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Bucharest, 16th of November 2022

To Prof. Dr. Alexandru Rafila, Minister of Health

Mrs. Adela Cojan, President of the National Health Insurance House

Mr. Nicolae-Ionel Ciucă, Prime Minister of Romania

Mrs. Gabriela Firea, Minister for Family, Youth and Equal Opportunities

Prof. Dr. Daniel Mureșan, President of the Romanian Society of Obstetrics and Gynaecology

Prof. Dr. Daniel Coriu, President of the Romanian College of Physicians

OPEN LETTER

FREE ACCESS FOR ABORTION ON REQUEST

The Independent Midwives' Association, the FILIA Centre, the Coalition for Gender Equality and the Network for Preventing and Combating Violence against Women are calling on the Ministry of Health and the National Health Insurance Fund (CNAS) to improve access to abortion care by paying for the abortions on request from the budget of the Single National Health Insurance Fund (FNUASS).

Access to safe abortion for women was a priority for the Romanian state in 1989 **after 23 years of abortion being outlawed in Romania**, during which more than **10,000 women lost their lives and another 100,000 suffered from medical complications**. Women used hangers, geranium leaves, probes, needles, or other sharp objects to induce their own abortions, they have thrown themselves down the stairs, they have taken medication, waiting for hours whilst hemorrhaging in the hope that they would not have to go to hospital and risk facing severe penalties. More than 120,000 children were abandoned in orphanages under the communist regime, living in inhumane conditions.

Yet, these experiences do not belong to the past. Even today there are women who will do anything, including risking their lives, to avoid becoming mothers against their will. **In the**



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last three years, according to data from the National Institute of Public Health (INSP), more than 300 women had abortions in unsafe conditions. Unsafe abortion is a leading – but preventable – cause of maternal deaths and morbidities. It can lead to physical and mental health complications and social and financial burdens for women, communities, and health systems.

The reason for this rise in unsafe abortions is because in recent years, more and more hospitals no longer offer patients the option of abortion on request. As shown in the research report of the FILIA Centre, carried out in 2020 - 2021, of the 171 hospitals that responded to requests under Law 544/2001 on free access to information of public interest, 51 hospitals cited religious reasons as justification for refusing to provide abortions on request, 20 hospitals cited ethical or moral reasons, and 9 hospitals cited reasons related to the SARS-CoV-2 crisis. Three hospitals stated that the decision not to perform abortions was taken by the management, with the agreement of the doctors. Some hospitals have told us, in their official response to requests under Law 544/2001, that they offer the possibility of abortion on request without anaesthesia, which is a form of obstetric violence that affects the most vulnerable women, those who do not have the financial means to have a medical procedure where they can be treated with dignity.

Moreover, in the first six months of 2022, according to INSP data, **13 counties in the country reported no abortions on request** (as opposed to 11 counties in 2021). **In three of these counties (Olt, Hunedoara and Vâlcea) there is no access to abortion on request in either the public or private system.** At national level, 6,728 abortions were performed on request, of which only 2,597 were performed in public hospitals, the other **4,131 being performed in private clinics and surgeries, where the price of an abortion reaches up to 4,500 lei.** Sometimes women, especially vulnerable ones, have no access to abortion, either because they live in a county where abortion on request is not available or because they cannot afford to pay for this medical service in the private system. **In public hospitals, the price of an abortion on request can be as high as 1,000 lei, and medical abortion pills cost up to 600 lei,** while the net minimum wage in Romania is 1,524 lei. These costs are a major barrier to accessing abortion-on-request services.



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At the same time, anti-abortion organisations have become increasingly prominent in the public arena in recent years. They often present themselves as an alternative to proper medical care offered in doctors' offices. **Women who seek services provided by anti-choice organisations, anti-abortion callcenters and pregnancy crisis centers are often exposed to traumatizing rhetoric based on medically false information.**

The experiences of several women who have sought the help of NGOs specialized in sexual and reproductive health and rights show that, in cases where hospitals offered patients the option of abortion, medical consultations were dedicated to persuading the woman to continue with the pregnancy. During the procedure, some hospitals forced patients to listen to the sound of the embryonic heart putting even more pressure on them at a vulnerable time.

Following the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in the United States, the European Parliament adopted a resolution in July 2022 on reproductive rights and the need to ensure the right to abortion and women's health in the EU, which recognises abortion as an essential right. **Making abortion free would bring Romania into line with this resolution, as well as with other European countries where abortion is already covered by the public health insurance:** the Kingdom of Denmark, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Kingdom of Belgium, the French Republic, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the Kingdom of Spain, the Hellenic Republic, the Italian Republic, the Portuguese Republic, the Republic of Ireland, the Swiss Confederation, the Kingdom of Norway, the Kingdom of Sweden, Iceland, Republic of Finland and the United Kingdom. Moreover, the United Nations Human Rights Office states that any impediment in access to abortion can be a form of violence against women (OHCHR, 2018). Lack of access to safe, timely, affordable and respectful abortion care is a critical public health and human rights issue.

Taking all of this into account, the decrease in the number of abortions on request provided in the public health system (and the rise in the number of abortions offered in the private health system), the risks to which women who do not have access to abortion care are exposed, the experiences of patients and the expertise of civil society organisations, **we call for abortion**



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on request to be paid for from the FNUASS budget. This measure ensures universal and safe access for women, regardless of their vulnerabilities, identities, and insured status. In addition, payment by the CNAS makes it possible to monitor the number of procedures carried out in medical institutions under contract with the CNAS. This would help identify facilities, localities, and counties where this essential medical service is not being provided.

It is the foundation of a democracy to have control over one's own body, and this measure will prevent the suffering and death of women who are unable to access abortion services because of the restrictions on the provision of this medical service reflected in the rise in the number of hospitals that are not providing abortions on request, the increased number of counties reporting 0 abortions on request provided in the public health system, the increase in the price requested for the procedure, the lack of access to sexual education and contraceptive methods (especially for vulnerable groups) and the increased influence of anti-choice organisations. Ensuring universal and safe access will allow women in Romania to choose on their own terms if and how they want to experience pregnancy and childbirth. We draw attention to the fact that access to abortion has become increasingly difficult in recent years, which only increases the risks of unsafe abortions.

In the hope that you will decide to ensure access to safe medical care and protect women, we assure you of our full availability and expertise in reproductive health.

The Independent Midwives Association

The FILIA Centre

The Coalition for Gender Equality

The Network for Preventing and Combating Violence against Women

SIGNATURES:

Coaliția pentru Egalitate de Gen (11 organisations)

- Centrul Parteneriat pentru Egalitate - CPE
- Asociația pentru Libertate și Egalitate de Gen (A.L.E.G.)
- Societatea de Analize Feministe AnA



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- Asociația Front
- Asociația E-Romnja (Asociația pentru Promovarea Drepturilor Femeilor Rome)
- Centrul de Acțiune pentru Egalitate și Drepturile Omului (ACTEDO)
- Centrul de Studii în Idei Politice (CeSIP)
- Asociația PLURAL
- Asociația Ema
- Asociația SEXUL vs BARZA
- Societatea de Educație Contraceptivă și Sexuală S.E.C.S.

Rețeaua pentru prevenirea și combaterea violenței împotriva femeilor (20 de organisations)

Alianța Națională a Organizațiilor Studentești din România - ANOSR (115 organisations)

Asociația Mame pentru Mame

Asociația Girl Up România

Asociația Iele-Sânziene

Asociația MozaiQ LGBT

Tineri pentru Tineri

ECPI - Centrul Euroregional pentru Inițiative Publice

Asociația ACCEPT

Asociația SPICC

Comunitatea WISE

Asociația Transcena

Asociația ART Fusion

Fundația Romanian Angel Appeal

Asociația Sens Pozitiv

Asociația Forum Apulum

Asociația ALUZIVA

Fundația Corona Iași

Asociația UNIC Iași

Asociația pentru Dezvoltare Comunitară Vaslui



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Asociația ECOVAS Vaslui

Comunitatea Declic

Funky Citizens

Fundația Centrul de Mediere și Securitate Comunitară (CMSC)

Asociația Romanian Women's Lobby (RoWL)

Fundația Comunitară Țara Făgărașului

Asociația Femeilor Profesioniste Galați

Fundația Comunitară București

Fundația Comunitară Buzău

Asociația de Ajutor AMURTEL Romania

Asociația Societatea Studenților în Medicină din București (SSMB)

Fundația Comunitară Sibiu

Alianța Națională a Organizațiilor Studențești din România (ANOSR)

Abortion Support Network

Asociația "Pepardes zieds", Letonia

FEDERA, Polonia

Doctors for Choice, Malta

Asociația Suedeză pentru Drepturi Sexuale și Reproductive (RFSU), Suedia

Sensoa, Centrul Flamand de Expertiză în Sănătatea Sexuală, Belgia

Rutgers, Țările de Jos

Centrul Albanez pentru Populație și Dezvoltare

Cassa delle Donne di Milano, Italia

Coordinamento Nazionale Se non ora quando?, Italia

Asociația Daneză pentru Planificare Familială, Danemarca

Medecins du monde

Sedera - Federacion Planification Familiar

International Planned Parenthood Federation (31 de organisations)

ASTRA Network - Central and Eastern European Network for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (41 de organisations)

FONPC - Federația Organizațiilor Neguvernamentale pentru Copil (33 organisations)