

**"This would be tantamount to a de facto ban on abortion".**

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**Women's rights in Poland**

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**A conversation with Hanna Grzeskiewicz by Carmela Negrete. This interview first appeared in German in [junge Welt](#).**

**CN: The feminist collective "Dziewuchy Berlin" has warned of the precarious situation Polish women find themselves in, as the corona crisis has limited abortion access even more. What is the connection between the pandemic and abortion access?**

**HG:** Around a thousand legal abortions take place in Poland every year. However, this option is only possible for a very limited number of cases, which is why it was common for many women to go abroad toward this end, for example, to Great Britain or Germany – while thousands of dangerous abortions that take place every year in criminalized, underground circumstances. However, now that the borders have been closed in the wake of the corona crisis, affected women have little chance to make decisions regarding their lives or bodies.

**CN: Under what conditions can abortion be performed in Poland?**

**HG:** Abortions may only be performed in three cases: following a rape, if the mother's health is at risk or if the fetus is terminally ill. Nearly every abortion performed in Poland is based on the latter grounds.

However, the right-wing Polish government attempted to make the situation more difficult for those affected even before the corona crisis, didn't it?

The attempt to ban abortions in Poland started as early as 2016. There were extensive demonstrations against this project. Two years ago, another debate on this question was held and a bill was proposed to remove the aforementioned third case.

The law was initially referred to committees – for consultation, and if it were to go through, it would be tantamount to a de facto ban on abortion. In addition, sexual education in schools would be banned and punishable by three years in prison.

The project was initiated by an extremely right-wing, very religious civil organisation, an association called "Life and Family". According to surveys, the majority of the population opposes this law and even supports the legalization of abortion.

In October we had elections in Poland, and as a result, all the existing legislative projects must be re-opened to debate within six months. In mid-April, the draft was adopted by Parliament at first reading. It is not yet clear what the next steps will be.

**CN: Were you able to demonstrate against this new repressive progression in the current circumstances?**

**HG:** Yes, several protests took place online. In addition, we, the collective "Dziewuchy Berlin", met at the Warschauer Brücke in Berlin-Friedrichshain and wielding black umbrellas, a symbol of the protest – we practiced social distancing and masks, of course, but we also held up banners and posters.

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It was important for us to signal our opposition and our demands – for example, the legalization of at-home medical abortion – in a visible and creative way, despite the quarantine.

In Poland, a motorcade and a road blockade were formed in the Warsaw city center. Women also protested in queues outside supermarkets. It should be noted that the restrictions in the country are very strict due to the corona pandemic and people have to wait for entry in front of shops at a distance from one other.

From our point of view, the protests were quite successful, even if the result is a rather unpleasant aftertaste: The law hasn't been passed, but it hasn't been rejected either.

**CN: What is the nature of your collective "Dziewuchy Berlin"?**

**HG:** Our group was founded four years ago when the debate on an abortion ban began in Poland. Ever since, we have been campaigning for the right to self-determination of Polish women and trying to draw attention to their situation in Berlin by organizing lectures, taking to the streets, and networking with other feminists.

*Translation by Emily Pollak for [The Left Berlin](#).*

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