

Women travel more than 100 km to get abortions

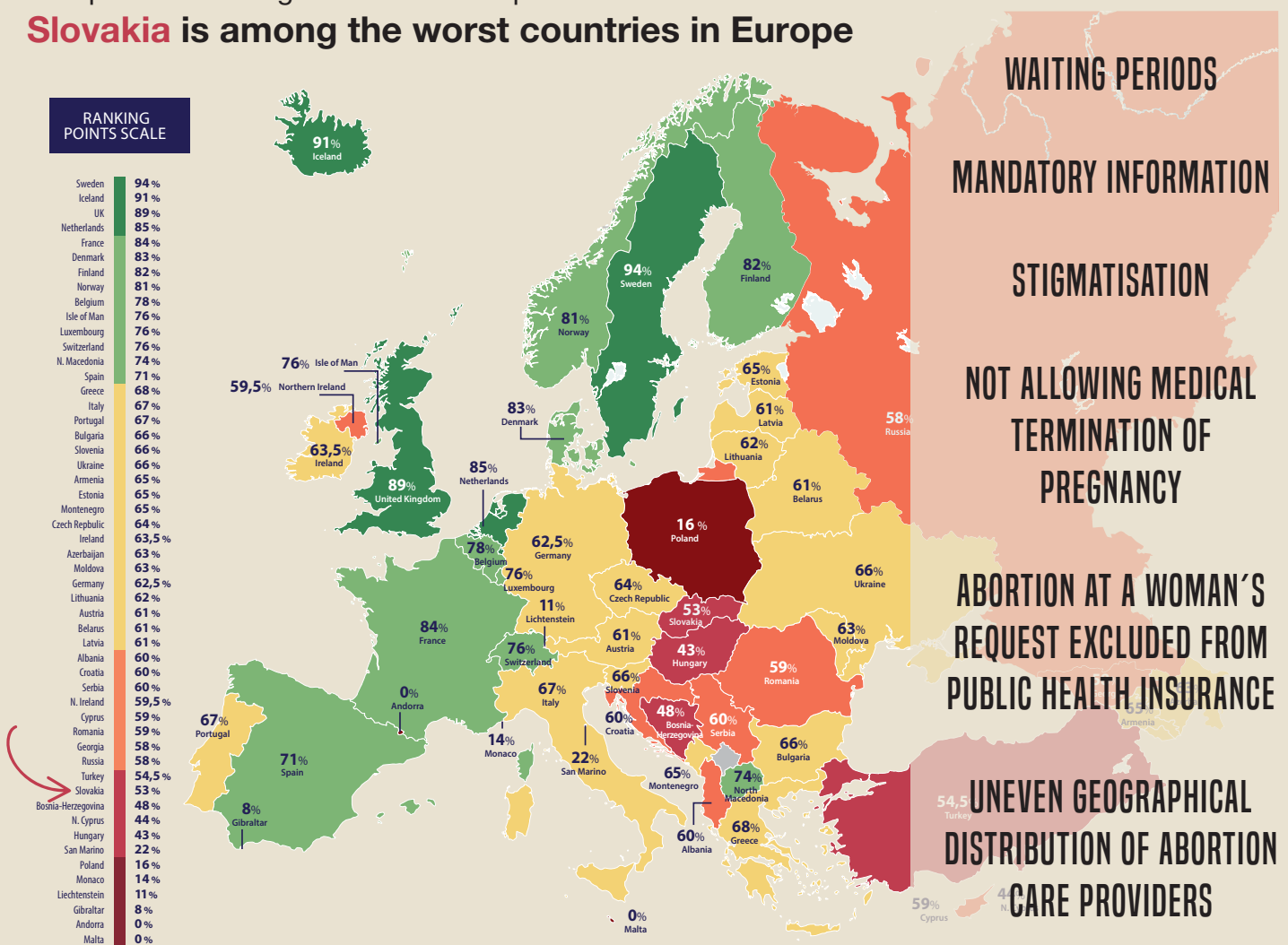
The right to health is a basic human right. It requires that women have timely access to safe, affordable and high-quality abortion services. Any obstacles concerning the access to abortion reinforce inequality, discrimination and poverty of women and violate a whole range of their human rights.

Limiting access to abortion puts women's health and lives at risk. It may lead to abortions being carried out too late or to abortions being provided in dangerous conditions, with the use of dangerous methods.

On the accessibility of abortions in Slovakia

Comparative ranking of abortion care policies:

Slovakia is among the worst countries in Europe



Source: *European Abortion Policies Atlas 2021*. Available at: <https://www.ippfen.org/resource/european-abortion-policies-atlas>

According to the European Abortion Policies Atlas, **Slovakia ranks 43rd** when it comes to providing abortion care. In total, the ranking evaluates policies in 52 countries.

43rd of 52

Information availability and accessibility

HOW TO FIND OUT WHERE AND UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS YOU CAN GET AN ABORTION

Women who would like to get an abortion find themselves under time pressure, as they have to get the procedure within the statutory time limit. They have to endure a mandatory waiting period and visit a doctor repeatedly.



1 You take a look at the **websites** of healthcare facilities. However,

1/3

of them do not inform about abortions at all

of them only mention abortions indirectly in the price lists

Information on the webpages is often not up-to-date or accurate. You will only find out whether they actually perform abortions after you visit or make a phone call.



2 **Calling** the healthcare facilities is time-consuming. When we called the health care providers,

12 %

of the facilities could only be reached after being called 3 times within a timespan of 2 weeks

16 %

of the facilities could not be reached at all



3 There is no publicly accessible list of healthcare facilities that provide abortions. Even your **gynecologist** may not be able to provide accurate information. Some women do not have a contract doctor. Some go to doctors who reject abortion care. Women then have to contact abortion providers directly.

Women's voices

At first, I called them and they told me to come. (...) When I reached the hospital, the nurse rushed towards me and said: "The doctor who carries out abortions is not here. All the others are objectors, get out." That was all. (...) They gave me a piece of advice, I went there and (...) I did not succeed. I was completely desperate.

Iveta, abortion at the age of 38

THE ACCESSIBILITY OF INFORMATION ON ABORTION CARE, USED PROCEDURES AND FEES IS LOW.

HOW CAN THE SITUATION BE IMPROVED?

The Ministry of Health and the National Health Information Centre should create a list of healthcare facilities that provide abortion upon request without medical indications. The list should:

- Inform about the abortion providers, the procedures used and the final prices to be paid;
- get updated regularly;
- be available on the website of the Ministry of Health, on the websites of local administrations as well as in gynaecological waiting rooms.

It must be ensured that gynaecological health services providers display on their websites clear and detailed information about the providing of abortions and of other types of reproductive health services.



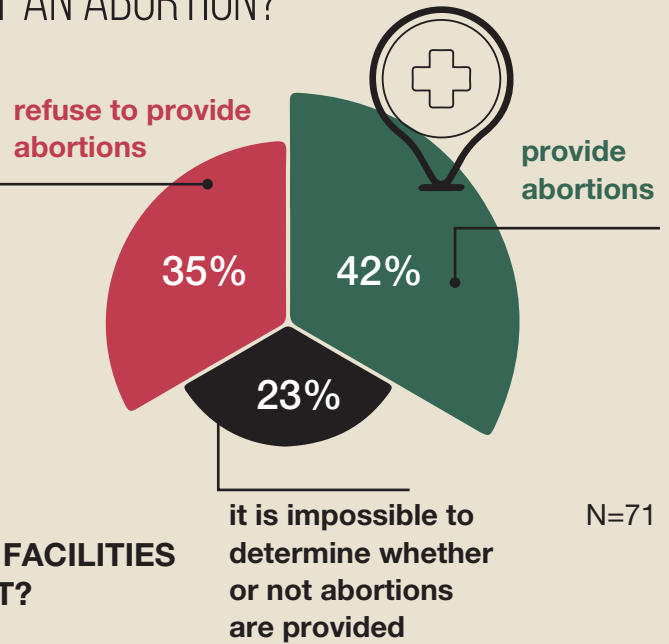
Geographical accessibility

WHERE CAN YOU GET AN ABORTION?

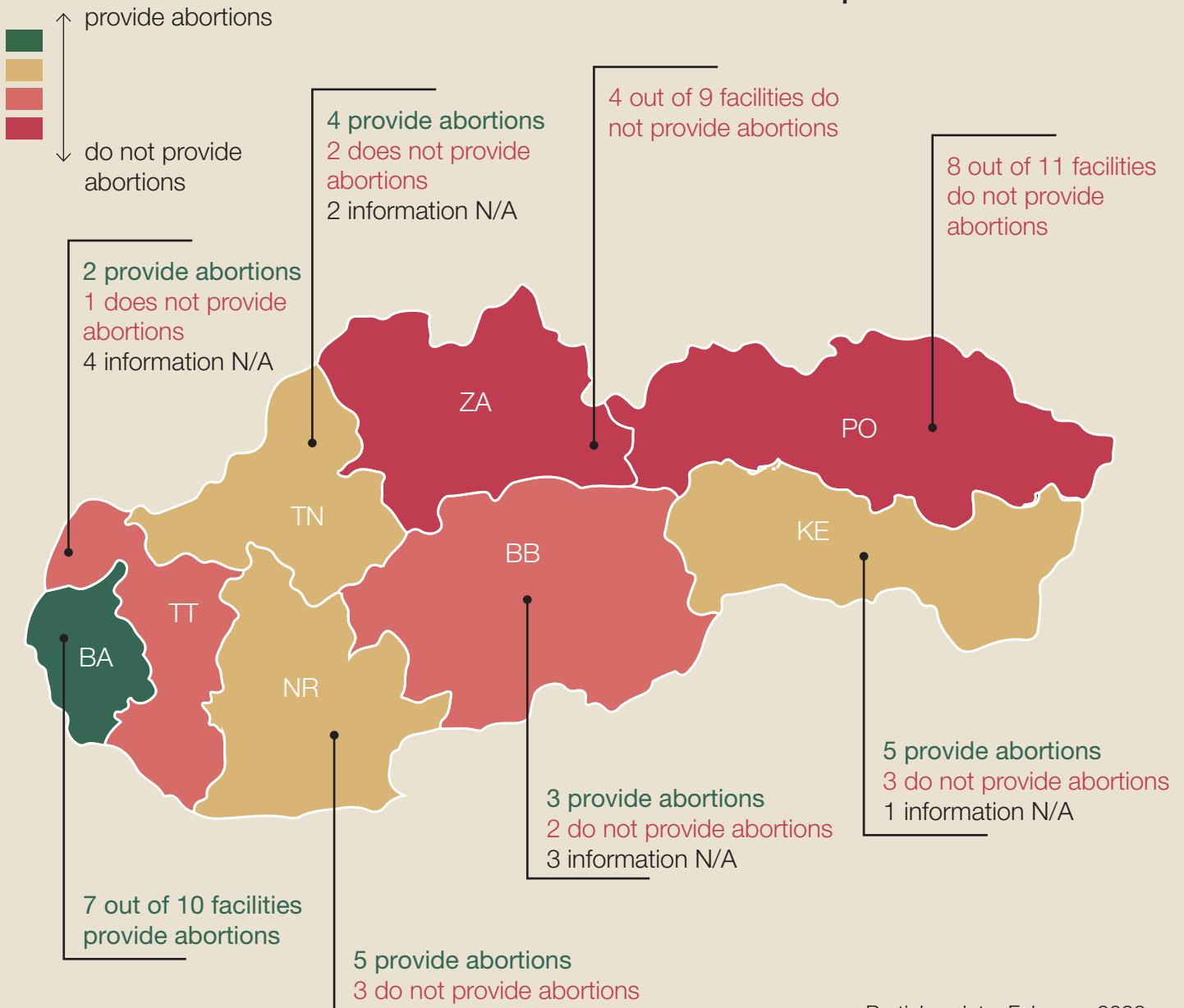
DO HEALTHCARE FACILITIES PROVIDE ABORTIONS?

35% of medical facilities refuse to provide abortion upon the woman's request.

There are great regional differences. Medical care accessibility is best in the Bratislava region, in the Prešov and Žilina regions the situation is worst. At the time being, one medical facility is already serving too many patients. After the envisioned optimisation of the hospitals network, this might worsen once again.



HOW MANY OF THE 70 MAPPED HEALTHCARE FACILITIES PROVIDE ABORTIONS AND HOW MANY DO NOT?





Women's voices

Before the procedure, it is necessary to undergo multiple medical examinations. Since these were not available, I had to carry a dead fetus in my body for more than a week.

From an anonymous online survey



What prevents women from receiving medical care?

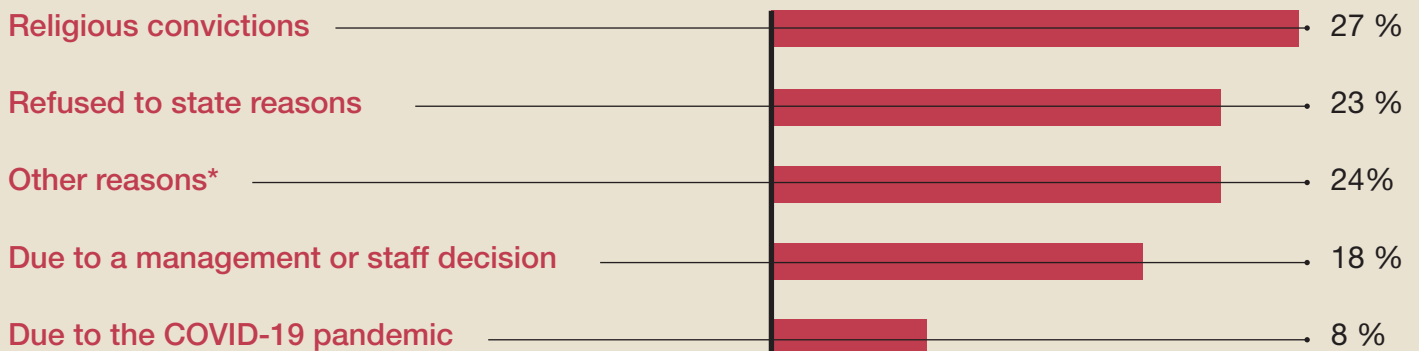
I do not have to tell you that. We just do not do (abortions) and that's it.
A healthcare centre, Bansk Bystrica region

Abortions are not being carried out, have not been carried out and they will not be carried out. (...) It just is a given. Just as it is a given that they do not sell crystal chandeliers at Lidl and people do not go there demanding such products. In the same way, people know that this issue is closed in our gynaecology and obstetrics.

A healthcare centre, Žilina region

The accessibility of abortions in Slovakia is greatly impacted by the fact that entire healthcare institutions refuse to provide them. 27 Slovak healthcare institutions, around one third of those mapped in this study, do not carry out abortions.

WHAT ARE THEIR REASONS FOR THIS?



*for instance, they no longer have a gynaecologist or they only perform abortions on medical grounds.
Partial update, February 2023.

A LOT OF HEALTHCARE FACILITIES REFUSING TO CARRY OUT ABORTIONS, HUGE REGIONAL DIFFERENCES, THE NECESSITY TO REPEATEDLY TRAVEL OVER MORE THAN 100 KM TO GAIN ACCESS TO THIS REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICE



HOW CAN THE SITUATION BE IMPROVED?

- Urgently address the situation in those regions where most healthcare institutions refuse to carry out abortions.
- Take the situation into account while preparing the optimisation of the hospital network.
- Rectify the situation when whole healthcare institutions refuse to provide reproductive health services based on religious or personal belief.
- In case individual employees refuse to provide medical care, make sure that women have access to abortions.
- Map the extent as well as the impacts of the refusal to provide medical care services based on religious or personal belief.



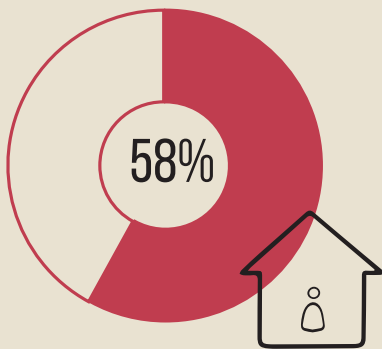
Financial accessibility

HOW MUCH WILL YOU PAY FOR AN ABORTION?

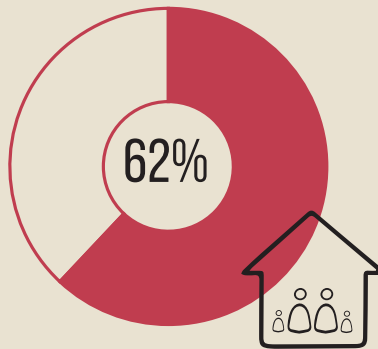
The average price for a legal abortion, including additional fees, is estimated to be **414€**. The regulation of the Ministry of Health sets the final price for an abortion at 248.95€. **Why then the difference?** Because the set price is often not respected and women pay various hidden fees.



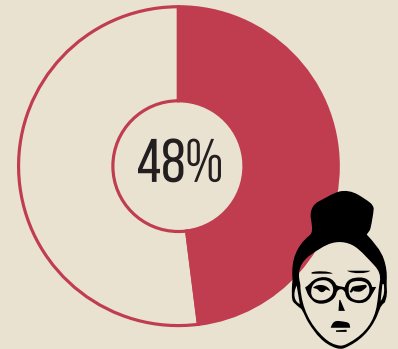
The estimated price (including fees) corresponds to:



58% of the monthly disposable income of a one-person household



62% of the monthly disposable income of a household with 2 adults and 2 dependent children



48% of the average nominal gross wage of young women aged 20-24.

Women's voices



For some women it is a big hurdle, especially for those who are younger, out of work and their partner earns low income, have many children, well, I can't imagine...

Iveta, abortion at the age of 38

ABORTIONS ARE EXPENSIVE AND A LOT OF WOMEN CANNOT AFFORD THEM

HOW CAN THE SITUATION BE IMPROVED?

- Fees for abortions should be abolished. Abortions should be covered by public health insurance for all women.
- The respective regulation should include free abortions for women who had become pregnant as a result rape and for those who experience violence by their partners.



Health care quality

HOW ARE ABORTIONS CARRIED OUT?

Surgical abortion is the only legal abortion method in Slovakia. The expert public, however, deems surgical abortions to be outdated and demands the introduction of medical abortions, which correspond to the latest scientific knowledge and are considered standard in the world.

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In developed countries, the abortion pill has been in use for over 20 years. An increase in the number of abortions has not occurred in any of the countries where the pill had been introduced.

Martin Redecha, President of the Slovak Gynaecological and Obstetrical Society

Women's voices



Well, I find it wrong in regards to the protection of life and health, because a surgery is always more invasive. It would be better if a medical method was available as well.

But I believe it should be done under medical supervision.

Radka, 35

IN SLOVAKIA, ABORTIONS ARE NOT BEING CARRIED OUT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LATEST SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE



HOW CAN THE SITUATION BE IMPROVED?

- A legislative change should be made so as to allow the use of medical abortion. The State Institute for Drug Control should re-approve the use of Mifegyne and Medabon and introduce them on the market.
- Let women decide whether they would like to have a surgical or a medical abortion.



WHAT ELSE CAN CONTRIBUTE TO SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE?

- All modern forms of contraception should be covered by public health insurance.
- Raise awareness about contraception.
- Develop and publish standards for preventive, diagnostic and therapeutic procedures for reproductive and sexual health services, including safe abortion care, in accordance with Slovakia's human rights commitments and WHO standards

In its Constitution and laws, as well as by ratifying international conventions, the Slovak Republic has committed itself to the protection of reproductive rights. . It has also demonstrated its willingness to implement them in practice by **voluntarily** becoming a member of the United Nations, of the Council of Europe and of the European Union. Reproductive rights enjoy protection not only by human rights authorities, but also by medical bodies such as the World Health Organisation which has summarised its human rights and health standards in the Abortion Care Guideline (WHO, 2022).



Women in Slovakia face a lot of obstacles when accessing reproductive health services. This way, our country does not protect and fulfil their human rights, including the right to health. Together, we can change this.

Let us be a country that cares. Women's health and lives are at stake.

#StarostlivaKrajina
#ZdravieŽien

This material elaborates on the findings of research conducted by the feminist non-governmental organisation Freedom of Choice (Možnosť voľby) in 2021. The research aimed to determine the informational, physical, geographic and financial accessibility of safe abortions at a woman's request - without medical indications. To this end, we mapped 66 websites of inpatient or same-day gynaecological health care providers; we carried out 56 telephone inquiries (mystery calls) at such facilities and conducted 6 interviews with gynaecologists; we also handled 21 requests for access to information under the Access to Information Act No. 211/2000.

The research report and its main findings are to be found at **www.moznostvolby.sk**. There, you can also read reports about our recent research on sex education and on women's experiences with accessing abortion and contraception.

Source: "Availability of Reproductive Health Services in Slovakia. Report on Health Care Providers." Barbora Holubová (ed.), Adriana Mesochoritsová, Paula Jójárt.

Freedom of Choice (2001) is one of the most active advocacy organisations in the field of protecting women's human rights. It is the only such organisation that has - since its inception - systematically devoted itself to improving the protection of reproductive rights and health in Slovakia.

In addition to reproductive health, it also deals with the prevention of gender-based violence and with the application of a gender perspective in public policies. Our members react and propose changes to political decisions that have discriminatory effects. Our members comment on legislative materials, prepare public comments and protests. Besides that, they conduct research, monitor the situation and present information on it to the public both in Slovakia and abroad. They engage in dialogue with state and public institutions and with politicians. Freedom of Choice is active in participatory bodies, most of all, in the Slovak Government Council for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality.

In order to mobilise as many people as possible for the protection of human rights and gender equality, Freedom of Choice offers experiential gender training sessions. The organisation has extensive experience with gender education for adults in Slovakia. It also has the widest portfolio of educational programmes for various target groups, including politicians.

In its activities, Freedom of Choice consistently relies on international human rights conventions and promotes solutions aimed at achieving gender equality and protecting human rights as key social values. It is our dream and goal that Slovakia becomes a just and caring country, where everyone can live a dignified life.



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FREEDOM OF CHOICE

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