

ANNUAL RAPORT 2018



Federacja
na rzecz
Kobiet
i Planowania
Rodziny

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SUMMARY OF 2018

The year 2018 brought new barriers in access to reproductive health services, but also further consolidation of social forces against backlash and attacks on the fundamental rights of women and various disadvantaged groups. The beginning of the year was a blow to the pro-choice community, which had to witness the mediocre parliamentary debate on two civic draft bills – the progressive and comprehensive “Save Women” and the barbaric “Stop Abortion”. The embarrassing discussion and the fact that the “Save Women” draft bill was rejected, while the “Stop Abortion” one was referred to the committees, sunk faith in the opposition, the purposefulness of a bottom-up legislative initiative, and the point of representative democracy. This event has also sparked mass protests in January, March, and July, when the draft bill was being worked on. Under the social pressure, the Modern parliamentary club submitted its own draft bill on conscious procreation along with the “Save Women” draft law as a parliamentary bill. The Civic Platform announced a “package for women” that retains the current anti-abortion law and adds “extra issues such as IVF, prenatal testing, contraception, and sexuality education.”



March 2018 will undoubtedly go down in history. The history of Polish democracy (impressive, quick mobilization,) of feminism (activists’ voices and strategies) and of politics (shameful behavior of MPs in the Committee of Justice, servilism towards the Episcopate of the Catholic Church, demands of real separation of Church and state.) In reaction to the bishops’ interference in politics, the Polish Women’s Strike organized #WordOnSunday demonstrations in front of curia and dioceses all over the country. The Committee’s favorable opinion and thus the risk of swift passing of the bill, all in the same week, mobilized various communities to organize and promote mass protests under the

slogan **#BlackFriday**. According to the organizers' estimates and unofficial police statistics circa 90,000 people attended the Warsaw march.

In July, under the pressure of the proposal's initiator, Kaja Godek and the Episcopate, the parliamentary Committee of Social Policy and Family began working on "Stop abortion". It triggered a wave of resistance – the Polish Women's Strike and the Warsaw Women's Strike announced protests in front of the Sejm in the capital, as well as in 16 other cities in Poland and four abroad. The Committee eventually decided to refer the draft bill to an extraordinary subcommittee, which consisted of five Law and Justice MPs, two Civic Platform MPs, one Modern MP, and one Kukiz'15 MP. No meeting date of the subcommittee was set until the end of the year.

In 2018 the Constitutional Tribunal failed to review the proposal of a group of MPs to examine the constitutionality of the right to terminate pregnancy due to fetal impairment. In November, just before the one-year anniversary of the proposal's submission, the extremist MPs and anti-choice communities led by Kaja Godek exerted pressure on the Tribunal to issue a decision.

The Polish fundamentalists did not limit their activities to the attempted imposition of the total abortion ban (an indirect result of a possible withdrawal of the embryo-pathological premise from the current Family Planning Act). The extremely conservative lawyers from the Ordo Iuris Institute for Legal Culture slandered the non-governmental organizations advocating for human rights or sexuality education calling them a "threat to children," interfered in political processes and lobbied for anti-human rights proposals in committees and ministries. They imposed harmful ideology breaking the constitutional rights to privacy, freedom of conscience, protection of health, or autonomy¹. Furthermore, they demanded that fetuses and embryos be granted patient's rights and be treated as "fully-fledged medical service beneficiaries."

The authorities still ignore **calls for the improvement of access to modern birth control methods**, which situates Poland at the very end of the Contraception Atlas ranking with the result of 44.8 percent. The following reasons of such a poor result can be pointed out: the next-generation hormonal birth control pills are not refunded by the National Health Fund, there is consent for the ideologically-based refusals of issuing prescriptions on contraception, lack of family planning counseling, and lack of education on modern contraception during the "Preparation for Family Life" classes at schools.

¹ <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/spoleczenstwo/1756232,1,religijni-radykalowie-cwicza-w-polsce.read>
<http://krytykapolityczna.pl/kraj/swiat-wedlug-ordo-iuris/>

Despite our interventions, the National Health Fund failed to undertake steps in order to improve the accessibility of IUD insertion service (in 2018 only 10 percent of entitled facilities performed the procedure more than ten times). As a result patients are either not informed about this guaranteed service and bear the high costs, or encounter unlawful refusals.

Yet again, the draft bill aiming to enable minors to visit medical specialists on their own was discarded. The current situation weakens youth's autonomy and negatively impacts their health.

Another year of fundamentalist propaganda and anti-women politics has deepened the problem of inaccessibility to services such as birth control prescriptions, prenatal testing, or the unenforceable right to legal abortion, because of the **abuse of the conscience clause**. Pharmacists also unlawfully invoke this clause, simultaneously advocating in favor of an official granting them the right to conscientious objection. The sad finale might take place in 2019. Over the course of the last year, the Ordo Iuris Institute and their allies undertook numerous legislative attempts in order to extend the conscience clause to another medical professions².

Political activities of the conservative parties and the Church negatively impact the issues of sexual health. The number of **HIV/AIDS** infections rises each year, contrary to the level of knowledge on infections or expenditure on prevention. Half of people living with HIV is unaware of their infection and can be a threat to other. Teenagers are especially prone to STIs, as they are unable to obtain comprehensive sexuality education in schools, because of the prevailing ideology of those in power. As a result, the youth does not know how to prevent sexual violence, **STIs**, or unwanted pregnancy. In a survey conducted by teenzone.pl, as much as 22.6 percent of Polish teenagers admitted to having had an STI at least once. Speaking on education, let us remember the governmental program for high schools "Towards maturity," which was based on information that are false and inconsistent with the current medical knowledge, for example "postcoital contraception is essentially abortion medication," or "easy access contraception among other things boosts libido, increases the number of teenage pregnancy and HIV infections."³ Alternative sources of information, such as workshops conducted by NGOs have necessarily a limited reach and thus are not able to solve the problem systematically.

² <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/spoleczenstwo/1750238,1,ordo-iuris-chce-tylnymi-drzwiami-wprowadzic-zakaz-aborcji-i-klauzule-dla-farmaceutow.read>

³ <http://ponton.org.pl/stanowiska/stanowisko-grupy-edukatorow-seksualnych-ponton-w-sprawie-rzadowego-programu-w-strone-dojrzalosci/>

When it comes to optimistic and inspiring elements of 2018 we can certainly mention Anja Rubik's #sexed campaign, with the participation of numerous experts, including those from the Ponton Group, as well as the Federation. Hopefully, the campaign will make it easier for young people to access information vital for their health, safety, and sexuality.

The unfortunate political climate therefore does not discourage many NGOs, groups, or individuals who tirelessly fight for the respect of reproductive health and rights. The **Doctors for Women** initiative, which helps women to obtain a prescription for emergency contraception for free, is growing in strength, and has joined the Federation. The cooperation between feminist and human rights groups and the anticlerical community is strengthening in order to weaken the power of the Church, implement secularity, and stop the Episcopate from interfering in the matters of health and rights. Thanks to the protests initiated by the parents of people with disabilities, the social awareness on the barriers and problems they face has significantly risen. Those include the lack of autonomy, when it comes to decisions on their bodies, sexuality, and reproduction for instance forced sterilization, abortion and administration of contraception.

On a positive note, it should be highlighted that another year of a national debate on abortion regulations has led to a **historic increase in support for the real accessibility of abortion**. As shown in a poll conducted by IBRIS and commissioned by the Federation on the occasion of the International Safe Abortion Day (28/9), 69 percent of respondents agree that women should be able to decide on the termination of pregnancy up to 12 weeks. What is more, thanks to actions of the Federation and the "Away From the Hospital" campaign, the resistance against exhibiting bloody anti-abortion banners in public spaces is growing among the Warsaw youth. Our poll has revealed that 83 percent of respondents disapprove of such displays, and 73 percent would like them to be banned. This is also a result of filing offence notifications, court judgements, and appeals of young people to the Bureau of Education to officially condemn such activity, or to delegalize the Pro Right to Life Foundation. Furthermore, according to our poll, 92 percent of Poles oppose the state's interfering in individual decisions on reproduction, which stands in contradiction to steps undertaken by the government to restricts autonomy and introduce solutions based on ideology and religion, instead of knowledge and law.

LEGAL ACTIVITY

Network of Lawyers

The Federation's Network of Lawyers has been active since 2008. Last year, it actively engaged in monitoring the law by issuing numerous statements, document templates, appeals, and legal opinions.

In February, members of the Network of Lawyers met during a **convention** in Warsaw. Ideas for strategic litigation, legal liability of medical entities, international jurisdiction on reproductive rights, and cooperation with organizations advocating for the rights of people with disabilities were among the topics discussed during the gathering.

In 2018, the Network of Lawyers worked on developing **strategic litigation**. For this purpose it provided a patient with **legal assistance in filing a lawsuit** against a medical facility in eastern Poland, which had refused a legal abortion service. The Team also provided **lawsuit representation** to auxiliary prosecutors in an offense case in Bartoszyce, regarding the display of bloody anti-abortion banners in public spaces. The perpetrators were fined. Legal assistance in writing a pleading was also provided to a person, whose personality rights were violated in connection to an offer to conduct sexuality education classes at a school. Furthermore, the Network of Lawyers **formulated complaints** about refusals to issue prescriptions for contraception, or illegal parcel detainment by customs offices at the border. In 2018 works on an *amicus curiae* (opinion of a "friend of the court") on the constitutionality of the right to terminate pregnancy on embryo-pathological grounds were initiated.

The Network of Lawyers also prepared a number of tools available to everyone, who wants to defend their rights and react in cases of violations. In the "activist toolbox" you can find templates of complaints and offense notifications, as well as the pattern of procedure in case of violation of the law.

ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

Around anti-abortion laws

#25YearsOfWomensHell

January 2018 was the 25th anniversary of the Family Planning Act, known for its fictional character and collision with the state's ideological neutrality. On this occasion, the Federation again brought up the evidence for its harmfulness to strengthen the discussion on the liberalization of the law. The #25YearsOfWomensHell summarizes the shortcomings and negative consequences of the act and presents arguments in favor of introducing comprehensive solutions concerning conscious parenthood and reproductive rights.

The resulting arguments, statistics, women's stories, along with the Federation's statement, which had been signed by 80 organizations and informal groups, were used in advocacy activities directed at MPs and journalists, especially during the debate on the "Save Women" civic draft bill on women's rights and conscious motherhood and the draconian "Stop Abortion" draft bill.

“The 1993 act is fictional – it does not work and is more restrictive in practice than in its wording,” “The whole debate in the parliament and outside it still lacks the woman’s perspective, her health, rights, and needs,” “Reproductive rights, including the access to legal abortion, have their basis in international conventions that Poland has signed, thus being obliged to protect and guarantee them” – this is the message that resounded during the Federation’s “25 Years of Women’s Suffering and Previews of Total Captivity” press conference on 17 January 2018. In reaction to the “Save Women” draft bill voting results we sent letters to chairmen of the Civic Platform and Modern parliamentary clubs. Next to critical remarks the letters contained proposals on advancing reproductive rights.

- [#25YearsOfWomensHell campaign materials](#)
- [report from the press conference and a video recording](#)

#BlackFriday

The Federation, together with many organizations and informal groups, ran an informational campaign and an action mobilizing people to report on the threats and the effects of a ban on abortion on embryo-pathological grounds. During the sitting of the parliamentary Justice Committee, which was about to vote on the “Stop Abortion” draft bill, Joanna Scheuring-Wielgus MP delivered arguments from the Federation’s statement. Our representative also took the floor, as the only representative of the pro-choice community. Unfortunately, the majority of Committee members ignored the human-rights, health, social, and legal arguments that were voiced against the inhumane “Stop Abortion” draft bill.



The Federation repeatedly appealed to decision-makers directly and indirectly through notifying international institutions – a group of UN human rights experts, a group of Members of the European Parliament, or the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human

Rights. On the initiative of the Federation, our partner organization Center for Reproductive Rights collected signatures of 203 organizations from all over the world under a letter calling upon Polish MPs to listen to the voice of Polish women and reject the regressive draft bill.

- [statement of international organizations on the draft bill banning abortion](#)
- [appeals of international organizations to Polish MPs](#)

#IntoTheTrash

During the July protests against the "Stop Abortion" draft bill, the Federation encouraged internet users to participate in a mailing action "Write to the Commission." On our Facebook page you could find a ready-made message with arguments in favor of rejecting the bill, along with the Committee's email addresses. The Federation also disseminated statements of international organizations. Our lawyer spoke during the Warsaw Women's Strike demonstration.

- [speech delivered during the #IntoTheTrash demonstration](#)

Monitoring of the accessibility of legal abortion

Once again, the Federation gained data on the annual number of abortions divided into a. three reasons that permit abortion according to the act on family planning; b. types of fetal defects. In 2017 1,061 abortions were performed in Polish hospitals, including 1,039 for embryo-pathological reasons. These results show the declining accessibility of the procedure. The number of abortions because of a threat to the woman's health or life decreased by 60 percent in comparison with the previous year, reaching the lowest level since 1993, when the current Family Planning Act was introduced. Faced with a threat to their health and life, Polish women do not want to risk unlawful refusals of doctors, and travel abroad to terminate their pregnancies. In 2017 not one abortion was performed in the case of a pregnancy resulting from a prohibited act.

Data on the number of hospitals in Poland performing abortions is another confirmation of the presence of systemic barriers. There are as few as 40 such facilities in Poland, meaning that only 10 percent of entities obliged to perform legal abortions actually obey the law. In our interventions, we try to direct patients to facilities closest to their place of residence to save them from abortion migrations.

- [analysis of 2017 abortion data](#)
- ["Dead Law. Shadow report to the government's report on implementing the Family Planning Act in 2016"](#)

Around the conscience clause

The Federation actively worked against the attempts to introduce the conscience clause for more medical professions. In February, when the Sejm Petition Committee asked the Minister of Health to “comprehensively analyze the issue of introducing the conscience clause for pharmacists to the legal system, signaling the need of introducing such a possibility,” we started a **petition on the Our Democracy website**. Granting the owners and employees of pharmacies the right not to sell and stock a medication would further decrease the already low accessibility to modern contraception, including emergency contraception. This would violate many civic rights and freedoms. Simultaneously, the Ordo Iuris Institute lobbied in favor of their own draft bill, which would allow representatives of additional medical professions, including pharmacists, to refuse service on the grounds of “conscientious objection.”

The Federation also appealed to the private health care provider **Medicover Polska** to take better care of the right of female patients to medical services by obliging their doctors to respect the limits of the conscience clause. This means that patients are guaranteed not to be deprived of the so-called information services such as a prescription for contraception, a referral to prenatal testing, or a medical certificate of the right to abortion, because of the doctor’s worldview. Our appeal met with very enthusiastic reactions of internet users. What is more, Medicover’s board reacted very openly to our proposals and promised to present a series of solutions that are supposed to safeguard the rights of patients to services, information, and privacy.

The Federation also sent a **statement on the conscience clause draft bill** to the Senate Committees and the Marshall of the Senate. We especially opposed the idea of introducing the conscience clause for laboratory diagnosticians. In the letter we emphasize the social effects of arbitrary refusals of health services. At the same time we highlight the positive aspects of the draft bill such as imposing an obligation on medical entities to indicate an alternative doctor or facility, who or which will perform the service in case of a refusal.

- [“Stop to the unlawful restriction of access to contraception” petition](#)
- [letter to Medicover on the abuse of the conscience clause](#)
- [letter to the Senate committee on the conscience clause draft bill](#)

Around the bloody manipulative anti-abortion banners

The local authorities take full responsibility for the quality of life of local residents. Unfortunately, in recent years that quality decreased, because of the consent for the Pro-Right to Life Foundation and Life and Family Foundation to shock with the graphic and deceitful pictures that aim to incite abhorrence of the medical procedure of abortion, introduce false information to the public debate, and frighten children and youth. To counteract this, the Federation initiated a [Facebook campaign](#) that made it easier for individuals to appeal to decision-makers and encourage them to deal with the problem of city residents being terrorized with brutal images.

In reaction to the campaign, the **City of Warsaw's Bureau of Education applied to the Municipal Police and the Legal Bureau to indicate the possible course of action in case of exhibiting anti-abortion content.** The obtained guidelines were forwarded to the mayors of Warsaw districts, who are supposed to send them to educational institutions in order to spread knowledge on how to protect their students from the shocking images. Earlier, the Bureau of Security of the City of Warsaw referred our petition to a public prosecutor's office with "a kind request to evaluate the presented content considering the possibility of committing a crime or offense."

As a civil society organization, the Federation presented its position as an *amicus curiae* of the District Court in Bartoszyce. The court delivered a judgement based on Art. 51 and Art. 141 of the Code of Offenses, that is the legal basis used by us in the notification templates and the opinion sent to the District Court in Bartoszyce.

→ [opinion of an *amicus curiae* on the bloody anti-abortion banners](#)

United Nations

Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The Federation joined the consultation regarding the Update of the Social Alternative Report to the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, by presenting [its statement](#), which referred, among other things, to the issue of current lawful grounds on which abortion is permitted. In the statement we argued with the Report's interpretation of Art. 5 (equality and discrimination) and Art. 10 (the natural right to life) of the Convention that was drafted by the KSK Foundation in cooperation with 60 other organizations. We cited legal arguments to encourage the Report's authors to verify their position on the right to terminate pregnancy and consider the woman's perspective and her reproductive rights.

Moreover, for the first time, the Federation joined a coalition of organizations advocating for the rights of people with disabilities, to work on a joint submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, before which on 3-5 September the government of Poland presented its report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Together with the TUS Foundation, Zone of Venus de Milo Association, Inspiration Powerhouse Foundation, and the Association of Women's Initiatives, we emphasized the fact that the observance of sexual and reproductive rights of persons with disabilities requires special approach and extra expenditures (as shown by the recommendations) and that is why these issues must have adequate prominence and be in the circle of interest of the state.

→ [statement to the UN Committee](#)

62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women

The session's objective was to issue a final document with important recommendations for improving the situation of girls and women in rural areas. The Federation's lawyer and coordinator of its Network of Lawyers participated in the session on behalf of the organization. During the negotiations, the Federation, along with 47 other organizations and social movements from the Great Coalition for Equality and Choice, successfully appealed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the Polish governmental delegation to deliver a statement on behalf of the entire European Union.

The strong presence of reproductive rights (RR) and reproductive and sexual health (RR) in the final documents is especially pleasing. The Commission urges states to actively engage in efforts to provide universal access to SRH services, and recognizes the right to freely control and decide on one's sexuality as a human right. A strong emphasis was also put on the importance of comprehensive sexuality education, as well as on antidiscrimination and equality education.

→ [letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs](#)

UN Human Rights Council

During the 38th session of the UN HRC in Geneva an important [report of the UN Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice \(WDGAW\)](#) was discussed. The Federation signed two statements, which evaluate the report very favorably and urge the states to implement the recommendations. They also highlight the necessity of providing access to reproductive health services, taking into account the needs of groups experiencing cross-discrimination – young people, refugees/migrants, people with disabilities, etc.

During the 39th session a statement on the occasion of the International Safe Abortion Day, signed by over 223 organizations from all over the world, was delivered. Moreover, the Federation's director took part in the debate „Regional developments in abortion law and policy reform.“ The panelists presented the tendencies in reforming abortion regulations, pointed at similarities and differences between processes in various countries. They also explained how pro-choice groups use human rights in creating innovative strategies in favor of the right to safe and legal abortion. On behalf the Great Coalition for Equality and Choice the Federation delivered a statement written to celebrate the International Day of Safe Abortion.

→ [statements for the 38th session signed by the Federation](#)

→ [video recording of the debate](#)

→ [statement in favor of access to safe and legal abortion](#)

Meeting with the UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights

Karima Bennoune, the Special Rapporteur, has a holistic approach to her mandate, which is why during her mission to Poland she looked not only at discrimination in access to

culture, but also she examined how this problem is affected by nationalism, the Catholic Church, or the systemic violations of reproductive rights. In the report summarizing her mission, we can also find accurate observations on the political and cultural polarization, or the use of cultural and religious narratives to discriminate and stereotype women, as well as important recommendations regarding the necessity of supporting women's rights defenders and the implementation of human rights standards.

→ [preliminary report from the Rapporteur's mission to Poland](#)

UN Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice (WDGAW)

The Group initiated its mission to Poland with a round table discussion on health, including reproductive health. The delegation learned about barriers in access to abortion, post-abortion care, and contraception, as well as about the ideological refusals of health care services. They heard how the abortion stigma manifests itself in Poland, and how the support networks raising awareness on medical abortion operate. The invited guests also talked about the situation of transgender and non-heteronormative persons. Furthermore, the issues of sexuality education, violation of perinatal care standards, and treatment of infertility were also discussed. In June 2019 the Group will issue a report with recommendations for the Polish government regarding counteracting discrimination, also in the intersectional dimension.

→ [preliminary findings of the Group](#)

Council of Europe

For years, the Federation has been **monitoring the execution of judgements of The European Court of Human Rights** in the following cases: *Tysic v. Poland*, *R.R. v. Poland*, and *P. and S. v. Poland*. All three judgements include recommendations of amending the legal system and practice in Poland regarding the observance of women's rights, including the effective access to reproductive health services.

Within this framework, in cooperation with the Center for Reproductive Rights, in August 2018 we presented the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe with a **communication in the case of P. and S. v. Poland**. The Federation also cooperated with the Supreme Bar Council and its Human Rights Committee on the issue of them submitting a similar *communication* to the Committee of Ministers.

→ [communication in the case of P. and S. v. Poland](#)

On 17 December 2018 **the Federation participated in the annual and open for NGOs meeting of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Group on the European Court of Human Rights**. During the meeting representatives of the ministries presented the actions they plan to undertake in order to implement the ECHR judgements. The discussion revolved mainly around the *P. and S. v. Poland* case, which is going to be the subject of the

Committee of Ministers of the COE's meeting in March 2019. The governmental proposals were highly unsatisfactory, disregarding the importance of the issue, and, most of all, not leading to the implementation of the ECHR recommendations, hence not aiming to repair the systemic negligence.

In early 2019 the Federation will send another letter to the Committee of Ministers containing a report from the above-mentioned meeting, highlighting the lack of initiative from the government to implement the judgements and better protect the rights of pregnant patients, including minors.

European Parliament

Study commissioned by the FEMM Committee

The Federation contributed to the "Sexual and reproductive health and rights and the implication of conscientious objection" study on sexual and reproductive health and rights and how the field is affected by the conscience clause-motivated refusals of services. The study was commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the FEMM Committee. It aims to provide a comparative overview of the situation in the European Union, in terms of access to sexual and reproductive healthcare goods (such as medicines) and services (such as abortion and family planning), from both legal and practical perspectives. It deliver European data, but focuses specifically on six selected Member States – Italy, Sweden, Portugal, Czech Republic, Croatia and Poland. The analysis on Poland was carried out by the Federation.

The study looks at the extent to which conscientious objection affects access to sexual and reproductive rights. The study will contribute to formulating a clear framework for the improvement of access to sexual and reproductive healthcare goods and services in the EU.



We hope that recommendations and observations made by this study will be used as an advocacy tool at the national and international level.

→ [„Sexual and reproductive health rights and the implication of conscientious objection“ study \(PDF\)](#)

Great Coalition for Equality and Choice (WKRW)

At the end of 2018 the Coalition, set up in April 2017, comprised of over 100 non-governmental organizations and informal groups from all over the country working for the liberalization of the current anti-abortion law and raising social awareness in this regard.

The Coalition’s mission is based on solidarity: it joins the forces of Polish organizations and pro-women initiatives in order to fight comprehensively for women’s human rights, evidence-based sexuality education, high standards of perinatal care, all reproductive rights, and complete elimination of violence against women.

Selected activities of the Great Coalition:

→ **The 1st Convening of the Great Coalition for Equality and Choice** (11-12 May 2018). During the two-day meeting, participants got to know each other and the work areas of their organizations, discussed the *modus operandi* of the Coalition and its priorities from the perspective of possible interventions and future projects. The convening also served as an idea exchange platform regarding the development of the Coalition and the professionalization of its member organizations. Ideas for the Coalition’s own activities were also presented during the discussions. Participants took part in a protest of parents of persons with

disabilities, having agreed on a position on this issue. Strategic documents of the Coalition were also adopted during the event.



- The following **working groups** were established within the Coalition: external communication, monitoring and political advocacy, education, event organization, international networking.
- A [statement for the 39th Session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva on the occasion of the International Day of Safe Abortion](#), delivered on September, 24th by the Federation for Women and Family Planning. In the context of the Vienna Declaration and campaign plans, the Great Coalition drew attention to the necessity to undertake actions aiming to provide women with access to legal and safe abortion, as well as to decriminalize abortion.
- The WRKW participated in **solidarity campaigns** with women from countries, where governments attempted to restrict anti-abortion laws. Furthermore, the Coalition expressed its support for the fight for women's rights in **Argentina, Ireland, Bulgaria, Iceland, and Slovakia**.
- The WKRW promoted **petitions, campaigns, and open letters put forward by its member organizations** that complied with the priorities of the Coalition.



- The Coalition **provided patronage over the charity auction #100for100**, organized by the Warsaw Women's Strike on the 100th anniversary of women's vote in Poland. Unique items donated by actors, writers, sportswomen, painters, photographers, and social activists were auctioned on the internet. The entire income went to support women experiencing various kinds of violence.

ASTRA Network – Central and Eastern Europe Network for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

ASTRA Network is an informal coalition of non-governmental organizations from Central, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia working for sexual and reproductive health and rights. It was established in 1999 during a regional meeting organized by the Federation and it comprises of 39 organizations from 21 countries (listed [here](#).) The ASTRA Secretariat is based in the Federation's office in Warsaw. You can follow the network's activities on its [website](#), [Facebook fan page](#), and [Twitter account](#).

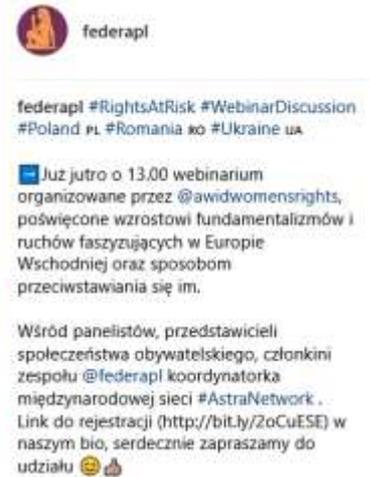
Selected activities in 2018:

- Together with ASTRA's partner, the Sexual Rights Initiative, the Network empowered its members in using the Universal Periodic Review Process on monitoring human rights on national level and mediated between the organizations to successfully submit UPR submissions for Albania and Macedonia.
- ASTRA representative delivered an [oral statement](#) and facilitated the civil society input into the text at the Voluntary National Review of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of Poland at the UN High Level Political Forum.



federapl Nasze reprezentantki uczestniczą właśnie w #HighLevelPoliticalForum2018 o zrównoważonym rozwoju, które odbywa się w siedzibie #DNZ w Nowym Jorku. 🌍👩🏻🗳️📢
@unitednations @intlwomen #Agenda2030 #SustainableDevelopmentGoals || #federapl #federacjanarzeczkobietiplanowaniarodziny #newyorkcity #unitednations #unhq #HLPF #hlpf2018 #SDGs #sustainabledevelopment #srhr #reprights #feminism #abortionrights #prawdoaborcji #legalnaaborcja #żądamylegalnejaborcji #prochoice #unitedstates

- ASTRA also contributed to the discussion at the **UN Commission on the Status of Women** with a [written statement](#) on “Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls” and the UN Commission on Population and Development through a [written statement](#) on “Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration”.
- ASTRA joined the Informal Steering Committee of the regional [UN Economic Commission for Europe ICPD+25 Conference](#) and the civil society consultation held prior to the conference in Geneva. ASTRA representative was a moderator at the civil society event. Several ASTRA representatives participated in the conference and one of them delivered the [Civil Society Statement](#) at the UN event that contributed to the outcome document.
- While participating in the [62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women](#) ASTRA representative coordinated filming of a short [solidarity statement of the Women’s Rights Caucus](#) in support for Polish women who were facing another threat of restricting their abortion rights. The film was shared via social media and reached over 36 000 people.
- ASTRA Network Coordinator participated as a speaker in a [webinar](#) on counteracting anti-choice and regressive movements in Eastern Europe together with speakers from Romania and Ukraine. The webinar was hosted by AWID and reached circa 3,000 people.



- ASTRA representative from Lithuania organized a debate and press conference on the threats and consequences of introducing restrictions to abortion services. Polish representative of ASTRA Secretariat presented how the current anti-abortion law in Poland influences the lives of women and what the real consequences of this anti-abortion are.
- ASTRA supported women’s groups in [Bulgaria](#) and [Slovakia](#) through solidarity statements shared via social media.
- Twenty-five ASTRA members met in person at a workshop in Zagreb to deepen their knowledge on using the international human rights instruments to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights on international, regional and national levels.

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY

Our events

“Female utopias in action”

The Federation joined the 100th anniversary celebrations of women’s right to vote by participating in the conference “Female utopias in action.” It was organized on 21-22 September 2018 in Kraków by the Sociology Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Sociology Institute of the Jagiellonian University. We contributed to a session on

reproductive justice. The presentations tackled the following issues: trouble with the implementation of parental and reproductive rights, the individual and collective strategies in the fight for reproductive justice and the consequences of the lack it. The coordinator of our Network of Lawyers spoke about the elements of state violence manifesting itself in the violation of reproductive rights.

→ [presentation abstracts and recordings from the session on reproductive rights](#)

Discussion panel at the 10th Congress of Women



Both the Federation and the Ponton Group were again invited to organize panels at the Congress of Women. The jubilee edition of the congress took place on 16-17 June in Łódź under the motto “We want all of the rights and all of the life!” The Federation’s panel focused on institutional violence which manifests in restricting reproductive rights, and on counteraction strategies.

→ [Report and video recording](#)

International Safe Abortion Day (28/9)

Each year, the Federation celebrates this unique international campaign. Under the last year’s motto “Normalizing abortion: it’s part of our lives” we organized, together with allied organizations, initiatives, and pro-choice individuals, an event to celebrate the successes of civic movements in Bolivia, Ireland, and South Korea. Representatives of the Łódź Gals for Gals, the Polish Women’s Strike, the Doctors for Women initiative, and the Federation took part in the discussion panel. Moreover, during the event we launched our two new publications – “How to report on abortion?” and “#WomensStories”.



Our director presented the sensational results of the opinion poll on the legalization of abortion, and politicians and activists signed the international Brussels Declaration "Abortion as a fundamental women's right." We also handed out our pro-choice gadgets – "We demand legal abortion" bags, T-shirts and badges.

→ [poll results, booklets, video recording of the panel discussion, photos](#)

16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence

Every year, between 25 November and 10 December, organizations and activists hype up the problem of gender-based violence – its scale, forms, and consequences. They emphasize the urgent need to react against violence, both on the systemic and individual levels. The Federation reminded of the fact that institutional violation of reproductive rights by limiting access to abortion, contraception, prenatal testing, and evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education, is also a form of violence.

Within the last year's campaign, we called for immediate cessation of violence against sexual and reproductive health and rights defenders.

→ [statement „Stop the state's systemic violence in the field of reproductive rights!"](#)

Participation in conferences, debates, meetings in Poland and abroad

The Federation's representatives took the floor during many debates and conferences both in Poland and other countries. The following are the most important events (title, organizer, place, date):

- [Launch of the "Suffocating the movement. Shrinking space for women's right" report](#); Kvinna Till Kvinna; Stockholm; 8th March
- 2nd International Women's Strike; Warsaw Women's Strike; Warsaw; 8th March

- “No woman no kraj. Women's rights in Poland” conference; College of Europe; Warsaw; 9th March
- Screening of the film “24 Weeks” and discussion on abortion; The Girlish Film Club; Warsaw; 24th March
- „Right-wing populism and gender politics in Europe” conference; Stiftung Frauen in Europa; Heinrich Böll Foundation in Hessen; Frankfurt; 27-28 April
- Press conference on the consequences of the restrictive antiabortion law in Poland; Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania; Vilnius; 7-8 May
- “Civil society at the forefront against populist agendas in Poland and in Europe” Round Table Discussion, The Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights in cooperation with Human Rights Watch, Warsaw, 14 May
- “Freedom of Religion or Belief, Cultural Rights and Women: Promoting a Gendered Perspective on Freedom of Thought, Conscience, and Religion” Symposium; UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Muslims for Progressive Values; Geneva, 23rd May. [Conclusions](#)
- “Together against the backlash on reproductive rights in the European Parliament” conference; Group of MPs “All of Us”; Brussels; 5-6 June
- “All united for the right to abortion” conference; the local government of Wallonia; Brussels; 21-22 June
- “The Laugh of the Medusa: the Left in Europe” symposium; transform!europe, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation; Vienna; 10th July
- “Developing an Advocacy Agenda for [#Abortion](#) in the 21st Century and Making Change Happen” Congress; International Campaign for Women’s Right to Safe Abortion; Lisbon; 5-8 September
- 4th Congress of Women; Plenipotentiary of the Congress of Women Association; Tomaszów Mazowiecki; 15th September
- Workshop for the youth; Anja Rubik, W.A.B. Publishing House; Warsaw; 20th September
- “Feminism without borders – the fight for abortion in Europe”; Kvinnegruppa Ottar; Oslo; 12-13 October
- Global Dialogue on Abortion, Prenatal Testing and Disability; CREA; Nairobi; 29-31 October
- Human Rights Defenders World Summit; Amnesty International, AWID, FIDH; Paris; 29 October-2 November
- “Act on Hope. How the European SRHR community can help unlock rights and care for all” conference and a lecture on the conscience clause in Poland; EuroNGOs; Ghent; 5-7 November. [Conslusions](#)
- Lecture on reproductive rights on the YouthVOICE Mazovia conference; Gwiazdka Foundation; Warsaw; 1st December
- The Świętokrzyskie Province Congress of Women; Kielce; 18th December

Report of the Ponton Group of sex educators



2018 was a year of challenges, hard work, successes and changes. As a result of the recruitment process ten new volunteers joined Ponton. After 16 years, Aleksandra Józefowska finished her work in the Federation. From January 2019 the activities of the Ponton Group shall be coordinated by Katarzyna Banasiak.

Since this year Ponton has had a new, functional and modern website. Our Instagram channel has also developed wonderfully, so that more and more young people know about our existence and can benefit from our support.

Selected activities, you can find the full version of the report [here](#).

- **Valentine's Day** with Ponton, 14th February. The Ponton Group on the occasion of Valentine's Day entered into cooperation with PROJEKT TEST organization. Educators encouraged to perform an HIV test. They also distributed materials on prevention and sexual health, including HIV/AIDS prevention and condoms.
- **Open'er Festival**, 4–7 July. The Ponton Group once again appeared in the NGO Zone at the Open'er Festival in Gdynia. This year we focused mainly on health education and HIV, HCV and HBV prevention. Like every year, the stand was very popular among young people. We promoted a responsible approach to e.g. sex, health, relationships. We educated why infections pose a threat during sexual activity, discussed their symptoms and principles of safer sex. This year the Ponton stand was supported by Durex.
- **Pol'and'Rock Festival**, 2–5 August. During this year's Woodstock Festival, sex educators from the Ponton Group talked to young people about sex education and safer sex. At our stand one could take part in a quiz on sexual health, receive

educational materials and condoms. We also held a workshop "Sexual violence among youth. Is it possible to talk about this nonexistent topic at a Polish school", in which many people took part.



- **Ponton workshops** were conducted in the last classes of primary schools (gymnasiums are liquidated by the Ministry of National Education) and in socio-therapeutic day-care centers and orphanages. Due to the conservative political climate in Poland, in recent years we have observed a smaller number of requests from schools for our classes. In 2017 there were more applications, but September 2018 brought a real breakthrough, after the holidays a lot of schools approached us. The summary of bookings shows that 2019 will be an exceptionally busy year; already at this point 40 Warsaw classes are waiting for Ponton's workshops.
- **World AIDS Day**, 1st December. On this occasion there was a live report on Instagram during which Ponton educator Antonina Lewandowska talked about the most important issues related to HIV/AIDS.
- as part of the **10th Congress of Women** in Łódź, the Ponton Group conducted on June, 16th a panel entitled "Sexual violence among youth - how to prevent it? Good practices in education". Its aim was to show how it is reasonable and worth talking to young people about sexual violence. Experts invited to the panel presented different perspectives on the causes of sexual violence, they also discussed various projects addressed to young people, which aim to reduce the phenomenon of sexual violence among peers.



- **Advocacy.** The Ponton Group has been appealing to the Ministry of National Education for years to introduce the necessary changes in the Polish education system and to ensure that young people have access to reliable sex education in accordance with the WHO standards. Currently, we cannot count on cooperation with the Ministry of National Education or the Ministry of Health. However, we publish our statements in response to the actions of decision-makers that interfere with reproductive rights of young people and we highlight the disturbing changes.
- **#SEXEDPL Campaign.** Thanks to the commitment of the well-known model Anja Rubik, the issue of sex education was exceptionally visible this year. As part of the action, a handbook "#SEXEDPL. Conversations of Anja Rubik", was published. In this book you can find Anja Rubik's conversations with two of our educators: Aleksandra Józefowska and Joanna Skonieczna. On 19–23 September as part of the campaign, a pop-up school was opened. A series of workshops and meetings took place in the former Hoffman High School in Warsaw. For five days Ponton ran a stand where you could talk with us about sex, infections and relationships.



COUNSELING ACTIVITY AND SUPPORT FOR WOMEN

Helpline

In 2018 the Federation's Helpline celebrated its 27th anniversary. Our experts – a psychologist, a lawyer, a gynecologist, and sex educators – took over 12,000 calls.

Network of Lawyers

The Network of Lawyers provide counseling via email and telephone. Last year, the advice requests concerned various reproductive and sexual health issues, namely: employee rights during pregnancy, enforcement of guaranteed services, social benefits after a miscarriage, patient's rights, and sexual violence.

PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITY AND CAMPAIGNS

Social media

The Federation's [fan page on Facebook](#) was our most actively used channel of communication. Apart from news on reproductive rights and our activities, numerous informational and educational campaigns were published. The number of people we reach on Facebook is rising steadily, and in 2018 it increased by 15 percent. Currently the fan page has been liked by over 19,000 people.

→ [website \(in Polish and English\)](#)

→ [Instagram profile](#)

- [Twitter account](#)
- [YouTube account](#)

Meme campaigns

Our various meme campaigns enjoyed significant popularity in the social media:

- **#25YearsOfWomensHell** campaign about the tragic consequences of the Polish family planning act;
- **#StopTheManipulations** campaign debunking myths spread by anti-choicers.
- **#TheRightToAbortion** campaign about abortion and reproductive rights in international documents and court judgments
- **#WomensStories** campaign on the systemic discrimination of women in access to reproductive health services. We publish **stories about unlawful refusals of guaranteed services** (such as legal abortion, prenatal testing, prescriptions and sale of contraception) that were sent to us.
- **#YouHaveTheRight** campaign is a series of memes that instruct how to enforce your rights in various everyday situations. We also remind about the possibility of obtaining free legal advice from the Network of Lawyers.

All images can be accessed in the [fan page's gallery](#) and the [on the website](#).

Educational campaign for the access to legal abortion www.terminacjaczazy.pl

The [terminacjaczazy.pl](http://www.terminacjaczazy.pl) website has been online since July 2016. It is devoted to the rights of patients who decide to terminate their pregnancy. The aim of this campaign was to elaborate on the three situations in which the Polish law permits abortion, and the ensuing procedures.

PUBLISHING ACTIVITY

„Dead Law. Shadow report to the government’s report”



Like each year, the Federation critically responded to the report of the Council of Ministers on the implementation and effects of the Family Planning Act for the year 2016. However, this time, the commentary had a wider scope, as the Ponton Group, the Federation’s Network of Lawyers, the “Our Stork” Association for Infertility Treatment and Supporting Adoption, and the “Birth with Dignity” Foundation were invited to provide their input. Based on facts, the report is enriched with statistics, and illustrated with infographics.

→ [the “Dead Law” report](#)

„Guidebook for Gynecological Patients”

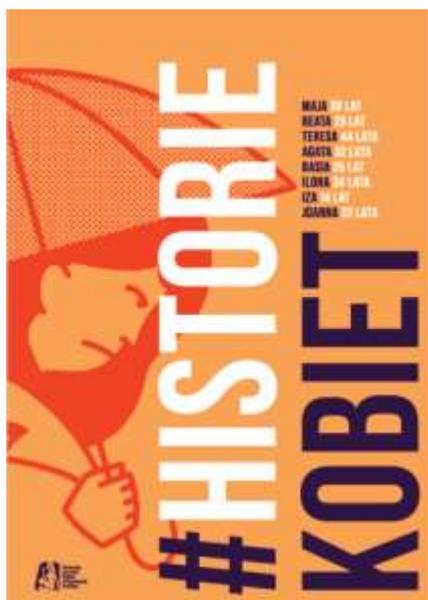


The Federation had the pleasure to contribute to the “Guidebook for Gynecological Patients,” created under the auspices of the Polish Society of Gynecologists and Obstetricians. Our contribution to the reproductive health-related section is a chapter on patients’ rights, namely on what patients are entitled to and what they should do in case of their rights being violated. We devoted a lot of attention to groups particularly exposed to discrimination - youth, transgender persons, non-heteronormative persons, or those living with HIV. The Federation also provided patronage over a session held during the 33rd Scientific Congress of the Polish Society of Gynecologists and Obstetricians.

Lectures within the session explored topics related to pregnancy and childbirth, diagnostics, menopause, and cancer.

→ [information on the “Guidebook for Gynecological Patients”](#)

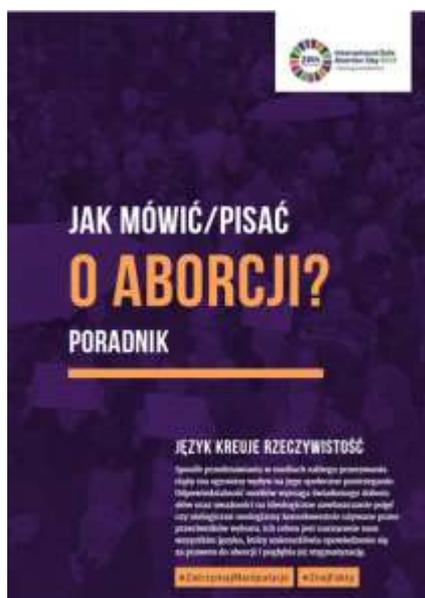
#WomensStories



On the occasion of the International Safe Abortion Day, the Federation issued a booklet with a selection of real abortion stories, mostly about the barriers in access to it. With the #WomensStories campaign we publicize the systemic discrimination of women in access to reproductive health services. We consistently promote stories, that are being sent to us, about unlawful refusals of guaranteed services, such as abortion, prenatal testing, contraception prescriptions.

[the "#WomensStories" booklet](#)

„How to report on abortion?”



The way abortion is presented in the media has a huge impact on its perception by the public. Journalistic responsibility requires choosing your words consciously and being mindful of appropriated terms or illogical neologisms consistently used by the anti-choicers. That is why we created the guidebook “How to report on abortion?”. It contains useful facts and statistics on the termination of pregnancy. It also briefly presents and explains expressions that meet both the standards of scientific knowledge and the rules of ideologically-neutral communication in the abortion debate.

→ [the “How to report on abortion?” guidebook](#)

FEDERATION IN THE MEDIA

Throughout the very busy year of 2018, there were 80 instances of our presence both in the Polish and foreign media. That includes interviews with our representatives and articles mentioning the Federation and its activities.

All interviews can be found on our website ([„Federation in the media”](#)).

SPONSORS

- Open Society Foundation (Women's Rights Program)
- International Women's Health Coalition
- Center for Reproductive Rights
- Global Fund for Women
- Sigrid Rausing Trust
- Rosa Luxemburg Foundation – Polish Representation
- Mama Cash
- Stars Foundation