



ANNUAL REPORT 2020



Federation
for Women
and Family
Planning

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SUMMARY OF 2020



In 2020, the worldwide spread of the COVID-19 pandemic had a huge impact on women's reproductive health all over the world. According to the data of Marie Stopes International, 9.5 million women lost access to abortion and contraception.¹

While many European countries decided to make it easier to access medical abortion, others tried to restrict their abortion laws or ban abortion entirely. The Commissioner of Human Rights of the Council of Europe appealed to all European states to ensure access to reproductive health services during the pandemic.

In Poland, not only women's needs when it comes to a minimum level of reproductive rights and health services were ignored, but attempts to further restrict the anti-abortion law were undertaken. The ultraconservative organizations used the pandemic as a good opportunity to deal with the "problem" of reproductive rights.

In April, two civic legislative initiatives were discussed in the parliament. The "Stop Abortion" draft bill aimed to drastically restrict access to legal abortion by making it impossible to terminate pregnancies in case of severe fetal malformation and/or incurable disease.

The second draft bill, called „Stop Pedophilia,” proposed changes in the Penal Code, namely imprisonment for sex educators and others teaching sexuality education according to the World Health Organizations standards.

1 Our response to the Covid-19 crisis, <https://mariestopes.org/covid>.

There was more to come. On 22 October, the [“Constitutional Tribunal” issued a decision on the unconstitutionality of abortion on embryo-pathological grounds](#). As of the end of the year, the decision has not yet been published in the Journal of Laws, which means the Family Planning Act of 1993 is still standing in full. The upcoming publication will result in an almost total ban on abortion in Poland. The Federation’s board published a statement on this issue, vowing to continue to help women in accessing legal abortion in the country.

It looks as if the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 was a fruitful and propitious time for fundamentalists in Poland. It is worth noting that they enjoyed the support of governmental institutions and the ruling coalition. The majority of people of Poland, however, mobilized by pro-women groups and organizations, reacted and stood up decisively. Despite the pandemic restrictions and police repression, massive demonstrations and marches were held all over the country. The Polish women also received a lot of support from the European Union institutions, many international NGOs, and pro-women groups from all over the world.

The Federation implemented its strategic program, but due to the pandemic, as well as the unexpected events endangering reproductive rights, we had to adjust our activities to the current social and political situation.



LEGAL ACTIVITIES

The Legal Team

[The Federation's Legal Team](#) was initiated in 2008. Last year, it continued to monitor the state of abortion access in Polish public hospitals, and the procedures they follow, when it comes to patients who want to terminate pregnancy. Moreover, the Team collaborated with Members of Parliament from the Left on interpellations concerning reproductive health services, as well as the Ministry of Health's response to those interpellations. After the decision of the "Constitutional Tribunal" to ban abortions on embryo-pathological grounds, the Team intervened in hospitals, which illegally (i.e. prior to the decision's publication in the Journal of Laws) refused to perform such abortions. What is more, the Team obtained a statement from the Ministry of Health that until the decision is published, abortions due to fetal malformations should be performed. The Team also submitted an inquiry to the Ministry of Health on abortion access during the coronavirus pandemic, as well as prepared a campaign on the necessity to decriminalize abortion that is to repeal the provisions providing for sanctions for assisting in extra-statutory abortions. In April, the Team monitored the parliamentary vote on the "Stop Abortion" civic draft bill, which aimed to ban abortions on the grounds of fetal malformations, and prepared an appeal to Members of Parliament to reject the draft bill.

B.B. v. Poland

The Legal Team provided help in the form of professional legal representatives to the complainant in the European Court of Human Rights *B.B. v. Poland* case. In this case, Ms. B.B. was unlawfully deprived of access to abortion, despite the fact that the fetus had been diagnosed with severe and irreversible defects. As a result, Ms. B.B. was forced to carry the pregnancy to term and give birth to a terminally-ill baby, who died shortly after. Therefore, the ban on inhuman and degrading treatment was violated, along with her right to privacy. In this case, the Federation as a civic society organization, issued an *amicus curiae* to the ECHR, pointing to the systemic lack of abortion access in Poland and violation of the complainant's human rights.

Sexuality education court case

The Team continued to handle a court case regarding violation of personal rights of a parent, who suggested sex ed classes in their child's school. As a result, the parent was accused of "introducing the sexualization of children to school". The case is currently pending.

Fighting the bloody banners

The Team continued to provide counseling concerning the so-called bloody anti-abortion banners, which have been raising concern and objection of the inhabitants of Polish cities and towns. The Federation's lawyer prepared complaint templates which can be found on our website.

Legal counseling

The Federation's Legal Team provided counseling to patients, who had unsuccessfully tried to obtain a guaranteed health service in public facilities. The Team helped patients with complaints and they resulted in favorable decisions of Medical Committees. The Team also prepared another court cases concerning the violation of personal rights (family planning) by an arbitrary and medically unjustified refusal of abortion.

ADVOCACY AND MONITORING

Around abortion

National statistics

Traditionally, like every year, we asked the Ministry of Health for data regarding abortions in Poland in the past year (through the access to public information mechanism.)

The data says that 1 110 abortions were performed in Polish hospitals in 2019, including 1 074 on embryo-pathological grounds. However, as many as 90 per cent of public facilities do not provide the legal and guaranteed health service of termination pregnancy.

#PrześwietlamySzpitale (X-raying Hospitals)

In 2020, we continued our abortion access monitoring action of in particular cities and/or regions of Poland. Through requests for public information, we inquire hospitals about whether they perform abortions and the procedures they follow. We report unlawful practices, such as refusals of due procedures or systemic violation of patients' rights to the Patient Rights Ombudsman and/or the National Health Fund.

Against the "Stop Abortion" draft bill

We prepared a statement and an appeal to Members of Parliament to reject the shameful draft bill. Then, we initiated a mobilization action aimed at the public opinion, which involved mass e-mailing MPs and urging them to vote against the "Stop Abortion" draft bill. More [here](#).

Furthermore, we alarmed the international community, which resulted in many appeals issued, among others, by Members of the European Parliament, the Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations experts, and over 100 NGOs and networks of NGOs. More [here](#).

The success of our objection to the Patient Rights Ombudsman

On behalf of a patient, we submitted an objection to a refusal to perform an abortion on the grounds of lethal fetal defects. The Medical Committee by the Patient Rights Ombudsman ruled that the patient had the right to legal abortion.

Abortion access during the pandemic

We inquired the Ministry of Health about how it was going to reorganize the public health system in order to ensure continuity of pregnancy terminations during the coronavirus pandemic.

After the October decision of the „Constitutional Tribunal“

- Until the end of the year, we helped over 100 women, who encountered refusals of legal abortions in hospitals.
- We launched an extra phone and email gynecological duty hours.
- We prepared a list of initiatives and organizations, which help people who need abortions.
- We intervened in hospitals, which unlawfully stopped performing abortions due to fetal defects after 22 October. As a result of our interventions, the majority of hospitals recanted and resumed services. Additionally, we received a written confirmation from the Ministry of Health that the Tribunal's decision cannot be ground for refusal as it had not yet taken effect, and that abortion is a guaranteed health service, meaning that hospitals contracted by the National Health Fund are obliged to perform it.
- We participated in the Women's Strike demonstrations, reporting on social media.
- Bearing in mind the safety of protesters, we prepared a list of lawyers willing to help in cases of arrests and detentions.
- We sent several thousand pro-abortion stickers, posters, and badges to activists all over Poland, as well as some abroad.
- We participated in the works on [resolution of the European Parliament on the *de facto* ban on the right to abortion in Poland](#) and we talked to MEPs from the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats.
- We sent information to the UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, as well as to other relevant UN expert bodies on the situation of women in Poland in context of the "CT"'s decision.
- In cooperation with international organizations, we engaged in international advocacy on the EU and UN level.
- Together with the Great Coalition for Equality and Choice member organizations we sent a letter to the relevant commissioners from the European Commission on the issue of expanding the scope of the Article 7 proceedings against Poland and including fundamental rights, as well as a letter to the UN Special Rapporteurs on police violence and repressions against protesters. More [here](#).
- We obtained numerous expressions of solidarity from international organizations, the Council of Europe bodies (Commissioner of Human Rights), the EU bodies (a EC Commissioner and many other EU politicians condemned the Polish government's actions on abortion and the rule of law), and the UN ([independent experts](#)). More [here](#) and [here](#).

Around the conscience clause

Petition on the obligation to provide information

We initiated a petition to Members of Parliament for restoration of the obligation of hospitals to refer patients to places where they can receive help, when the doctor refuses to provide medical services for ideological reasons. More [here](#).

Around contraception

E-prescriptions for emergency contraception

At the beginning of the year, there was a media storm around remote issuing of prescriptions for emergency contraception. The media tried to negatively portray people, who remotely issue e-prescriptions without specialization in gynecology. As an organization supporting reproductive rights, we issued a statement opposing such a witch-hunt. We are in favor of lifting barriers in access to emergency contraception.

Intervention to the Chief Pharmaceutical Inspectorate

In reaction to numerous reports of problems in availability of contraception and hormone replacement therapy in pharmacies, we intervened to the Chief Pharmaceutical Inspectorate.

Survey on access to emergency contraception

Together with the Doctors for Women initiative and the Ponton Group, we launched an online survey, which aims to map barriers in access to emergency contraception in order to advocate for better access.



Presentation of the Contraception Atlas 2020 – Warsaw, October 2020.

Around gynecological care

Gynecological care for girls

In response to reports of refusals to admit underage girls to gynecological clinics, we inquired the National Health Fund whether there had been any changes in regulations or in the system of funding that worsened the availability of gynecological care for teens.

Prenatal diagnostics

In response to numerous reports of non-compliance with the current recommendations of the Polish Society of Gynecologists and Obstetricians, we prepared a list of changes that should be implemented in the Polish system, in order for prenatal testing to be more accessible, reliable, and in compliance with latest medical trends.

Other

Letter to the Presidium of Sejm on the quality of debate over civic draft bills

We believe that the Members of Parliament should not use misconceptions and distortions, and show ignorance of scientific facts in their speeches during parliamentary debates. Our letter was supported by over a hundred NGOs and informal groups that make up the Coalition for Equality and Choice.

We also launched a mailing action entitled "I condemn hate speech and fake news during parliamentary debates."

Advocacy on the international level

UN Human Rights Council in Geneva

[The 43rd session of the HRC](#) (March 2020) – we presented three statements: to the Special Rapporteur on cultural rights' report, to the Special Rapporteur on people with disabilities' report, and a statement on the situation in Poland on the occasion of International Women's Day.

[The 44th session of the HRC](#) (June 2020) – we presented a statement on the issue of Poland's non-compliance with the UN Working Group on women's rights' recommendations after its visit to Poland in 2018 and on the last events in Poland indicating to more violations of women's rights.

[The 45th session of the HRC](#) (September 2020) – we presented the Great Coalition for Equality and Choice's statement on the occasion of Safe Abortion Day; a joint statement on abortion of NGOs, including the Federation, was presented (coordinated by our partner organization – the Sexual Rights Initiative.)

UN Commission on the Status of Women

Due to the pandemic, the [64th session](#) of the UN Commission on the Status of Women was not held as usual. The Federation, together with the Union Women's Center of Georgia, the „Women and Modern World“ Social Charitable Center of Azerbaijan, and the Women's Rights Center of Armenia, with the use of our ECOSOC statuses, submitted a statement on the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform.

Council of Europe

The Federation has been monitoring the implementation of European Court of Human Rights' judgements by Poland in the cases: *Tysic v. Poland*, *R.R. v. Poland*, *P. and S. v. Poland*. All those judgements include recommendations for changing the legal system and practice in Poland in terms of observance of women's rights and effective access to reproductive health service.

Based on the description of the state of women's rights in Poland, prepared by the Federation, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe made recommendations to Poland concerning actions aimed at implementations of these judgements. More [here](#).

European Parliament

The Federation participated in the works on the European Parliament's [resolution on the de facto ban on the right to abortion in Poland](#) and the dialogue with MEPs from the Socialist & Democratic alliance on the situation in Poland.

GREVIO

The Federation prepared an alternative report to GREVIO, a group of experts monitoring the state of observance of the Istanbul Convention. The report concerns issues that the

Federation is involved in, namely reproductive and sexual health in the context of people who experience sexual violence and who are protected by the Convention.

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Projects and campaigns

The webinar series „We know our rights and will not hesitate to use them!”

Due to the pandemic, we had to move the second edition of our educational meetings to the virtual space. Thanks to the financial support of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, we were able to organize 6 webinars (on reproductive health and patient rights, on abortion, on the conscience clause, on contraception, on prenatal testing, and about the opponents of reproductive rights in Poland and the world.) The recordings are [available on our YouTube channel](#).

#CałegoCiała (Whole Body) podcast

Since July 2019, every 4 weeks we broadcast a podcast on the of [Radio Kapitał](#). We speak freely about various aspects of sexual and reproductive health and rights. The 2020 episodes were about:

- safe sex [audio video](#)
- giving birth and rights of pregnant people [audio video](#)
- the Great Coalition for Equality and Choice on the Ordo Iuris Institute [audio video](#)
- the fight for abortion and sexuality education in April 2020 [audio video](#)
- the parenthood of intellectually disabled people in Poland [audio video](#)
- menstruation [audio video](#)
- the Istanbul Convention [audio video](#)
- abortion in Poland and the world on the occasion of the Safe Abortion Day [audio video](#)
- the late professor Maria Janion and her legacy [audio video](#)



The #CałegoCiała episode on Maria Janion – the Federation’s director Krystyna Kacpura talks with Kazimiera Szczuka.

- the Great Coalition for Equality and Choice [audio video](#)
- the Polish “Constitutional Tribunal”’s decision on abortion [audio video](#)

Informational and educational campaigns

#ProaborcyjnePrawoISprawiedliwość (Pro-abortion Law & Justice)

In the middle of September, two weeks before Safe Abortion Day, we launched a



campaign entitled *Pro-abortion Law & Justice*. We rented 20 city light posters on the streets of Warsaw that promoted our abortion manifesto (is [available to sign](#) by everyone on our website.) More [here](#).

„Abortion Facts”

The campaign’s aim was to collect facts and bust myths, lies, and fake news on abortion as a medical service. It consisted of a series of infographics presenting facts about termination of pregnancy – based on scientific research, medical professionals, and position of international organizations.

Pro-decriminalization of abortion

The campaign was promoted with infographics presenting legal arguments in favor of decriminalization and hashtag #WykreślićAborcjęzKodeksuKarnego (Strike Abortion from the Penal Code.)

„8 Rules of Conscious Patients”

The campaign’s aim was to promote knowledge on patients’ rights and methods of exercising them. In series of 8 infographics we presented 8 rules of conscious patients – what to do when we are refused due services and our rights are violated.

„Contraception During the Pandemic”

At the beginning of the pandemic, in cooperation with doctors, we prepared an informational campaign on how to get a prescription for hormonal contraception in times of difficult access to stationary medical services.

“The ABC of Prescriptions”

We also decided to present a comprehensive overview about prescriptions – both electronic and paper ones, and bust myths on remote issuing of prescriptions on emergency contraception, as well as promote the fact that some midwives and nurses can also issue them.

IUDs insertion refunded by the NHF

We prepared a mini-handbook on the enforcement of the guaranteed services of insertion and removal of IUDs.

Rights and miscarriage/abortion

We prepared a comprehensive and approachable list and description of patients’ rights in case of miscarriage or abortion.

„Did you know that...?”

It was a mini-campaign on international commitments of Poland in the area of reproductive health. A series of infographics presented the declarations that the Polish state made on ensuring access to abortion and sexuality education.

Campaign on fundamentalism

In response to another manipulative report of the Ordo Iuris Institute’s report on abortion, we prepared an [article](#) dealing with its main manipulations and lies.

In another [article](#), we alarmed that the violence of anti-abortion organizations is intensifying and their goal is to make Poland a religious state. We appealed to people and organizations to unify and undertake long-term, comprehensive, and interdisciplinary actions to fight ultraconservatism.

COUNSELING ACTIVITY AND SUPPORT FOR WOMEN

Helpline

The Federation's [Helpline](#) has been functioning non-stop since 1991. Last year, our experts (sexuality educators, psychologists, gynecologists, and a lawyer) answered over 1 000 calls. The callers most frequently asked questions concerning sexuality education (26.6%) and sought psychological advice (23.9%). Inquiries about contraception made constituted 10.3% of calls, abortion – 8.2%, law – 5.8%, sexological matters – 4.9%, LGBT issues – 3.%, pregnancy – 3.6%, violence – 2.6%, STIs and STDs – 0.5%. 16 per cent of all calls were about other issues. Women made up 54 percent of all callers.

Extra gynecological counseling

In response to the crisis situation of patients after the decision on abortion of the "Constitutional Tribunal" of 22 October, we launched [extra phone and email duty hours](#) of a doctor of gynecology.

The Legal Team

Last year, the Team's lawyers provided counseling for patients, who tried to obtain guaranteed sexual and reproductive health services. They provided assistance in submitting patient objections, which resulted in favorable decisions of Medical Committees. The Team also continued to provide counseling concerning the so-called bloody anti-abortion banners, which raise concern and objection of many inhabitants of Polish cities. Furthermore, the Legal Team received inquiries on issues such as patient rights, rights of pregnant employees, penalties for abortion, post-miscarriage benefits, as well as sexual violence.

PUBLISHING AND INTERNET ACTIVITY

Informational and educational publications

Medical abortion



On International Women's Day, we premiered our [manual](#) about medical abortion – an update and continuation of the Federation's first brochure on the abortion pill from 2010. The guide is based on current scientific research and World Health Organization recommendations.

Emergency contraception for medical staff (... and not only)

The [brochure](#) was created in cooperation with the [Doctors for Women](#) initiative.

Gynecological care for refugees and migrants

Asked by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, we prepared a leaflet on reproductive health protection in Poland. The publication, which was also translated to English and Russian, discusses fundamental issues such as contraception, prenatal testing and diagnostics, and termination of pregnancy. More [here](#).

Social media

The most actively used social media channel was our [Facebook page](#). Apart from news on reproductive rights or the Federation's activities, we published numerous informational and educational infographics. The number of people we reach through

Facebook has been rising steadily. In 2020 it was an unprecedented rise in comparison with the previous year – over 50 per cent. Currently our fan page has 34 000 followers. The biggest number are people aged 25-34 (32%) and 35-44 (25%.) Aside from Facebook, we used our other channels – [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [YouTube](#), as well as the [website](#).

“I have the right” newsletter

Every two months, almost a thousand people receive our newsletter. In 2020, we published [five issues](#), which talked about reproductive rights in Poland and the world, the Federation’s activities, as well as medical and legal information, and SRHR literature recommendations. We promote each issue through our social media channels.

ACTIVISM

The *Federaktyw* group

In June we launched a Facebook [group](#), whose task is to gather pro-choice people, who feel close to the Federation’s mission, vision, and activities, and who want to engage in the fight for sexual and reproductive rights in Poland. The group is supposed to be a platform of discussion, initiating ideas, and promoting activism, as well as information exchange.

FEDERATION IN THE MEDIA

In 2020, we were featured 200 times in various media outlets, including foreign ones such as CNN, *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, *The Times*, *el Periodico*, the BBC website, Politico, and *Paris Match*. You can find all entries in the [Federation in the media](#) section of our website.



WIELKA KOALICJA ZA RÓWNOŚCIĄ I WYBOREM

THE GREAT COALITION FOR EQUALITY AND CHOICE

The Great Coalition for Equality and Choice (*Wielka Koalicja za Równość i Wyborem*) is going to be 4 years old this year. In 2020, it was very active and became widely recognizable as a result. The Coalition became a powerful intervention and advocacy tool that comprises of over [100 NGOs and informal groups](#).

Advocacy

- against the closure of the gynecological ward in the Ustrzyki Dolne hospital – letters to local authorities were sent
- against the homophobic resolutions and declarations adopted on various local levels – letters sent to governmental representatives in the regions
- on the situation of women and minority groups during the coronavirus pandemic – letter sent to the Minister of Health and the Minister of Family Affairs
- against the shameful “Stop Abortion” draft bill – a letter was sent to MPs
- in favor of the Istanbul Convention – the Coalition’s statement was sent to the European Commission
- on the need for the President’s signature under the law imposing an immediate isolation of a perpetrator of violence from their victim
- on safe abortion – a Great Coalition statement on the occasion of the Safe Abortion Day was delivered during the 45th session of the UN Human Rights Council
- in favor of the Constitutional Tribunal calling off its 22 October sitting and the withdrawal of the request for the Tribunal to verify abortion on embryo-pathological grounds with the Constitution
- in favor of a decisive reaction to the recurring instances of violation of the rule of law in Poland – a letter to representatives of EU institutions was sent

Monitoring

- monitoring of homophobic and transphobic resolutions and declarations in Polish towns and regions
- analysis of the situation of women in Poland during the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting restrictions of their reproductive rights, as well as threats related to gender
- monitoring of manipulations of the Ordo Iuris Institute and threats resulting from its activities
- monitoring of the presidential campaign in terms of women's rights issues, reproductive rights, and LGBT rights
- monitoring of violations of human rights during the pro-abortion protests and demonstrations

Education

- informational campaign on threats resulting from adopting the "Stop Abortion" draft bill
- distribution of brochures and leaflets on reproduction rights
- educational campaign on violence against women and the Istanbul Convention
- publication of a report on the manipulation strategies of the Ordo Iuris Institute:



- campaign on the manipulations of the Ordo Iuris Institute and threats resulting from its activities

Integration and activist support

- promoting the activities of member organizations via the Great Coalition social media channels
- establishment of a nation-wide database of lawyers willing to help people arrested during the protests
- an guide for protesters with helpful tips and valuable information
- the Coalition participated in statements of other organizations on issues such as the Constitutional Tribunal's abortion decision, police repression, or perinatal care
- a series of educational and supportive webinars for the Coalition members after the Constitutional Tribunal's decision

Promotion and communication

- an [interactive map](#) of the Coalition's member groups and initiatives
- over 20 organizations and informal groups joined the Coalition, based both in Poland and abroad (Polish-émigré groups)
- more than 100 mentions in the media
- a new social media channel was launched – the [Great Coalition's Instagram](#)
- over the course of last year, the number of people reached by the Great Coalition's content in the social media channels almost tripled – currently in total more than 10 000 followers
- the Coalition participated in statements of other organizations on issues such as the Constitutional Tribunal's abortion decision, police repression, or perinatal care
- the Coalition joined the Batory Foundation network of NGOs
- WKRW initiated cooperation with experts on fundamentalist movements

GRUPA PONTON

Edukacja Seksualna

THE PONTON GROUP

Introduction

The year 2020 was full of challenges, hard work and changes for the **Ponton Group**. One of the most relevant factors that defined our activity and triggered numerous problems was undoubtedly the pandemic. We are extremely proud of the fact that despite the big challenges on many levels, we managed to stay active in the field of sex education and at the same time, to support each other in these difficult times.

We started this year being full of hope, zeal and motivation. In January and February, we managed to organize the 2019 evaluation meeting, as well as the 2020 strategy meeting. None of us could suspect how many of our plans would have to be changed or postponed! It turned out quite soon that the February meeting was our last live meeting in 2020. For the sake of our safety, all the subsequent meetings concerning planning and organization took place only remotely. We are satisfied with what we managed to achieve, despite the unfavourable conditions. Although Ponton Group was unable to conduct typical workshops in schools, we remained active in the field of counselling, advocacy and supporting the youth.

Counseling

On our website, there is an online forum that has been functioning for years, where one can ask anonymous questions concerning contraception, relationships, sexuality, pregnancy, infections or puberty. In 2020, our forum gained a new graphic design – the improved layout facilitates not only moderating, but also placing new posts in appropriate categories. It's beneficial to both the users and the volunteers who answer the questions.

Although the forum had to be suspended due to technical issues concerning the registration, it is still open. The existing questions and answers serve as a precious knowledge base, from this year on in a more modern and accessible form.

Owing to the above-mentioned breakdown, counselling has mainly moved to the comments section under the articles on our website. Throughout the year, approximately 350 questions were asked that way, and they were all being successively answered by our volunteers.

Most common questions young people tend to ask concern invariably the possibility of getting pregnant. Young people need to be assured if various activities they engage in (for instance petting) may lead to fertilization. One can easily notice they lack some basic knowledge on the process of getting pregnant. In response to the returning questions we published an article about petting.

Similarly to the previous years, this year again, despite the pandemic, the educators from Ponton Group were available to answer the questions on our helpline each Friday from 4 to 8 PM at telephone number 22 635 93 92. Almost 40% of all the phone calls (there is also a psychologist, a lawyer and a gynaecologist available on other days) were answered by Ponton Group.

Most frequently the questions concerned basic matters. Despite the popularization and de-stigmatization of the topic of period, the menstrual cycle remains something enigmatic for many Poles. The callers often needed to consult their doubts about whether the sexual contacts they had engaged in might be qualified as risky, both in terms of STIs and unwanted pregnancy. A great number of questions related to contraception, including using its specified types. It shows very clearly that even those who have already had a gynaecologist appointment lack the everyday chance to consult a specialist and ask him or her questions regarding for example omission of a pill. Also, we received numerous calls from male teenagers and young men who very often indicated that never before had they had an opportunity to gain reliable information about topics relating to puberty and psycho-sexual education.

Another group of questions were those related to the body; we were able to see a huge need to comfort the callers that everything was fine with them. After a longer conversation, it usually turned out that the teenagers were really concerned about how much their physique differed from the bodies promoted in the media, social media as well as in porn – according to our observations, the latter still serves as a ‘source of information’ for the youth.

Website

On our website, we have also published more reviews of the books for people at different ages. Teenagers can read about ‘Consent: The New Rules of Sex Education’ by Jennifer Lang or the comic book ‘Girlsplaining’ by Katja Klengel In 2020, 16 new articles appeared on our website. They explored key topics concerning sexuality, and they constitute a reliable source of knowledge for the youth. Reading these texts, young people can learn more about for example bodily fluids, menstruation, sexting, homophobia and transphobia, first sexual experiences, phimosis or the LGBTQ+

community.; their parents can read for instance about 'Uniesienie spódnicy' by Voca Ilnicka as well as the book for younger kids 'Kisses, YUK!' by Barbara Rose and Volker Fredrich.

Social media

The online presence is currently a vital part of Ponton's activity. Thanks to that, we expand our audience and reach not only to residents of Warsaw, but also people living across the whole country and Polish-speaking people living abroad. Social media is not merely an addition to teenagers' lives; it is a space where a large part of interactions take place, so it is extremely important for us to provide ourselves with recognition and access to these channels.

Instagram

In 2020, we had to move much of our work online and it gave us an opportunity to further develop our social media accounts. On Instagram, we continued our campaign about first times to later touch on topics such as hygiene, body fluids, abortion and pornography. We used Instastories to elaborate on content shared in posts and answer questions from our followers.

We shared information about important events, Ponton Group's activities and content we found interesting. We were active online during strikes and protests after the Constitutional Tribunal's decision to ban embryopathological abortion on October 22. We also organized an online protest called #WiedzaNieWięzienie (#KnowledgeNotPrison) against bans on sex education proposed within the scope of the "Stop Paedophilia" bill. In 2020, we gained 3.1k new followers and our account is now followed by 9.5k people.



Facebook

As already mentioned, in 2020 we moved many of our activities online and among others to Facebook. Thanks to regular posts and original content we managed to gain 3.5k new followers and by the end of December our page was liked by 18.6k people. Among the most popular posts there were two online classes about contraception and periods conducted by one of our volunteers during the first lockdown in March.



In April, we initiated a national campaign to protest against a popular initiative that proposed penalties for sex educators working with the youth under the age of

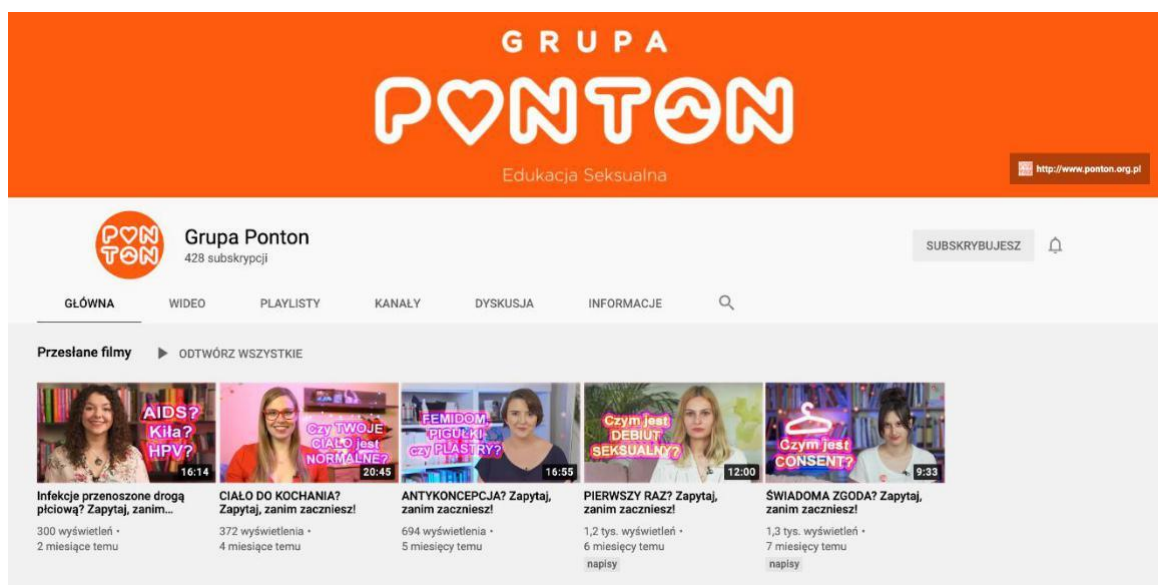
Our Facebook event, which was the main communication channel of the campaign, was followed by 1.5k people. During the protest we came up with and promoted the #WiedzaNieWięzenie (#KnowledgeNotPrison) hashtag using memes, posts and a profile picture frame. Our hashtag was later used by other NGOs and private profiles to promote content supporting the protest.

From June 25 and to November 9, we used Facebook to promote our new YouTube channel and our first campaign "Zapytaj, zanim zaczniesz" ("Ask before you start"). Each of the 5 videos was promoted via its own Facebook event and dedicated posts on our main page.

Toward the end of 2020, we participated in the international campaign "16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence". We created 9 original posts containing information about gender-based violence, the campaigns history and reproductive health. We ended the campaign on December 6 and kept posting reminders about our forum and helpline. We also used Facebook to promote and collect data for our future report on sex education in Poland.

YouTube

In 2020, after months of planning and preparation, we restored our slightly outdated YouTube channel. We managed to do that thanks to financial help from the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. Between June and November 2020, we posted 5 educational videos in a series entitled "Zapytaj, zanim zaczniesz" ("Ask before you start"). In these videos we explored topics such as consent, sexual initiation, contraception, body, and STIs. During each premiere, our volunteers were available to the viewers via live chat to answer any questions they might have on the topic discussed. Currently 423 people are subscribed to our channel and the most popular video was viewed 1337 times. We plan to continue working on our channel and using this platform.



Workshops

Workshops conducted in public schools have always been the main activity for Ponton Group. Currently, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most of our activity had to be moved online (counselling via social media and email). For most of the year, young people didn't have regular classes at schools, so we tried to adapt to these new circumstances and provide them with online educational materials.

As a result, we did not conduct any classes in person at schools. However, we managed to organize two webinars during the first lockdown in early spring. These were mainly lectures, but we provided our viewers with the opportunity to ask questions live and

interact even after the class was over. We acknowledge that this level of interaction cannot be compared to in- person workshops, but they were sufficient considering the circumstances.

Public appearances



7.03.2020. One of our volunteers, Agata Kozłowska, participated in a debate along with Barbara Ewa Baran before the viewing of „LOVESEX – TALES OF YOUNG” by Anja Kvistgaard Marott during the HER Docs Film Festival 2020.

17.09.2020. Our sex educators Antonina Lewandowska i Finka Heynemann participated in the first sitting of the Parliamentary Committee on Sex Education. During the meeting the Children’s Ombudsman was blamed for his behavior and words related to sex education. Moreover, the first foundations

for a new regulation on sex education were established.

18.09.2020. The first reading of the president’s bill restricting the school activity of NGOs was planned for this day. However, representatives of the society were not invited and therefore, MP Agnieszka Dziemianowicz-Bąk led a group of activists, including one of our volunteers Antonina Lewandowska, into the Parliament to stop the proceedings. Their efforts were successful and the project was taken off the agenda.

5.10.2020. Our sex educator Agata Kozłowska participated in a debate entitled “Sex education or education for (a healthy) family life - which one do we need more nowadays?” organized by the “Edukacja: można inaczej” webpage. The other speakers during the debate were Agnieszka Stein and Szymon Grzelak.

15.10.2020. MP Joanna Scheuring-Wielgus along with the Federation for Women and Family Planning and the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual & Reproductive Rights organized the premiere of the “European Contraception Policy Atlas 2020”. The Atlas talks about the (un)availability of



different contraception methods internationally and the reasons for such legislation. One of our volunteers, Antonina Lewandowska, had a speech about the situation in Poland. The general assessment for Poland was very poor with the worst access to contraception in Europe. However, among others, Ponton Group and our website containing reliable information on sexuality and reproductive health helped improve the overall score.

12.11.2020. The „Organizacje społeczne. To działa” initiative organized an online meeting entitled “Seksualność to nie seks. | Rzetelna rozmowa o edukacji seksualnej” (*Sexuality doesn't equal sex. A comprehensive conversation on sex education*). It was an opportunity to listen to two of our educators – Patrycja Wonatowska (who hosted the meeting) and Maciej Pilch (as well as Agata Loewe, PhD and Marcin Tabar, Instagram famous as @edukator_seksulany), who talked about what psychosexual education was and why people shouldn't be afraid of it.

14.12.2020. Two of our educators, Agata Kozłowska and Alina Synakiewicz, held a lecture and a workshop entitled “Rozwój psychoseksualny dzieci i młodzieży. Wyzwania i trudności” (*Psychosexual development of children and adolescents. Challenges and difficulties*), as part of the “Baza Kompetencji 2020” seminar organized by Konsorcjum Nowa Baza. It was a seminar for professionals working with children and teenagers.

Advocacy

The Ponton Group has been actively taking part in the public discussion concerning youth rights and sex education for years. We publish positions and comment on current affairs concerning sex education and youth reproductive health.

This year, we strongly reacted when our work was in danger and children's and teenagers' right to comprehensive education were violated.

[Our position on the lack of any reaction of the Ministry of National Education to teenagers' suicides](#)

[Ponton Group's position on the "Stop Pedophilia" bill 2020](#)

The proposed bills on public praising of minors' engagement in sexual behaviors could forbid sex education classes, as well as conversations on sex with minors. It is a cruel attempt to intimidate sex and anti-discrimination educators, as well as to deny young people their rightful access to health care.

[NGOs statement on the social crisis](#)

[Ponton Group signed an appeal to the authorities \(especially to the Ministry of National Education\) concerning the management of the education system during the pandemic](#)

We have also made statements and gave our opinion in the media, via social media, as well as in private conversations, which are difficult to track, but they constitute an important part of the individual work of Ponton Group's volunteers.

Situation of non-heteronormative individuals

Due to social distancing and epidemiological restrictions, the year 2020 was very mentally challenging for most of us. For non-heteronormative people it was even more difficult because of a mounting smear campaign going on since 2019. There were campaigns promoting false information, there was violence during peaceful protests in the streets, as well as systemic discrimination.

Actions performed by radical conservative organizations, like the PRO – Prawo do życia Foundation, received explicit support from the government, both at the central and the local level. Regional authorities have kept accepting the anti-LGBT Charter of Family Rights (Karta Praw Rodziny) prepared by Ordo Iuris. Moreover, the government has praised local authorities which adopted anti-LGBT resolutions in 2019.

We have also observed a rise in the activity of lorries driving around towns displaying posters and loudly playing voice advertisements encouraging hate towards LGBT people and connecting them to pedophilia. In 2020, they were escorted by police squads, which prevented citizens from stopping the lorries and resulted in fines given to protesters.

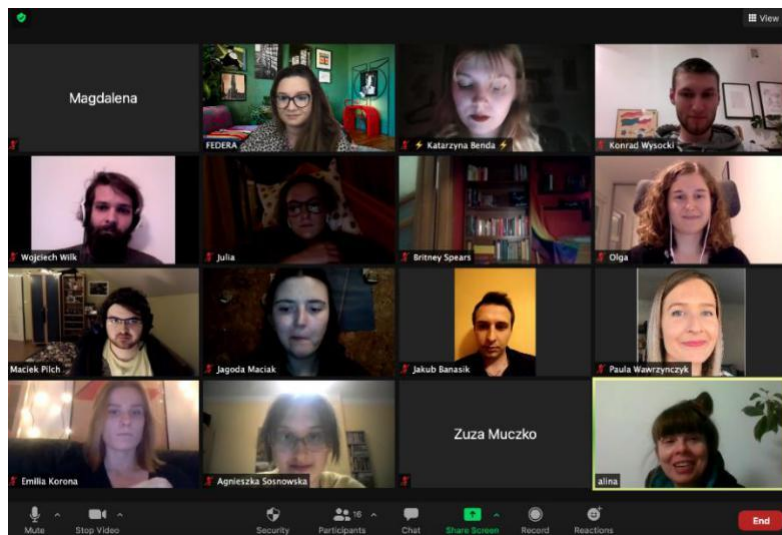
The rainbow symbol has started to be treated as offensive. The government has been protecting monuments to a greater extent than the rights of LGBTQ+ Poles. The police illegally abducted people accused of desecrating statues with pride flags, whereas wearing a rainbow bag has been enough of a reason to be booked. A new Minister of National Education has been appointed, known for publicly dehumanizing non-heteronormative people. Local education boards have sent out letters to schools discrediting *Tęczowy Piątek* (Pride Friday), an educational and solidarity action.

Transgender people have been struggling with exclusionary language used by some of the groups whose struggles they themselves had supported. There has been a notable pushback against calling the protest against the new abortion law "the strike of women and people with uteri". Such phrase would include transgender persons who are able to get pregnant and may need an abortion, despite not being women.

Given the situation, it was essential to support the LGBTQ+ people so they wouldn't feel alone, as well as educating everyone affected by the hateful disinformation campaigns. As Ponton Group, we addressed both. We joined the support action for the Stop Bullshit collective, while posting reliable information about gender and psychosexual orientation on our website and social media. When writing about bodies, we have tried to use gender neutral language that would include everyone, regardless of their gender. Ponton's volunteers participated in numerous marches and protests despite the pandemic, not only those connected to the delegalization of abortion, but also those showing solidarity with LGBTQ+ people.

Internal work

In order to be able to offer sex education that meets high standards, Ponton volunteers keep undergoing internal training. Such meetings not only help improving medical knowledge but also serve as integration, organization and project meetings. We learn from each other and from experts to expand our knowledge and practice skills necessary to educate others.



Supervision for counsellors

On September 22nd and November 24th, there were supervision meetings for educators working in the counselling section of Ponton Group. It was an opportunity to professionally discuss the most difficult situations reported by the counsellors, to take a breather and to receive constructive feedback from the team. It requires plenty of effort, patience and time to provide counselling and support in its broadest sense, as well as reliable information in an easy way for young people of all ages.

During the first supervision meeting, we worked out guidelines on how to react to any kind of issue. During the second meeting, we discussed how these guidelines were useful in practice. The results were positive; thanks to introducing these guidelines we've managed to improve the educators' comfort (less prank calls/messages and calls/messages from people outside of Ponton's target), as well as create more space for people in real need of help. During the supervision meetings, we formulated plans for the future, mostly to promote our counselling on a wider scale.

Summary

Our goal for 2020 was to keep up the hard work for sex education and the wellbeing of the youth, despite the hostile political climate. We've never predicted the situation to worsen. Not only did the pandemic start, but also (and above all) we could observe the reprehensible behavior of the ruling party, which threatened (and still does) sex educator

with jail, spearheaded a systemic hate campaign against LGBTQ+ people and provoked the largest protests in years against the stricter anti-abortion law.

Due to the pandemic, we've moved a huge part of our activity to the internet, which was inevitable in order to keep providing young people with support regarding their sexuality. Thanks to that we could focus more on this aspect of our work – through social media presence, our new video resources, online seminars and media appearances. Considering the amount of advice provided, the number of mentions of Ponton Group in the press, on the internet, radio and in television, as well as our increased activity and recognizability during the protests, we are sure that our work is essential, needed, wanted and appreciated.

The online year 2020 turns into 2021, which seems to be another year of remote work and, sadly, struggling against the political narrative in Poland. Our mission will remain to provide the youth with a safe space and support. We know that our work positively affects the wellbeing of young people. The year 2020 has been, without a trace of doubt, extraordinary, difficult, spotted with many saddening events regarding our reproductive rights. However, looking back at our achievements, we dare to be proud and optimistic about the future.





ASTRA NETWORK

ASTRA Network – Central and Eastern Europe Network for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights is a coalition of non-governmental and informal organizations from the CEE region that work together for advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as health care in general. The Network, established in 1999 during a regional meeting hosted by Federation for Women and Family Planning, currently consists of [41 organizations](#) from 21 countries. ASTRA's secretariat is located in Federation's office in Warsaw. Our activity can be followed online: on [ASTRA's website](#), [Facebook fan page](#) and [Twitter account](#).

Regional publication



In February 2020, ASTRA Network's newest report was published –

„The fight hidden in plain sight. Sexual and reproductive health and rights in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia“. The report provides an overview of reproductive rights in 14 countries of the region (Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Latvia, North Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Russia and Romania).

Special emphasis was placed on 6 thematic areas:

- abortion and post-abortion care,
- contraception,
- sexual education,
- prenatal care,
- LGBTQI+ rights,
- gender-based violence.

ASTRA Network takes pride in its part as a network that creates the space for the smaller organizations to share their knowledge – all the chapters were written by local activists, who provide the best expertise when it comes to the situation in their countries. Consequently, the report not only summarizes the legal situation in each of the abovementioned countries, but also offers a unique insight into the actual implementation of law, thus enabling the members of ASTRA's affiliated organizations to present the lived reality of reproduction in their countries.

The volume comprises of 83 chapters and exceeds 100 pages, which makes it the most accurate and up-to-date source of knowledge regarding sexual and reproductive rights in the region

International advocacy, interventions and support

In 2020, ASTRA represented the interests of regional organizations in international bodies and publicized cases of violations and attacks targeting sexual and reproductive rights that required attention from global community. The Network kept the public informed about the attempts to limit the abortion law in Slovakia and the process of tightening the anti-abortion law in Poland. At all times, the organization remained in contact with local activists, actively supporting them by means they indicated as most adequate (by organizing legal consultations with other organizations from the region/the relevant country, publishing official statements, providing and disseminating information, contacting international organizations, etc.)

The Coordinator of ASTRA Network was invited to offer expertise and specific guidance on improving access to reproductive rights for the new Germany's National Sustainable Development - an article on the topic is available here. She was also

invited to comment on the results of the latest Contraception Atlas in the European Parliament, where she explained the reasons for the declining results of Eastern European countries and for Poland being ranked last in the entire study.

Solidarity statements and open letters

In 2020, the Network's member organizations expressed their support for Polish activists twice: for the first time in April, [condemning the Stop Abortion and Stop Pedophilia projects](#), and for [the second time in October](#), with reference to the forthcoming ruling of Polish Constitutional Tribunal on the legality of abortion on the grounds of fetal malformations.

ASTRA also signed the [statement of the Center for Reproductive Rights](#) regarding abortion during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the member organizations with ECOSOC status (including the Federation for Women and Family Planning) expressed their [joint statement](#) at the CSW 64.

New member organization

Although the everyday reality in 2020 was marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, ASTRA continued to grow. A new organization has joined the network – SEXUL vs BARZA (Sex vs. Stork), a Romanian initiative focusing on providing young people with access to reliable sex education. SEXUL vs BARZA constitutes an active participant in the life of the network, providing current information about the public sentiments in the country and reporting activities which limit the access to education and contraception for young people, to name a few examples.

Preparations for the new publication

At the end of the year, work on the organization's new brochure began. It will present the reproductive reality in the time of COVID-19 pandemic, as experienced in each country of the region. The publication is planned for the first quarter of 2021

Monthly newsletter

As in previous years, ASTRA carried out a thorough monitoring of the state of sexual and reproductive rights in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Our monthly newsletters summarized the collected data and remained an important source of information on sexual and reproductive rights in the region. Over 3,000 subscribers and social media followers drew knowledge about reproductive health realities and policies from these bulletins. The information comprised in the newsletter was cited, among

others, by the Center for Reproductive Rights or the International Campaign for Women's Right to Safe Abortion.

SPONSORS

[Open Society Foundation](#) (Women's Rights Program) [International Women's Health Coalition](#)

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