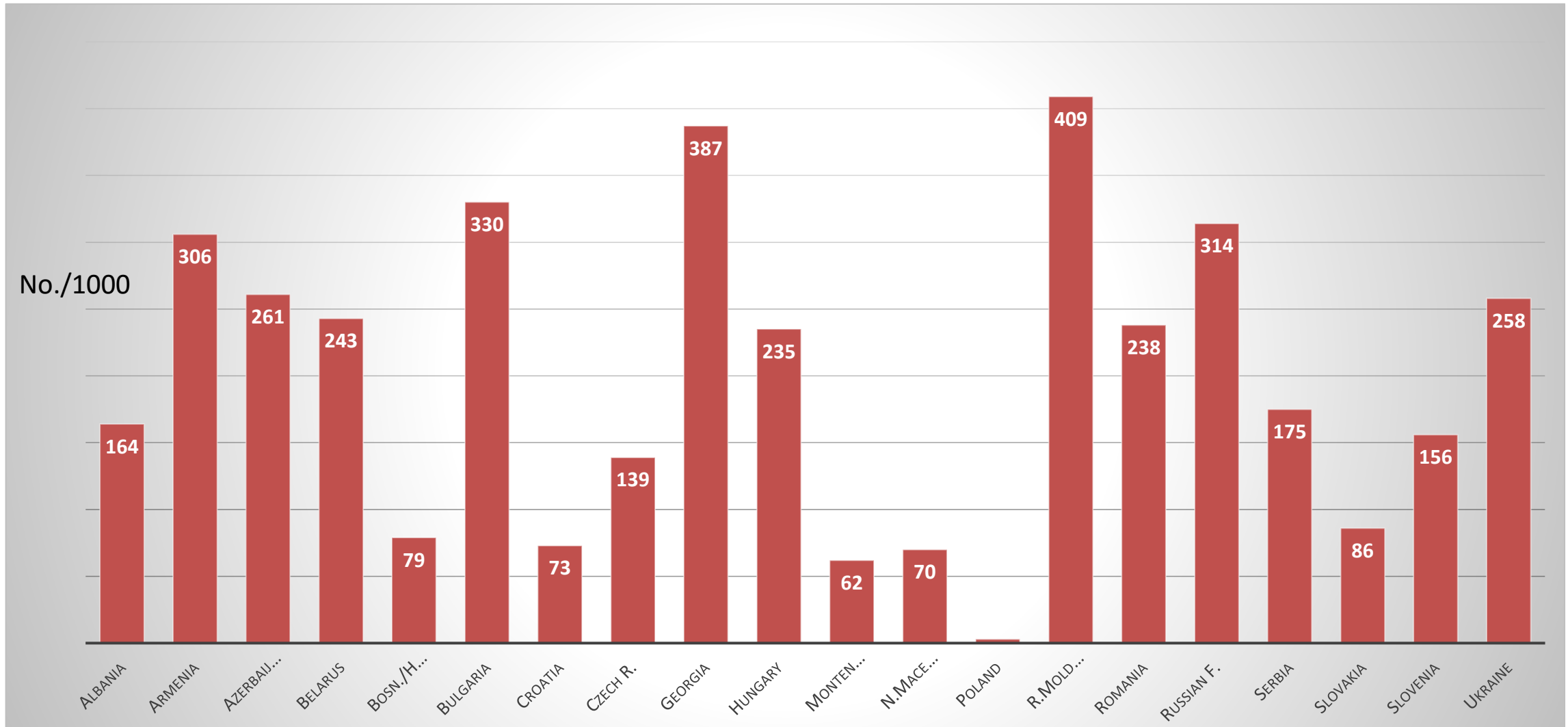
17th ESC Congress "Sexual Rights and Contraception in a Turbulent World"

1- 4 May 2024, Bilbao, Spain

Sources

- WHO. Global Abortion Policies Database: <https://abortion-policies.srhr.org/countries/>
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- Abortion. Legislation and Statistics in Europe:
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- Abortion in the European Union:
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- European Abortion Laws. A Comparative Overview:
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- WHO. Abortion Care Guideline: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240039483>
- ACOG. Abortion Is Essential Health Care: <https://www.acog.org/advocacy/abortion-is-essential>

Abortions per 1000 live births in CEE

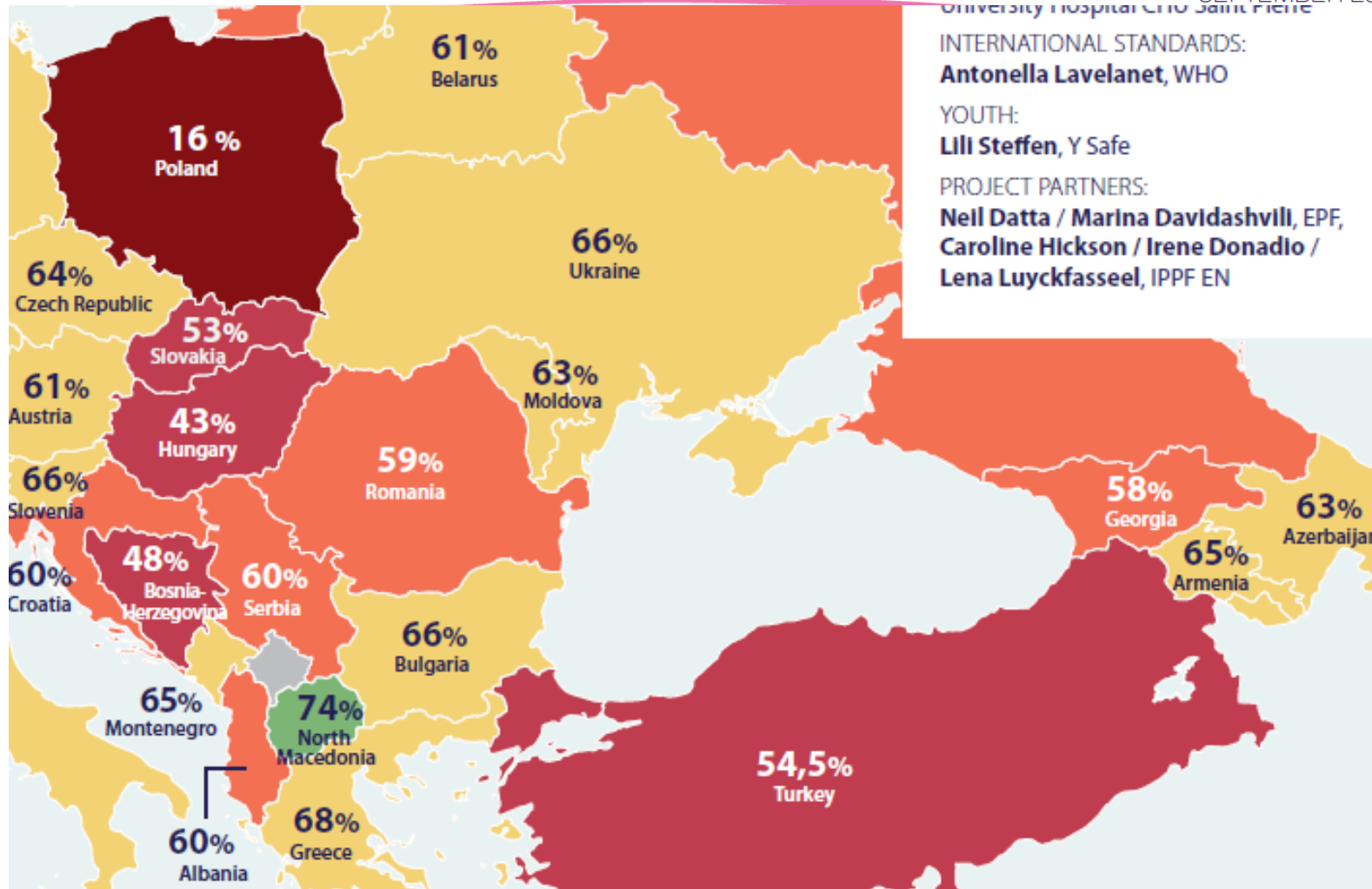


Access to abortion in CEE

- **Accessibility:** How can women get the abortion?
 - Administrative accessibility: legal barriers, procedural steps
 - Physical accessibility: distance, physical barriers, methods used
 - Financial accessibility: fees, other costs
 - Social accessibility: non-discrimination, conscientious objection
 - Information accessibility: information about services

EUROPEAN ABORTION POLICIES ATLAS

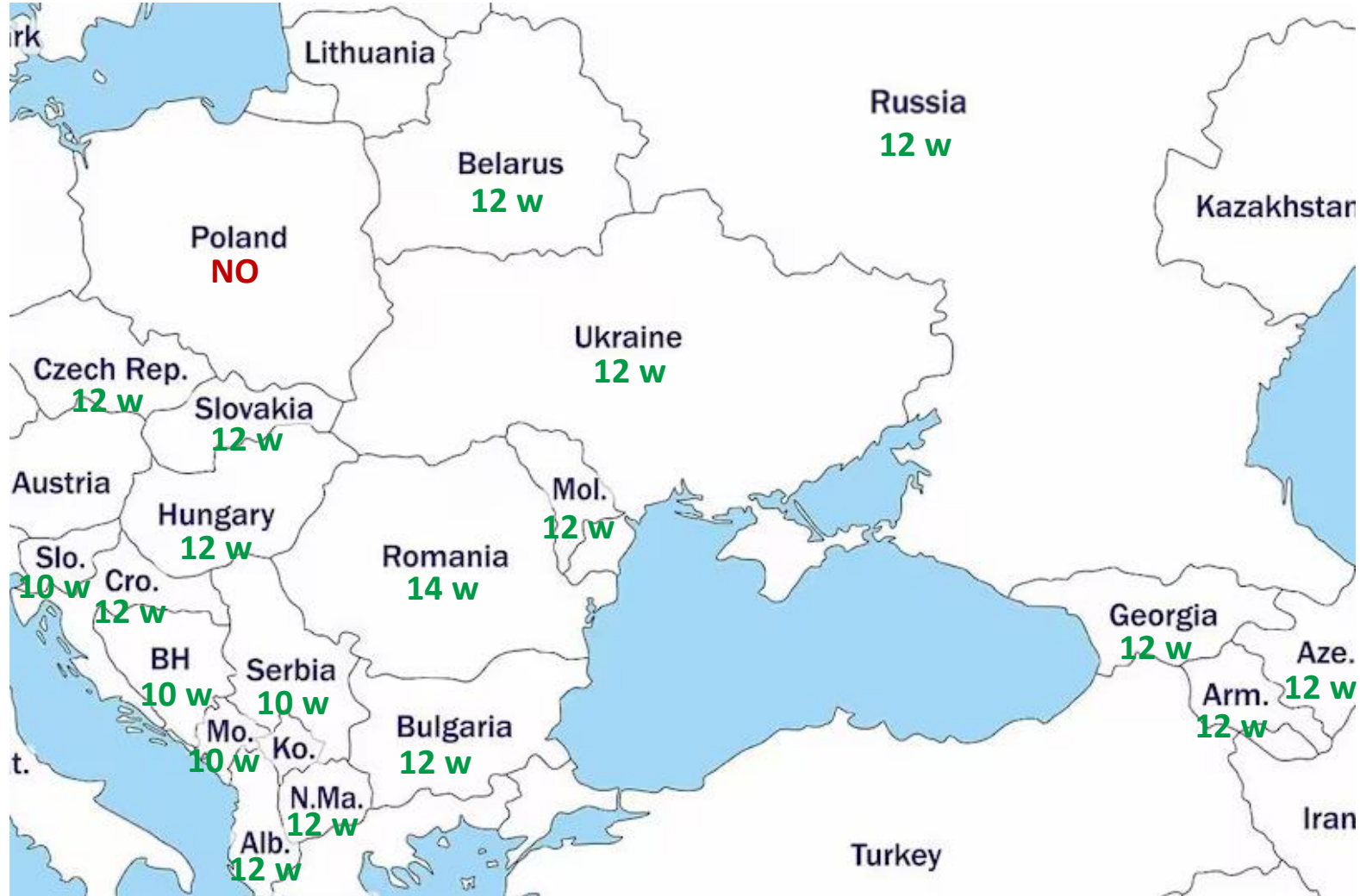
SEPTEMBER 2021



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Abortion on request




Legal barriers

- Poland
 - 1993: Restrictive law
 - Influence of the Catholic Church
 - Indifference/hostility of the medical profession towards abortion
 - The silence of the left and liberal politicians
 - 2020: Abortion not allowed for foetal impairment
 - Present: abortion allowed in rape, incest, to save woman's health
 - Several barriers: Conscience clause
 - New government: liberalisation?

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Health Healthcare

Abortion back on the agenda in Poland as lawmakers debate whether to liberalise strict access



By Lauren Chadwick with AP
Published on 11/04/2024 - 14:43

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Under the current law, Polish women can only access an abortion if their life is at risk or if the pregnancy was the result of a crime.

Legal barriers

- Hungary
 - Available on request: < 12 weeks
 - Severe crisis situation
 - Two times compulsory counselling at least 3 days apart
 - Woman has to first listen to the foetal heartbeat
 - Medical abortion not available
 - Mifepristone approved, not available

[my.europe](#) > Europe Decoded

Dozens of Hungarian women travel to Austria for abortions every week, amid tightening laws



By Lili Rutai

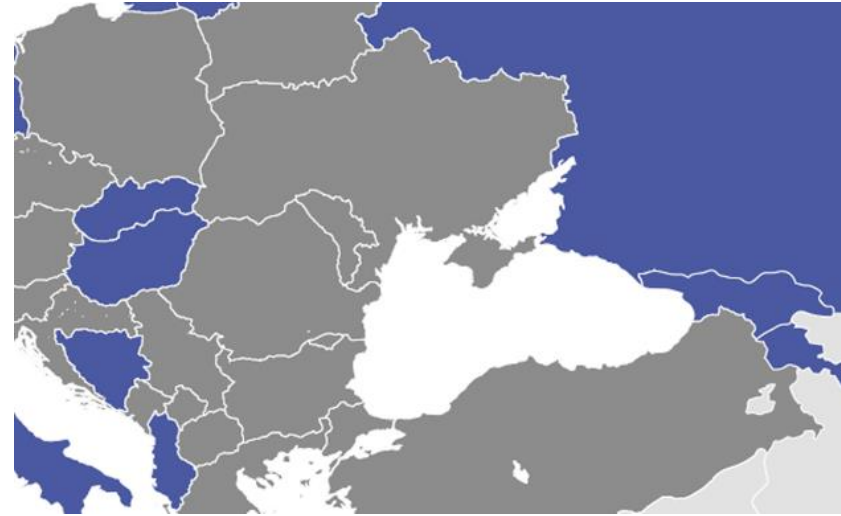
Published on 16/08/2023 - 07:00 • Updated 11:14

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Abortions are legal in Hungary but humiliating treatment and waiting lists prompt women to terminate their pregnancies outside of the country, women and experts told Euronews. Their main destination is Austria.

Legal barriers

- Mandatory counselling
 - Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Hungary, Russia, Slovakia
- Mandatory waiting periods
 - Albania, Armenia, Georgia, Hungary, Russia, Slovakia



- Third party authorisation
 - Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czechia, Georgia, Monenegro, N. Macedonia, Poland, Moldova, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine

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Medical abortion



Medical abortion

- Slovakia
 - Misoprostol available, but not mifepristone
 - 2014: Four days of waiting period
 - Mandatory counselling
 - Parental consent: < 18 years
 - Inavailability of abortion service
 - Abuse of the conscience clause

Slovakian health minister holds keys to unlocking abortion pill impasse

By Filip Áč | Euractiv.com © Est. 5min

📅 14. dec. 2023

Content-Type: Underwritten

Supporter



Woman, Holding, Blister, Of, Emergency, Contraception, Pills, On, White, Background, [shutterstock / New Africa]

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The political debate around access to abortion in Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and Malta – the EU countries in which medical abortion is prohibited – has dogged numerous election cycles and health ministers, with no major shifts.

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Access to abortion in CEE

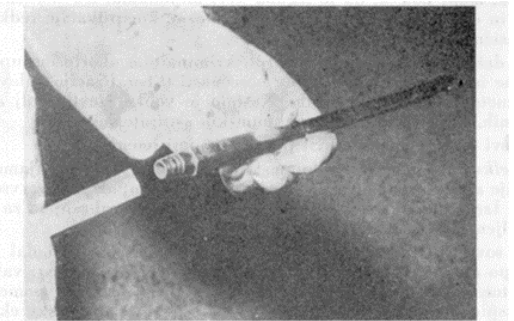
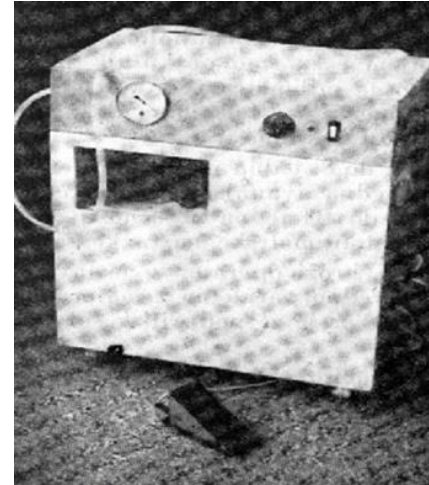
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Abortion on request reimbursed

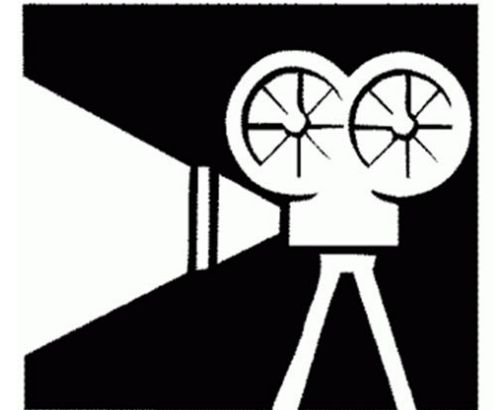


Abortion reimbursement

- Slovenia
 - 1952: Abortion legalized
 - 1964: Improvement of VA developed at UMC Ljubljana, Slovenia
 - 1971-73: Ljubljana Abortion Study
 - Joint American-Yugoslav research project
 - Randomised trial – D&C: VA
 - 1974: Constitution Yugoslavia/Slovenia
 - Family planning is a human right
 - 1977: Abortion on request < 10 weeks
 - Abortion on request reimbursed



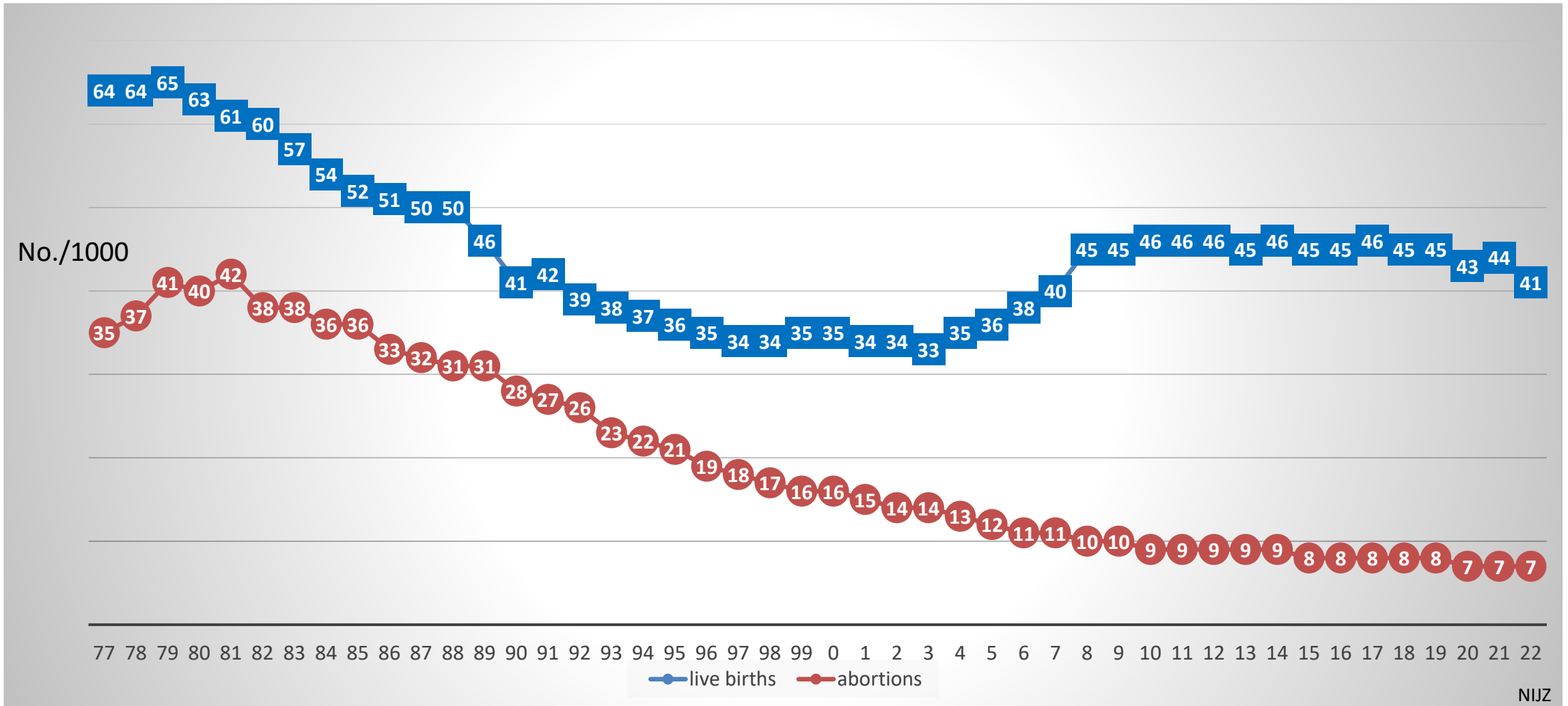
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Fertility and abortion rates

Slovenia 1977 – 2022, women aged 15 – 49 yrs



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Reports...

- „It is **incomprehensible that misogynistic language is used** daily in health care facilities to communicate with female patients, **especially in the gynaecology department, clinics, and that such procedures become an established discriminatory practice** without any sanctions, restrictions or reports.“
- „**Medical staff must continuously have gender-sensitive trainings** in order to overcome **personal frustrations and dominant patriarchal patterns of behaviour.**“

Research on Regulation, Availability and Practice of Abortion in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Dellia Hasanbegović Vukas

Sarajevo, 2023

Conscientious objection



Conscientious objection

- Croatia
 - 1978: Abortion on request < 12 weeks
 - Influence by conservative groups and the Catholic church
 - 2017: the Constitutional Court reaffirmed the right to abortion
 - 2018: 59% of MD conscientious objection
 - NGO: Many illegal, medically safe abortions in the private sector

Croatia abortion: Thousands protest against termination

15 May 2022

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Thousands of anti-abortion activists staged a "Walk For Life" protest

Anti-abortion activists have protested in Croatia amid a fierce debate about reproductive rights in the country.

While abortion is legal in the strongly Catholic EU nation, rising religious pressure means many doctors are refusing to carry out terminations.

The protest on Saturday came after thousands rallied to support a woman who was refused an abortion despite foetal abnormalities being diagnosed.

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Prohibition of information



Prohibition of information

- Russia
 - Advertising should **warn about the possibility of infertility and other harmful effects of abortion**
 - 1920 (Soviet Union): first country in the world to allow abortion in all circumstances (Lenin)
 - Initiative came from medical doctors
 - 1936-1955: abortion prohibited (Stalin), then allowed again
 - 2011: on request < 12 weeks, more strict late abortions
 - Demographic crisis, anti-abortion rhetoric

Russian authorities crack down on abortion access amid demographic crisis

22 November 2023

By Vitaly Shevchenko, Russia editor, BBC Monitoring

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Members of the Warriors of Life movement during a 2022 procession in favour of a ban on abortion

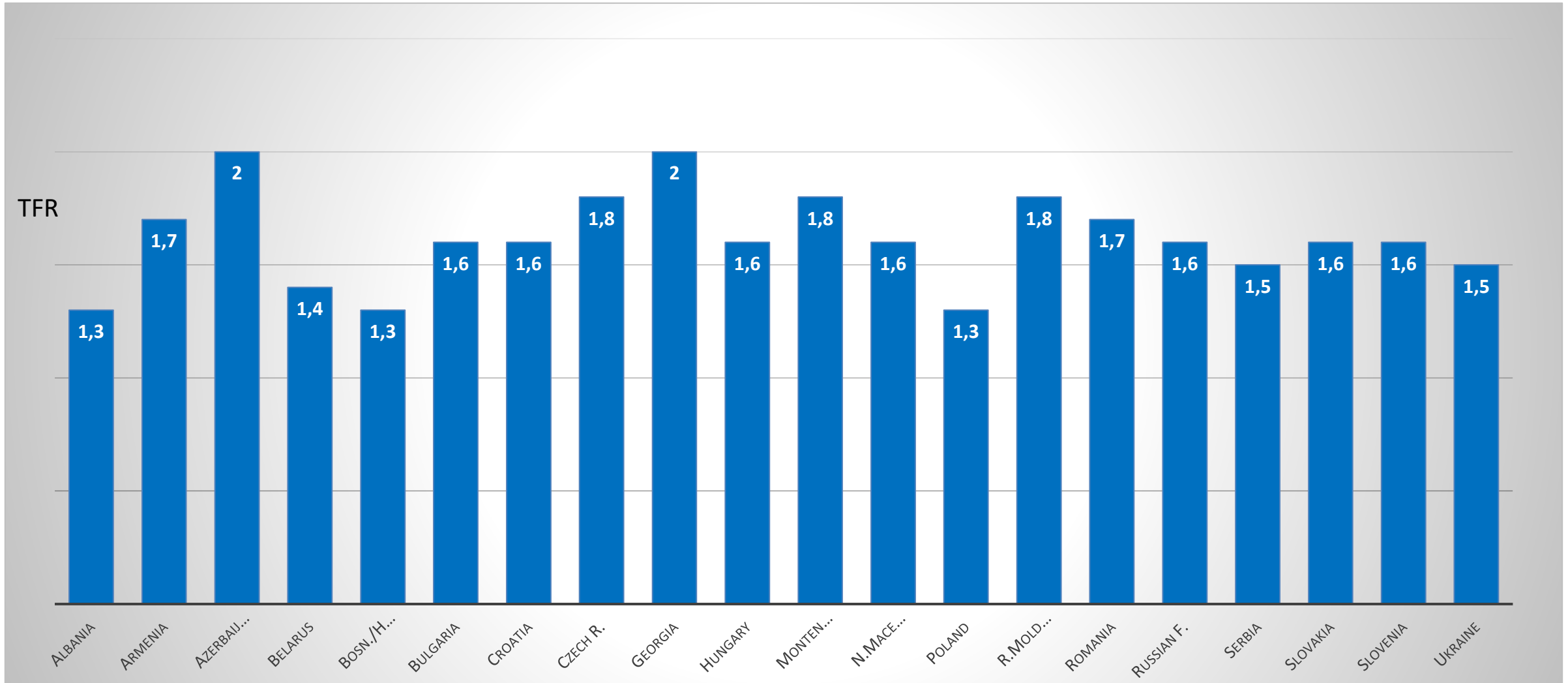
Russian authorities are limiting access to abortions in an attempt to confront the country's longstanding demographic crisis.

Measures include making it an offence trying to persuade a woman to have an abortion and pressuring private clinics to stop carrying out the procedure.

Feminist groups say the campaign is putting the lives of women at risk.

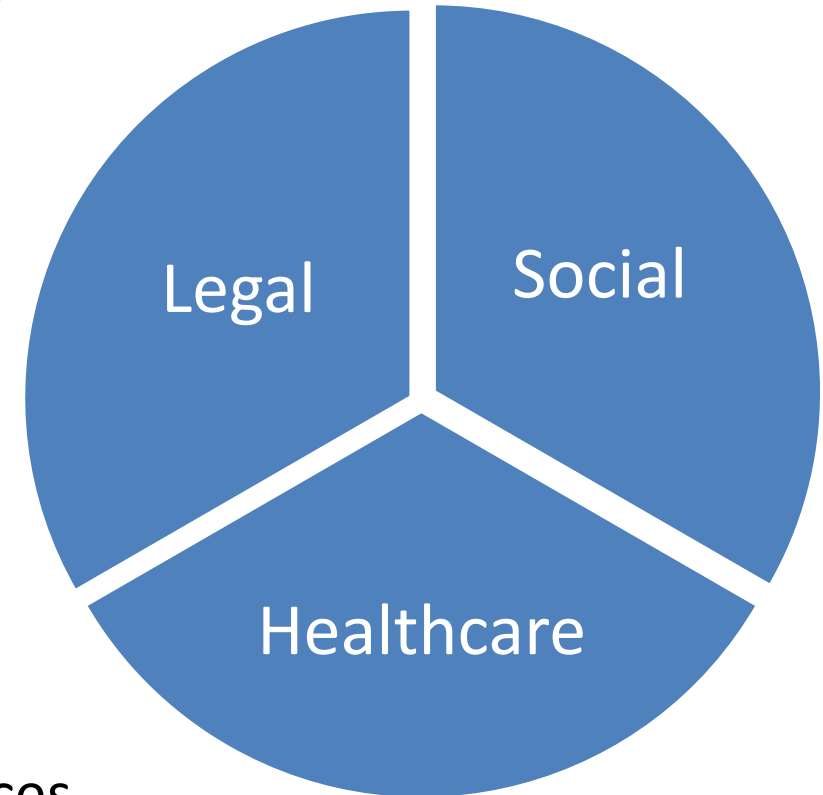
Total fertility rate (TFR) in CEE

(births per woman)

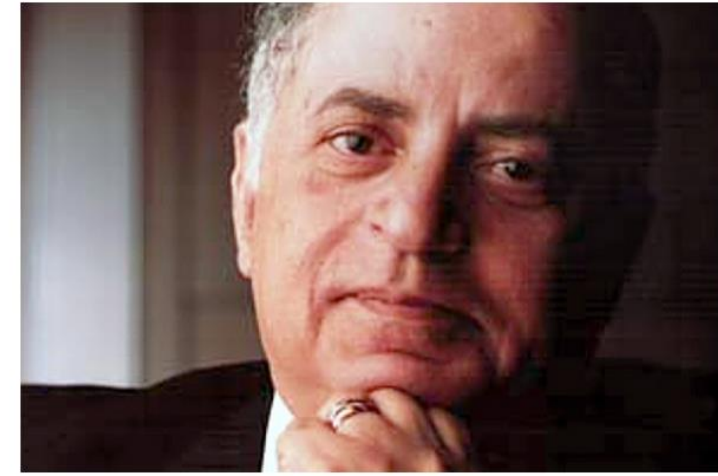


How to Improve Access to abortion in CEE

- **Legal Reforms:** international human rights standards, legal access
- **Public Health Policies:** reimbursement
- **Education in information:** accurate information about abortion care and reproductive rights
- **Support Services:** confidential and non-judgmental counselling services
- **Telemedicine:** to increase access
- **Advocacy:** reduce stigma associated with abortion
- **Collaboration with NGOs:** share resources, best practices
- **Research and Data Collection:** abortion rates, trends, and barriers to access



Professor Mahmoud F. Fathalla

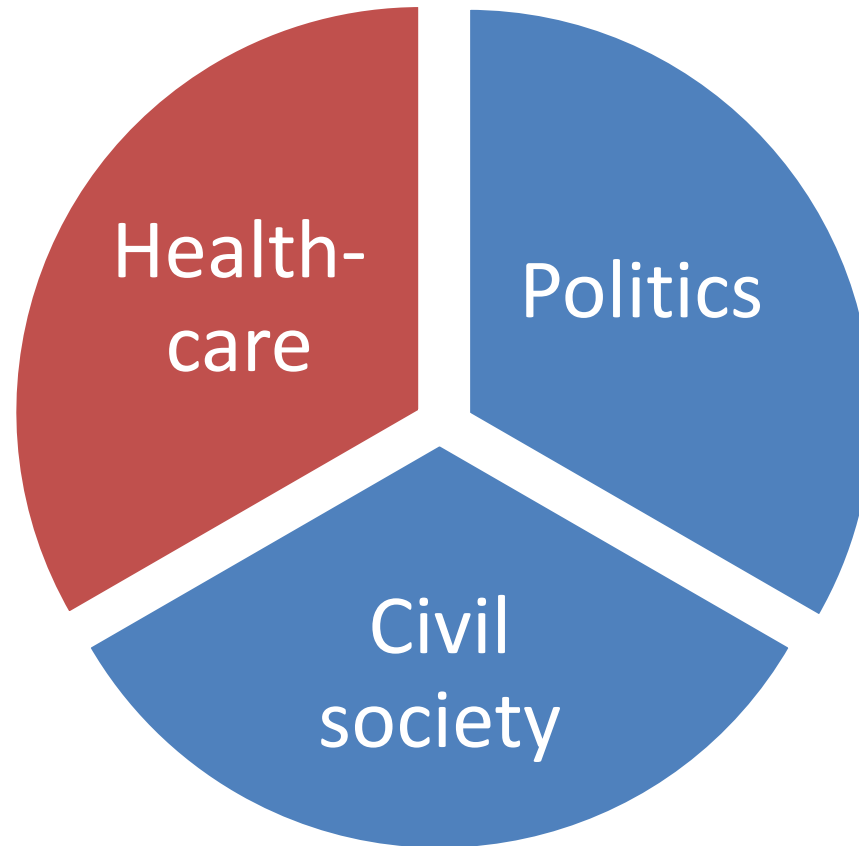


“

Women are not dying because of diseases we cannot treat. They are dying because societies have yet to decide their lives are worth saving.

Advocacy of HCP!

Abortion is essential healthcare



WE NEED 1 MILLION SIGNATURES FOR SAFE AND ACCESSIBLE ABORTION IN EUROPE

On the 24th of April, we will start collecting signatures across the EU in support of our European Citizens' Initiative. Join us and be the first to sign!

JOIN

