



Brussels, 21 May 2021

As members of the European Parliament and of the All of Us Network, we reaffirm our severe concerns with the very restrictive national legislation in Malta that criminalises access to safe abortions. Our network affirms that each and every individual has a right to decide over her own body and should enjoy protection from any form of coercion, discrimination or violence in making informed decisions about her sexual and reproductive health. When women are denied this fundamental right their autonomy, dignity, equality, wellbeing, and life are jeopardized and undermined.

Despite the fact that sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are considered essential healthcare and a fundamental right around the world, Malta remains one of the few countries where abortion is still criminalised. Under the Criminal Code, abortion is prohibited in all circumstances and the person performing or having the abortion is subject to imprisonment. The criminalisation of abortion in Malta promotes the refusal of many healthcare professionals to discuss termination of pregnancy options with their patients and forces hundreds of women every year to seek clandestine abortions, to travel to other countries or to carry their pregnancy to term against their will. Such violations of SRHR have been declared by international organisations as a breach of human rights and a form of gender-based violence.

Last week an independent member of parliament presented a bill to decriminalise abortion in Malta, thus steering political forces towards finally taking a public position on this urgent matter. This is a historical opportunity to promote the debate on abortion in Malta.

We call on the Maltese government, members of parliament and political parties to commit to:

- decriminalise abortion in the Maltese Penal Code
- ensure that people in Malta are able to access the full range of sexual and reproductive healthcare services without fear of judgement or criminal prosecution, including safe and legal abortion.
- develop comprehensive evidence-based sexuality education for all primary and secondary school children in line with the WHO standards
- eliminate practical, financial and legal restrictions on the provision of contraceptives especially for young people and persons on low income and to remove the requirement for third-party authorisation that impede access to contraception for adolescents under the age of 16

Furthermore, we want to express our full support and solidarity with the civil society organisations and individuals in Malta who have been tirelessly advocating and promoting the advance of sexual and reproductive health and rights in the country. Like them, we also believe that unhindered and timely access to reproductive health services and respect for women's reproductive autonomy and decision-making are critical to protecting women's human rights and gender equality.

All of Us Coordinators in the European Parliament

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