

FIGHTING FOR
ACCESS TO
ABORTION EVEN
WHEN IT'S LEGAL

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**This interview was made on Saturday,
30th of April 2022, at 2pm.**

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Maybe you can start by telling us a bit about the morning-after pill, how is the access here in Romania, the law, and how was it in the past.



In Romania the situation is so bad regarding reproductive health, access to services, and so on, I would say this is one of the services that slightly works because first of all, you can access it in every pharmacy even if you are under 18. You don't need any parent's signature or any parent with you while buying it.

Well, the access is more restrictive in terms of information. You really don't have official information from institutions or even from civil society, until now we did not manage to have a website with information regarding our reproductive health and services accessible in Romania. We did not have funding until now, but now we will have a website regarding this.

And another problem that I noticed regarding emergency contraception is in relation to survivors of sexual violence because first of all Romania does not have any centers for them, centers that should offer them health and therapy and juridical services but none of this is really happening. So I was pretty shocked when we were invited to the University Hospital in Bucharest.

They wanted to show us the center for victims of sexual violence... It was a small room and when I asked about emergency contraception and access to abortion, nobody knew anything about this even if it's so important to have that for survivors of sexual violence at the moment that the abuse happened in order to not traumatize the survivor more.

So this together with the fact that it is still pretty pricey considering

the economic situation of the average Romanian. It's around 15-20 euros and we have really few family planning offices where they offer emergency contraception free of charge.

Apropos of this center where you were invited, what were they providing?

They had kind of a rape kit in order to not go to forensic medicine, DNA tests, and other things related to police intervention. They wanted to bring together the social assistance, the police officer, and somebody from the hospital to be there at the same time and place with the survivor, but the center did not have any people who worked there, they were all volunteers, and the center was also mostly locked because they were afraid somebody will steal the rape kits.

And when we went there, the center was open for 4-5 months. The only beneficiary was a man that they underlined he came there after the pride week and something sketchy happened trying to imply that he was abused because he was a gay man, which was not cool.

They were very excited about opening another 8 or 9 centers exactly the same as the one in Bucharest in other counties in Romania.

Was it a governmental project?

Yes, the government had a project with EU money and they had to open 9 centers for victims of sexual abuse and on paper they looked much different than in reality of course.

Did they advise themselves with you or other NGOs before making this project?

Not at all, well we are not working so much on sexual violence, maybe when writing the project, but when implementing them not at all, there is no question.

At first, I was very excited about the center opening and everybody at Filia wanted to give access to this info and then a survivor of rape came to us in need of an abortion and I called this center. This is how I found out that it's so impractical actually. The woman on the phone told me first of all that the center is not working even if one week before I saw on the news that it was open.

And then I talked with someone from the press and this is actually how we managed to receive an invitation from them because the press went there and they found out what is really happening or rather not happening, so they asked us to come and give some advice. Of course, it was just a conversation.

I also wanted to underline accessing abortion services there, The University Hospital is not offering abortion services. They told me by their official response that the center is offering abortion pills until 6 weeks of pregnancy, not 9 as the guide says, but when I called this week because a beneficiary of mine needed an abortion they told me they are not even providing the pills. So yeah, they are pretty unprepared.

Should we maybe move to abortion and discuss how it looks like in Romania, maybe we could start with how the law is constructed and then how it looks like in theory, and then we can go to the praxis.

What is interesting about abortion regulation in Romania is that first of all it was one of the first laws passed after the fall of communism in 1989, so the decree was not in place anymore, people had access to abortion on request until 14 weeks of pregnancy and medical abortion after 14 weeks of pregnancy if the life of the mother or the unborn baby is a risk. And of course in Romania if you are a woman and you try to provide an abortion to yourself because you don't have any access you are not charged as in other countries but if you are a doctor and you are providing an abortion for a woman after 14 weeks of pregnancy you are possible to go to prison.

If there is no medical reason, right?

Yes, if there is no medical reason.

**But in case of incest or rape?
Is it possible after 14 weeks?**

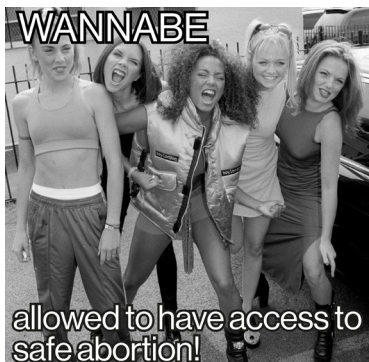
Well this is a tricky question, the law says it should be possible, it should be treated like a medical abortion, so it should be possible and free of charge! This is also important, for victims of rape, incest, and other crimes... but in reality, it's actually hard even for a survivor of rape to access abortion until 14 weeks of pregnancy, after 14 weeks things are getting even more complicated. The law is not really specific, it's like.. some people wrote at some point about this from a legal perspective including the mental health issues that are coming after a situation of rape, or sexual abuse as a medical reason in order to put this under the umbrella of medical abortion. So it is pretty hard even for survivors of sexual abuse and

of course, most of the time it's even not free of charge, they have to pay for it. We had situations of women that wanted an abortion after being raped and it was really hard for them to access one.

The private clinics that we first referred them to, denied them access to abortion, because „we are not providing abortions for survivors of rape, we are not providing abortion to a person who did not have abortions before, we do not have an ambulance if something goes wrong“. And when one of my beneficiaries asked at some point, „ok but where should I go? I was raped, and I want to get this abortion“. She also wanted to get a DNA sample from the embryo to use it during the trial against the rapist. And the doctor just said „Who am I? A secretary? You go and find out yourself where to get an abortion!“

Romania really needs a national guide on how to provide this service. I've been hearing since 2020 that a group of people has been working on this document since at least 2017, but it was never published and never approved by the Ministry of Health, so I don't know what is written there.

But we have a guide regarding abortion pills¹. Until 9 weeks of pregnancy, it is recommended in Romania, in reality, this is not happening. Most hospitals and private clinics are offering you abortion pills only until 6-7 weeks of pregnancy. In the guide you also have information about how to communicate with the beneficiary, also information about how to talk after the abortion, about contraceptive methods and potential risks, potential mental health issues after that, and even some information regarding short therapy sessions that



should be provided to the people. But of course, even if this guide is in place, they are only recommendations after all from the Society of OB-GYN doctors. It is a very good document. If things would happen as it is written on this paper it would be amazing, but it's not enough of course. And the ministry and the institutions that are working under the Ministry of Health should really push this inside of the hospitals and train the doctors for this.

I am hearing from the med school that young doctors, and students are encouraged not to provide abortion and this is a recurrent practice and from my fieldwork, I noticed that it is rather the elder doctors the ones who provide abortions because they've been socialized through those moments when a woman was going to their hospital between life or death because she would try to provoke an abortion on herself. They know how this suffering feels like, the younger ones don't and they think that if they would not provide an abortion, somebody else will at some point.

And coming back to how it is regulated, another interesting piece of paper that we have is the Ethical Code of Doctors² provided by the College of the Doctors and where the conscious clause is stipulated: Any doctor can deny any procedure if it's against their moral beliefs. And the second article says that if you deny a procedure to someone, you should refer that person to a doctor who can provide that procedure. When I asked that via a freedom of information request, they told me that this is happening, but not for abortion. And after I published my first report in 2019, the first report that FILIA published on abortion access, the president of the College of

¹ <https://sogr.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/35.-Avortul-medicamentos.pdf>

² <https://lege5.ro/gratuit/geztmojxhe3q/codul-de-deontologie-medicala-al-colegiului-medicilor-din-romania-din-04112016>

Medics went out in press and told the world that he congratulates every doctor that does not provide abortions.

Yeah i mean.. looking at how it's regulated, I would say that we don't have enough regulations, so the hospitals have a really big freedom in choosing how to provide the abortion, how much it should cost, who is providing it, if the hospital provides it or not.. which is actually not legal! I mean it is legal for the doctors to refuse an abortion, but it is not legal for the manager of the hospital to say „We are not providing abortion in this place at all“, but they are doing it. So this lack of specificity in our legislation all together with the rather anti-choice beliefs of the ones who are in charge of these institutions, the real important actors, is the combination that is bringing us to the situation we are in, especially in terms of not having enough instruments to make yourself some justice or change the situation at all.

So we have to rely on European institutions, international ones to make advocacy, to talk to international journalists and raise awareness because the institutions we have are pretty anti-choice, are pretty not interested in the subject and they would rather listen to us and not do anything in practice.

I wanted to ask you if you know when this shifted... because after the communist time, the law changed and Romania was for some time a model, it was the place where people could freely make abortions. So did it change when the Coalition for the Family started to put a lot of pressure on society? Was that the point when a lot of hospitals and doctors started to stop providing abortions?

Well, several things happened. First thing

first, I would say it was really important to notice, I mean during the 90's it was this really big urge to be like the Western countries and to copy the American model and we were receiving a lot of money from US organizations to implement reproductive health services in Romania. The discussion on sex education was pretty open, we were trying to offer access to contraceptive methods. This is why actually in Romania we registered almost 1 000 000 abortions in 1999 because we did not have access to any contraceptive methods.

And during the 90s yeah it was this period when finances were coming and we were writing projects and we were supposed to open family planning offices and so on. We also needed to do this because we wanted to be a part of the EU and the EU would request strategies for reproductive health, accessing abortion, contraceptive methods, sexual education, and trained doctors...

So of course we made all of this in order to access the EU, but after we became a part of the EU, the situation got worse because there was nobody to push us, and there were no consequences for not writing another strategy on reproductive health or not opening another family planning office. We opened them, again, for getting into the EU, so after 2007.. Romania had at this point free contraception offered to vulnerable groups and young people, the family planning offices were working. Until 2011-2012 we had free contraceptive methods and access to them. Now we only have access to contraceptive methods because some NGOs are writing projects or are in programs and can buy for their beneficiaries.

And also what happened is that the conservative movement became more prominent, not only in Romania but all across the world or the European space at least. It fits Romania's culture and society pretty well. And now the European and the US conservative actors were having access to Romania through their churches and groups and NGOs that they were opening here. Some of the anti-choice NGOs have had pregnancy crisis centers in Romania since the 90s. Their main goal was helping women and children, but with this perspective of not offering access to abortion, contraceptive methods.



Then we had the moment of the Coalition for the Family³ and this was an important moment because for the first time, several conservative NGOs and groups were having the same discourse, pretending they had 3 000 000 signatures to change the definition of the family in the constitution⁴. We knew from their agenda that abortion and women's rights will be second on the list after the LGBT community. We were pretty afraid about that, the moment Coalitia pentru Familie 2018 was really impactful for the Romanian civil society actually. And after they failed, they dismantled, but

³ The coalition for the Family is one of the biggest and most vocal extreme right wing organisations in Romania. They work together with the Orthodox Church and are against choice and against the LGBTQIA+ community.

⁴ The Referendum wanted to change the definition of marriage in the Romanian constitution, which was and still is defined as the "union between husbands" ("uniune între soți") in a mot-a-mot translation. This is because in the Romanian language, the masculine is used many times to define a group of people of both genders. The amendment was supported by many politicians and religious groups, but opposed by the President and the opposition party USR. The Referendum failed because of the final turnout, which was 21.1%, below the 30% threshold necessary to make it valid, which was a huge victory for the civil society in Romania. The year 2018 and this Referendum was a very important moment for all feminist and LGBTQIA+ activists and people in general. It was a moment of national solidarity and resistance.

they transformed into another network called Romania for Life, which is another network of conservative NGOs and groups receiving private funds from prominent people like Gigi Becali, who is a football club owner in Romania or other NGOs from across the borders. And they are the ones who organize the anti-abortion march every year, they are the ones in charge of the majority of the pregnancy crisis centers. And what is really sad for me... I was at the abortion march this year and what made me very sad was the amount of teenagers and young people that were there.

Now they changed their discourse and they are more prominent on social media, they know how to access young people, to make it catchy and besides that, the motto for this year's march was actually „gender equality starts before giving birth/ before conception“. Before the discourse was very.. us versus you, a civil society that believes in feminism and LGBTQIA+ and so on, it was really polarized but now... I was amazed at how sneaky they were and how they actually tried to transform our discourse and make it more manageable also for the teenagers that you know.. are in contact with a lot of information on TikTok and social media and they do not have time for this, they have time for their rights to be respected!

Also for the institutions, because it is kind of pressure at the European level that we want gender mainstreaming and we need to focus on women and gender equality, and by packing the march like this it would make it easier for managers of hospitals or people working in public institutions to go there and support it.

Besides that of course the Romanian Orthodox church was also a big

actor in this series of circumstances that brought us here and also the neo-protestant churches that are mostly focused on Transilvaia.

What is also pretty sad is that we are working in some closed religious communities, mostly neo-protestant, in which women are not allowed to use contraceptive methods. I mean you gotta go with them to put IUDs in secret because the husband and the community and the priest are not allowing them to use any kind of contraceptive method. And when I meet a woman that is 40 and has 11-15 kids and I'm asking her „Ok, but do you want to have more children? Because you know, this is dangerous at this point for your body.. because you cannot give birth every year without giving your body some time to rest“ and they are simply replying „It's not my choice, it's God's will and the priest is telling me that this is how it's supposed to work.“ So yeah... there are several actors and they are really interconnected with other conservative movements all across Europe and abroad in Russia and the US. I really want more research done regarding this. As a small NGO in Bucharest Romania, we cannot map what is happening with the anti-choice movement and how the money is flowing across our country, but I hope at some point some people will do this because I really want to understand more.

Let me give you an example: Gabriela Firea who is our only woman in the government and she is in charge of our new Ministry of Family was asked at some point if she agrees to free access to abortion and she said yes, but for people who are religious she recommends speaking with a priest and she would include the pre-abortion counseling. This is

pretty dangerous because the anti-choice movement in Romania is so powerful and so vocal, implementing pre-abortion counseling would just open more doors for them and they are already working in the family planning offices and hospitals.. and priests start telling journalists that they are proud that they convinced... more than 100 priests in the maternity are working against providing abortion...

So at this point, I feel like this is a spider web that has really many implications and several actors who are working for the same purpose, while on the other side of the story, there is us, working with fewer resources and with a political environment which is more on the other side of the spectrum.. we have AUR, for the first time a far right-wing party in the Romanian Parliament, the other parties have also conservative people that are prominent figures, we have a prayer group in the Parliament and they are actually inviting actors, NGOs and politicians from US and from Europe and Russia to hold speeches and so on. So they are pretty powerful and they have resources which is the biggest difference between them and us. They have already a helpline for abortion. They bought the perfect website! In which to provide information about abortion in Romania, which is called avort.ro. On the website they have a phone number and when you call they are telling you that you will die and that you will be thinking about your unborn kid and that you will not be able to get up from your bed and you will be falling into a deep depression. And after that, they have the audacity to call you a few months later to ask you if you gave birth or you made an abortion in order to be a little more rude with you.

This is so interesting because this is exactly the same strategy that is used by the Czeck anti-choice movement and they also switched their aesthetic and discourse, from very gore photos of black and white aborted embryos and fetuses into a discourse much more trendy for young people and also with the text that we are not judging, we are helping. But when you call them actually they are offering you money for your future baby...

This is also happening in Romania. Actually, I was scrolling through my newsfeed a few days ago and I noticed this post from Pro Vita Iași describing how this woman who was coming to maternity for an abortion was convinced by them to give birth and they are helping them with a little amount of money and some baby clothes and now she has not one, but 2 babies because she gave birth 2 times! So yeah, it's not their choice anymore if they are calling you and you are telling them they are sinners and you are making them feel guilty and attacking them at their most vulnerable moment. I think it's really hard for religious women especially to have this kind of interaction with somebody from an anti-choice NGO or a hospital that won't provide abortion. I think for them it is shattering and it's following them all their life because they think they killed a life!

Could you elaborate a bit about the work you do with people from religious communities, how you reach them and what is the process?

We are doing community work, where we are meeting people with several vulnerable identities and we are organizing action groups of women and young people talking about the issues they are facing in their community. If we map the need for contraceptive methods we are trying to

provide them with modern contraceptive methods. Because the majority of them are religious or living in religious communities (plus the patriarchal culture). Therefore we are helping them with accessing IUDs because this is a contraceptive method that they can hide.

When a woman comes toward us with the need for an abortion we are asking her about the place where she is living and offer her help for an ultrasound that confirms the number of pregnancy weeks. This is the first step - after finding the location and the number of weeks we will either contact the professionals we already know or we map the services around her (usually on a 100 km area). Meanwhile, we are here to answer whatever questions she has, and if needed we are referring her to mental health services, free of charge. Sometimes we are assisting them at the hospital, it depends on each case.

So maybe we can go back to the abortion regulations and so on and we could talk about the economic aspect of that and how much it costs in Romania to have an abortion until 12 weeks on demand so called and then after 12 weeks for medical reasons?

Well.. this answer is more complex because as I told you abortion is not regulated and also the price is not. It is clear that medical abortion should be free even if it does not happen in reality and abortion on request is... From our data, the price of an abortion can go from 100 lei to 1200 lei in public hospitals if it's a surgical abortion. An abortion based on medical pills is 400-500 lei, it's pretty pricy even in public hospitals. And we also have the situation of the private clinics and I hate this because, especially

during the pandemic when the public hospitals stopped providing abortions, they made their abortion services even more pricy. I was outraged when I found out that one of the biggest health networks in Romania is charging 4500 lei, almost 1000 euro for abortion in this country.. others are charging 3000 or 3500, so if you are an average Romanian person earning the minimum wage, you need 2 wages to pay for your abortion which is outrageous. This is a big burden and problem in accessing abortion, especially for the most vulnerable women, from rural areas, without education, Roma women, or who are living in abusive relationships or are survivors of domestic violence and so on is because of the money.

Sometimes when I would call a hospital, the person would tell me the doctor is not providing abortion at the hospital but at his private office in order to charge me more. They are seeing you as an object, a way to make more money on your back, and a simple transaction.

So yes, actually it's a really big impediment, I wouldn't say that we will get free access to on request abortion soon, but at least setting a maximum price for the public hospitals is something that I am requesting from the Ministry of Health since 2019. I am trying to convince them that this is a big issue and nothing is happening until now.

What we are also trying to do now is to find some ways in which we can pay, especially for Ukrainian refugees for abortion, for contraceptive methods, and emergency contraception methods and now we are making research on other NGOs in Poland and how we can help Ukrainian refugees that are coming to Poland to get

actually an abortion in Romania or sending them abortion pills from Romania to Poland if it would be easier for us because we are not charged for doing that.

Do you have a network that helps people who need abortions in Romania, to put them in contact with places that provide abortion? Do you also have the possibility of helping them financially here at FILIA and how much if so?

At the moment we don't have this possibility, we are starting now a project working with Ukrainian refugees especially, on their reproductive health and services. We also don't have a network per se, it's more of an informal network of activists from several NGOs, some of us are activists, some of us are midwives, some of us are researchers or volunteers and we kind of know about each other. We are not making this public, but we have a list of abortion providers in Romania which is not comprehensive, it's not covering every county. We are now trying to map... I gathered a group of volunteers and next week we will be calling especially the hospitals and clinics from the counties at the border because we want to have access there for the Ukrainian refugees to abortion services. And we know well the situation in Bucharest, here it's the easiest to find a person to provide an abortion. And this is how the system works, somebody is calling an NGO and is in need of an abortion, so they are calling us or writing to us on our Instagram or Facebook or mail and telling their story. Most of the time I like to talk with these people on the phone and to have a discussion because most of them come with a lot of guilt and a lot of fear. I want to debrief a little bit and tell them that we have several solutions „*You are not alone*“ and

we've been doing this for a lot of time and "We can meet and talk about how you're feeling and what you are afraid of". And I either call Irina, my midwife friend who is working in the Association of Independent Midwives⁵ because she now has a project in which she is offering abortion access via telemedicine. They are working with only one or 2 doctors, so it's a pilot, but we can send abortive pills all across Romania at this point. So either I call them or I call the clinics or doctors that I have on my list of providers.

It's happening also that a person is coming to an NGO that is not us but is covering women's rights, domestic violence, or sex ed issues and they are referring them to us. After that, we are helping them or if they passed the 14 weeks of pregnancy and we have no solution for them here, we are talking with our friends abroad from Abortion Support Network⁶ and we are sending them to another country.

So I understand that you are not providing financial support for the people in the worst situation, so are there any supportive networks, collectives, NGOs, and so on who can offer to cover the costs for people who need to terminate their pregnancy and don't have resources for that?

From my information, they're really not. What we rather do is, when there is a situation of a vulnerable person who needs money, we chip in. I mean we go on our Facebook groups because in Romania we have a lot of informal groups with feminists, activists, or other people who are believing in feminist ideals or we have specific groups talking about gynecologists and traumatizing experiences at the doctors and so on.

⁵ <https://moasele.ro/en/>

⁶ <https://www.asn.org.uk/>



So we are going towards the informal network in these situations.

There is also the situation in which the woman who needs an abortion and passed the 14 weeks of pregnancy does not have any resources to pay for it, especially abroad, so Abortion Support Network would pay for the abortion.

Actually, many cases came to us from Facebook groups and our feminist groups. The thing is that I am always trying to find the cheapest solution and here this is why I really don't like to refer them to private clinics. I would like to have doctors in public hospitals in every county, not only in Bucharest that offer this service, because the difference between 400-500 lei and more than 1000 it's really big and it counts.

Now regarding this, I told you, we are starting a new project. We are hoping that the ones financing us will also give us money also for Romanian people, not only for Ukrainian refugees. Why? Because it's a situation of discrimination, our country is already really polarized at this point. The discourse on you are helping them but you are not helping us and our life is shit and so on... this is why we want to provide it for the people who really need it, because nobody should be forced in any way to become a mother and especially in this situation when money is the most important thing that counts.

What is also sad is that you are doing a lot of effort to find people who are providing abortions and when one hospital is telling us that they do, we don't have any guarantee that they are going to offer an abortion that is not going to be traumatizing. Because we encounter situations in which people told us that they felt the abortion from the beginning till the end, they fainted

because of the pain, they were told „Oh you liked when you fucked, but not it's too much of a pain“, or that they should be more relaxed. Some hospitals are actually asking you if you want your abortion without any anesthesia which is I think inhumane. And also, because many hospitals are not offering aborting pills, you have to go for a surgical procedure rather than take the pills and have an almost non-invasive abortion. So the chances of getting a traumatizing abortion are really high and this is why my short list of abortion providers is like 20 people because the other ones who are offering abortion are offering it in these conditions and I am not sending them to slaughter.

So maybe we can continue talking about abortion pills. Can you tell us first how it works here when you decide to have an abortion made by pills and how it is with the access?

Actually, the doctor is the one that decides that this should be the procedure and it depends.

Until 9 weeks of pregnancy, we have the guide and what the World Health Organization and UN are saying, that abortion should be provided with medical pills. So on paper, you should have the possibility to choose, but actually, the doctor is choosing for you. This is why I am always looking for doctors offering the pills. The doctors are many times afraid that the abortion is going to be incomplete and you will come back for a surgical abortion, but actually, the data is telling us that only less than 1% of the women that went through abortion with medical pills are going to have a surgical abortion afterward. So as I told

you before, we are working with a midwife who has a pilot project offering abortive pills via telemedicine or we have the situation where you take the pills in the clinic or in the hospital.

In the first situation, you are going and you have an ultrasound and then afterward you are talking via Zoom with a doctor and they are explaining you the procedure: that you are going to take the first pill, wait several hours, take the second pill, how you are going to feel in the process, people who should be around you and so on. They are giving you the prescription via email or WhatsApp and you can go to the pharmacy and buy the abortive pills. You can call the doctor when you take the pills if you want. Irina, the midwife is also trying to implement a pack to send to different cities around Romania, with the abortive pills instructions and a pregnancy test because of course after taking the pills you need to know if the abortion was complete or not. In extreme cases like Ukrainian refugees, you can also give abortive pills after 9 weeks of pregnancy because the chances of the pregnancy being terminated are high and it's better than not doing anything and waiting for the time to pass.

And when they are going through the official traditional way in a clinic or hospital, they are providing the pills there. It is more rare that they give you a prescription and you buy them, but this can also happen

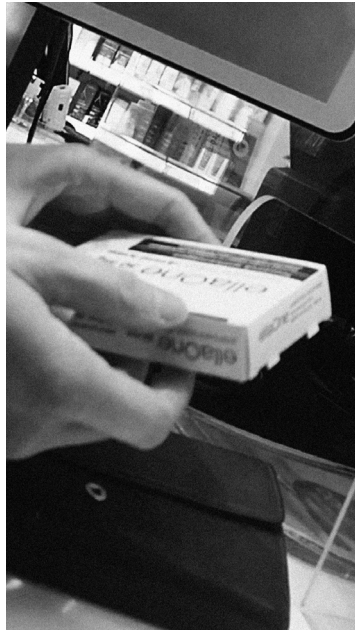
Of course, we haven't talked about this, but if you are under 16 in Romania, you need to be with one of your parents in all this process. There are doctors that are accepting the signature of an adult even if it's not one of their parents, which is not ok... I encourage every teenager that comes to

me to tell her parents, at least one. I know that family situations are complicated and this makes it even more, but your parents should know and you should not go through this alone. And when I encounter teenagers I also have discussions about contraceptives with them. Because the lack of information and access to contraception makes it so that we are encountering very often teenage pregnancies and abortions. And in Romania, the medium age in which we are starting our sex life is 15 and the age of consent is not really regulated, so for teenagers, it's way more complicated.

So maybe I will continue with the topic of the pills itself. I am coming from Poland where abortion is almost completely illegal, so the most common method to get a legal abortion when abortion is illegal is to order abortion pills from Women on Web or Women Help Women, two organizations which we can for sure trust and will not send aspirin. It's also quite cheap, 70 euro and they are asking for donations, so they also send it for free if the person does not have money.

According to Polish law, this is completely legal if this is for you because you can perform an abortion on your own body. Only the people helping you can be charged for that, like doctors or activists. So this is a very common practice, you wait for max 10 days and it works. So I was wondering since the situation in Romania is also not good regarding abortion, if this would be a good way, to advocate more this possibility and to start working with these organizations who are sending the pills from abroad.

I also know that they are sending pills to countries where abortion is illegal, so I don't know how it can be here where abortion is legal, but access is very hard. So I was wondering if that could work.



We are in touch actually with both of the organizations and we talked several times. For Romania, it is also legal to order the pills for yourself, but the problem is when you are doing this institutionally. As an NGO, we cannot order pills and distribute them to people, so we have to put them in contact with the 2 main NGOs. We are not doing this often because we usually manage to access the pills in Romania somehow via a doctor who gives us a prescription and we can go to the hospital. Here this is not a super urgent need, but we would definitely want to talk more with them about this and also about the situation with the refugees from Ukraine.

For us more important in terms of abroad abortion services, it's the over 14 weeks period which is a pretty low limit, so we need to find solutions to have it covered after that also. Giving people the chance to terminate their pregnancy until the 3rd trimester, is extremely helpful here. We had situations of people who bled during pregnancy so they thought they were menstruating and they realized they are pregnant in the 14th week. Nobody was providing them with an abortion anymore. I had a situation in which a beneficiary of ours told us that she called the number from that website avort.ro and they scared her, she was in 12 weeks of pregnant and then she went for an ultrasound and the doctor was very harsh with her and she told us: *And those 2 weeks just passed, I was so scared and so anxious and they just passed and I gave birth to a baby. I was in a really violent relationship, he was beating me during the pregnancy, I was a student at the university, and I was ashamed at some point to go to school anymore. And now I'm living with my*

mother and the baby in fear of my ex-partner. Her mother is helping her, so this is one of the lucky cases and she is continuing her studies, and then she told me: I was thinking about pregnancy as a blessing, but for me, it was a curse. And when I was young and thinking about the possibility of becoming pregnant in my teenage years or my early 20s I always said, I will get an abortion! I did not know it was so hard to get one...

So maybe as a last thought, we can talk a bit about the strategies of resistance and how do you think we can build a better future for reproductive rights.

First thing first I think short-medium term, it's going to be bad, I don't have much hope! I think the backlash from conservative actors is going to be even more powerful and they are going to be even more vocal. I see this conservative cloud all over Europe. So it's a lot of work to combat their discourse and actions, but I think in the long term we will win and we'll have access to at least decent services of reproductive health and to our rights!

But what I want is that this subject should not to be a taboo anymore, should not be something that we are talking about with shame and by whispering and finding out about our mother's stories only 40 years after they happened, as in my case. Normalize the discourse about abortion, this would be very helpful, this is one of the reasons why the institutions are not taking us seriously. Everybody is living with this idea that because we have a law that offers abortions, abortions are happening.

But as real steps and actions regarding our resilience, resistance, and

future help on reproductive health, I personally started a master's degree in health management, I want to write a thesis on access to contraceptive methods, not only on abortion. I think we need more research, Romania is really bad at collecting data. Without having data we don't know what is the need therefore we don't know what is the solution to the problem or its magnitude. I am seeing this in the data regarding abortions that were provided at home to people by themselves and 90% of them are in the main biggest cities, Bucharest, Cluj, and Timisoara, which is not the reality. They are just registering the provoked abortion as something else. We heard about people dying during the pandemic because of abortions that they provoked on themselves.

Collecting data on this, having an overview of the real situation on the hospital level... It is really frustrating that I am doing the job of the state, the Ministry of Health should be asking the hospitals every year how many doctors are providing abortion, how much does it costs, until how many weeks they provide it, and so on... But 2022 is here, next week we will be starting collecting data for our annual report on access to abortion.

I think it is really important to consolidate our solidarity, here in Romania between us activists, NGOs, coalitions, and groups but also all across Europe and with our sisters from Poland and Malta and so on and at least to check on each other. I am discovering lots of similarities between Romania and other countries, we are facing the same issues and the same actors who are deciding on our behalf. So we need to have a common discourse,

a common agenda. In my ideal world, I have common actions toward the international institutions and bodies that can regulate or at least put some pressure on the states to do something. It is really important that journalists are writing about this. We are collaborating a lot with them for our advocacy work.

We will continue mapping the legislation, finding institutions that have a thing to say regarding hospital regulations and accreditation and how we can, not persuade doctors, but you can oblige the hospital to provide at least one doctors who is providing abortion. Also to have a national guide on how to provide these services. I don't know in terms of the conservative movement, I really don't know how you can regulate and restrict their access to hospitals and family planning offices, close their helplines... I think it's going to be a fight that will be continuous and require a lot of people and resources. I am really glad that I have the knowledge of my fellow activists and on the basis of that I started my research.

Romania also has this big trauma with the decree, with 10 000 women that died and more than 100 000 women that mutilated themselves trying to provoke abortions. History is repeating, even if we are not talking about this, it is still happening. And we are living in a country in which a few years ago, I think it was 2020, a woman died in Ploiesti after an abortion made by a doctor who already had a file open for mal praxis, made abortions in an unofficial office. That woman died and the spokesperson of the Ministry of Health went out and said that they are not actually supporting this procedure and they are

actually believing in raising the natality of the country. Yeah... This is the country we are living in, a country that wants to raise their natality on the shoulders of the people that are forced to become mothers. This is outrageous! We don't need a law to deny us access to abortion, they are doing great now without one!

Solidarity and research and talking about it, going towards the society with information on what is happening it's the key in order to put pressure on the minority of people who make the decision. At the societal level, people are quite pro-abortion because again, we've been through communism, everybody has one person in their family who had an abortion during communism.

Any denial or any slight intention to deny a person access to contraceptive methods and abortion, and especially abortion because it's a last resort, is a sort of violence!

I hope we will manage at some point to convince them that we cannot go any longer like that!

Thank you very much!

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Printed from the [unclear] (SISTER, July 1973)

