

## ORAL STATEMENT

International Humanist and Ethical Union

**UN Human Rights Council, 46th Session (22 February to 23 March 2021)**

**Item 6 UPR Outcomes: Croatia**

Thank you, Madame President and thank you to the Croatian delegation.

I make this statement on behalf of Humanists International and the Center for Civil Courage, Croatia.

We are deeply disappointed that Croatia has rejected the recommendation to guarantee legal and safe abortions for all women and girls.

While on paper, abortion has been legal in Croatia since 1978, in practice a woman seeking an abortion faces numerous obstacles.

A key issue is the increasing refusal by doctors to perform abortions on the grounds of their religion. Nearly 60% of doctors are now considered “conscientious objectors”.<sup>1</sup>

While hospitals are under a legal duty to make a referral in such cases, the practice is very unregulated.<sup>2</sup> Many women are forced to have terminations in private clinics or to travel abroad, at extraordinary cost and danger to themselves.

There is a powerful anti-abortion movement in Croatia which uses sophisticated tactics to undermine a woman’s right to make an informed choice about her body. Intimidation outside of clinics are now combined with aggressive online disinformation campaigns, which spread unscientific claims and lies.<sup>3</sup>

Women's reproductive rights are exposed to intense economic and ideological pressure.

We need a comprehensive, science-based program of sex education in schools. And in cases of conscientious objection, the burden should be on the hospital to ensure that the religious beliefs of its staff do not undermine the right of patients to access safe and legal abortion care. Public health institutions must employ sufficient staff who are willing to provide all reproductive health services.

Thank you / Hvala vam

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/is-croatia-going-the-way-of-poland-on-reproductive-rights/a-56044929>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.znajznanje.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Marina-Vosika-Msc-Report-Barriers-to-Abortion-Access-in-Croatia-1.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/12/01/brave-sisters-tackle-croatias-growing-stigma-over-abortion/>;  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/30/croatia-anti-abortion-lobby-new-ways-get-message-across>