



October 16th, 2017

Prime Minister of the Republic of Lithuania

Gedimino pr. 11
01103 Vilnius
Lithuania

Dear Mr. Saulius Skvernelis,

On behalf of ASTRA Network we are writing to you to express our deepest concern about the draft law proposed by the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania, aiming to severely restrict access to legal abortion in Lithuania.

ASTRA Network is a regional coalition of 39 non-governmental organizations from 21 countries of Central and Eastern Europe, advocating for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and gender equality. We urge you to not support the draft law due to the serious consequences of introducing such legislation.

If the proposed law is passed in its current form it will enable abortion in two cases only - when there is evident threat to the woman's health or life or in cases of rape. Lithuania will become one of the very few countries in Europe with such a strict law on abortion, alongside Poland, Malta and Ireland. Such a law will severely impact the lives of women and also further contribute to stigma associated with abortion.

Prohibiting abortion pushes it underground and gives rise to unsafe abortions, violating women's rights to life, health and bodily autonomy. It also conflicts with women's rights to privacy, confidentiality and non-discrimination, as protected by the international and regional human rights obligations which Lithuania has committed to respect. Moreover, restricting access to abortion never reduces the number of abortions women resort to. According to the most recent research by the World Health Organization and Guttmacher Institute¹ in countries where abortion is permitted only to save the woman's life or preserve her physical health, only 1 in 4 abortions are safe; whereas, in countries where abortion is legal on broader grounds, nearly 9 in 10 abortions are safe. If it really is women's health and wellbeing that is of a concern to the Lithuanian Government then the efforts should be directed towards making sure that sexual and reproductive health and rights are fulfilled, respected and protected. That can only happen by securing access to safe abortion and modern methods of contraception, high standards of antenatal care and granting young people access to comprehensive sexuality education in schools.

¹ www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2017/unsafe-abortions-worldwide/en

Further, we also urge you to ensure that all key stakeholders, including civil society and women's rights organizations, be consulted and actively involved from the outset in any future discussions about abortion legislation. We also call on the Lithuanian Government to guarantee that any law with bearing on women's sexual and reproductive health respects women's rights and includes protection for informed and non-coercive decision-making, in compliance with regional and international human rights and medical standards.

On behalf of ASTRA Network we kindly ask you to take all these issues into consideration and reject the draft law on abortion.

Yours sincerely,

Marta Szostak



ASTRA Coordinator

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