



# Obstetric Violence & Birth in Romania

## Strategies Towards a Better Tomorrow

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- Situated in the south-eastern region of Europe, with an area of 237 500 m<sup>2</sup>
- In 2014 the population of Romania was reported to be 19.91 million (The World Bank, 2014).
- Life expectancy was estimated at 71 years for men and 78 years for women in 2013 by WHO
- Joined the EU in 2007
- From an economic perspective Romania is still in transition from communism towards a market economy.

- ▶ In the 1960s, the Ceausescu government tried to reverse the country's fertility decline by making abortion illegal.
- ▶ Illegal abortions (most of them self-induced or performed by an untrained individual under unsafe conditions), which contributed to Romania having the highest maternal death rate in Europe:
- ▶ In the early 1990s, after the communism period has ended Romania was faced with the reproductive health consequences of a rigorously enforced pronatalist policy—in place for more than two decades—that restricted women's access to contraception and abortion.
- ▶ During the communism period Romania like other central and eastern European countries had a Semashko health care system, which meant that all services were state provided and free of charge, but had the downside of providing little or no choice to people when seeking health services.



- ▶ Starting with 1960 traditional birth attendants were forbidden to attend births in Romania and pregnant women found themselves forced to give birth in hospitals.
- ▶ Midwifery schools were abolished in 1978, and the role of the midwife was taken over by the general nurse with a short period of on-site training in obstetrics and gynaecology.
- ▶ In 2004, the Ministry of Health reintroduced the midwifery profession and the first midwifery program at university level was established with a curriculum and training period in compliance with EU requirements.
- ▶ At present midwifery care and home births, only exist in the memories of a few older women and practised by the occasional isolated 'revolutionary' midwife. Midwifery care was gradually phased out with the growth of a medicalised approach to childbirth.

- ▶ There is a complete lack of concern for the woman's experiences in childbirth with little thought given to her needs, such as for companionship, comfort, emotional support.
- ▶ Technology is frequently over - used, for example, frequently repeated ultrasound during pregnancy and routine foetus heart monitoring in labour.
- ▶ Technological intervention is preferred to a non-interventionist approach whenever possible

- ▶ There is no official data yet available for 2015, so we are still referring to 2014.
- ▶ 154,083 women gave birth in Romanian public hospitals.
- ▶ 44.4% gave birth through C-section
- ▶ WHO recommends a rate of 81% of vaginal birth without episiotomy. In Romania this rate is 21%.
- ▶ 60% of pregnant women are being abused at birth in Romania
- ▶ C-section rate went up 10% in 2014, which makes a total of 68,384 C-sections.

## International C-section rate

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- ▶ Romania, one of the top countries with the highest C-section rate
- ▶ The wide variation in the incidence of C-section illustrates how different the medical practices are at the European level, which raises questions regarding the integration of scientific evidence in clinical decisions.





## International episiotomy rate

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- ▶ In Romania, episiotomy is considered a pure routine procedure.
- ▶ The episiotomy rate is 61.8% in Romanian public hospitals.
- ▶ There are districts (41 districts in total) where the episiotomy rate is 100%, basically no chance to give birth naturally.
- ▶ For the 154,083 births in 2014 there were reported 231,405 invasive medical procedures in public hospitals.

- ▶ 185,322 babies were born in 2014 in public hospitals in Romania
- ▶ 781 were still-births
  - ▶ 78.3% of moms benefited from antenatal appointments
  - ▶ 65% began their medical examinations in the 1<sup>st</sup> trimester of their pregnancies
  - ▶ 27% of them received no medical appointments at all to the day of the birth
- ▶ The infant mortality rate in rural areas is 60% higher than in urban areas.
- ▶ At the EU level, Romania's infant mortality rate is 13 deaths per 1000 new-borns.
- ▶ Maternal mortality: 31 women die in 100,000 pregnancies

- ▶ In 2003, the profession of midwifery was re-established in Romania
  - ▶ Over 1000 licensed midwives
  - ▶ Only 591 midwives are partially active
  - ▶ Only 2 midwives in rural area!
- ▶ No positions for midwives in Romanian public hospitals, often taken over by obstetric nurses, because they are cheaper workforce and because midwifery profession is very poorly understood
- ▶ Although midwifery scope of practice is clearly defined by EU legislation, this has been completely dismissed by the Romanian authorities who made it mandatory for an obstetrician to be present at every delivery, including home birth delivery
- ▶ No legislation to protect midwives from a potential malpraxis lawsuit
- ▶ No guide for natural birth
- ▶ No evidence based practice

- ▶ In 2014, we produced the first Romanian documentary about birth
  - ▶ Describes the abuses in the Romanian health system
  - ▶ Describes the emotional needs of women during pregnancy and birth
  - ▶ Breaks down the myths of C-section
  - ▶ Describes the options that women and babies have at birth
  - ▶ Describes the need for midwifery in Romania
- ▶ We wrote the first birth guide, which is free to download on our website
- ▶ We do screenings of our documentary and public debates all over the country
- ▶ We offer data transparency at the national level, but also at local level per hospital, per procedure by conducting our own surveys.
- ▶ We are informing about women and children's rights and options at birth through our articles online ([www.LionMentor.ro](http://www.LionMentor.ro))
- ▶ Through everything we do, we PROMOTE midwifery in Romania!

Thank you so much for the opportunity of being part of this conference.

We do hope to bring international awareness of the birth crisis and obstetric violence in Romania