

METHODOLOGY AND STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

Methodology

This report is based on research and interviews conducted by the Center for Reproductive Rights; Citizen, Democracy and Accountability; and Freedom of Choice Slovakia in April and September 2010. Our in-depth interviews gathered the experiences of 29 women of reproductive age from different socioeconomic backgrounds from the Prešov and Košice regions of Eastern Slovakia. Some women were single, while others were married; some women did not have any children, while others had given birth up to 11 times; some women wanted more children, while others did not; some women were low income and relied on social benefits, while others were middle class; some women had not finished secondary school, while others had a university degree; some women came from towns, while others lived in smaller, more remote villages or Romani settlements. In addition, we interviewed 39 social workers, healthcare providers (including gynecologists and pharmacists), and representatives of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working with women. This report also draws on research of national, regional, and international laws and policies and on other articles and published materials relevant to women's and adolescent girls' right to affordable and acceptable contraceptive services and information.

The participants interviewed for the report were identified through national-level NGOs that work with women and adolescents, as well as through other contacts of Citizen, Democracy and Accountability and Freedom of Choice Slovakia.

To protect their privacy, the names of all women whose testimonies are used throughout this report have been changed. The names of other stakeholders whose experiences are presented have also been changed, except where explicit permission to use the individual's real name was received.

Scope and Structure of the Report

This report documents legal, political, and social factors that make the accessibility of modern contraception a formidable barrier to women and adolescent girls in Eastern Slovakia, negatively affecting their health and lives. The report focuses on the prevention of unintended pregnancies through the regular use of female-controlled contraception. To that end, the report primarily covers access to hormonal contraceptives available by prescription. However, it also addresses some concerns around emergency contraception, which is available without a prescription, and female sterilization, which is a surgical procedure. Given the scope of the report, the use of condoms is not addressed.¹

This report focuses primarily on the state's failure to ensure women's access to affordable contraceptives. It also addresses other structural and social barriers, such as the absence of mandatory, comprehensive, evidence-based sexuality education in schools and the limited information provided to women and adolescent girls during their visits to the gynecologist. The Catholic Church hierarchy's influence on laws and policies is also discussed.

The report opens with a general background that explains why access to contraceptive services and information is critical to the health and lives of women and adolescent girls. The next section provides a general overview of the situation in Slovakia, including a brief historical account of women's access to contraceptive services and information, and a discussion of several structural and social factors that adversely influence such access today. It also addresses the current financial crisis and its impact on reproductive rights. The following section contains the results of the interviews we conducted and focuses on the key barriers documented in this report: lack of affordability and lack of reliable information. It also discusses some of the effects of barriers to access and ways that interviewees believe the situation can be improved. The last section provides an overview of the legal and human rights standards of the rights violations identified. Recommendations to key stakeholders, based on input by those interviewed, are included at the end of the report.

It is evident from the results of the testimonies gathered that Slovakia must take action to ensure that (i) contraceptives are affordable and acceptable to all women and adolescent girls, and (ii) comprehensive, accurate, and reliable information on contraceptives specifically, and on sexual and reproductive health and rights issues generally, is provided both by healthcare providers and in schools.