



ASTRA Network Narrative Report January 2015 – December 2015

IMPACT

Year 2015 has been a year of empowerment of ASTRA member organisations as well as strengthening the Network internally by reaching out to the members and reviewing their condition and work at country level. It has also been a year of continuous advocacy for realization of women’s Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) with several successes at regional level. ASTRA’s advocacy and international and regional cooperation has resulted in the inclusion of reproductive health and rights and sexual health in the United Nations development agenda for the next 15 years as well as a strong recognition of the importance of SRHR on the European Union level.

ASTRA Secretariat continues to be hosted by its Polish member – the Federation for Women and Family Planning in Warsaw, Poland, where the ASTRA Network Coordinator operates.

I. Results of ASTRA Network advocacy at regional and international levels

- i. ASTRA Network contributed to inclusion of strong language on SRHR, especially the call towards the European Commission to recognize SRHR as a fundamental human right, in the [2015 Report on the situation of Fundamental Human Rights in the European Union](#). This inclusion is a result of the Public Hearing “*Barriers in access to reproductive health goods and services*” (June 4th, Brussels, Belgium) hosted by the Co-Chairs of the European Parliament Working Group on Reproductive Health, HIV/AIDS and Development: Member of European Parliament Sophie in 't Veld (ALDE/D66, the Netherlands) and Member of European Parliament Heidi Hautala (Greens/Vihreäliitto, Finland).
- ii. ASTRA Network Public Hearing at the European Parliament also resulted in a call by MEP Sophie in 't Veld for a thorough research on access to reproductive health goods and services in the EU and in individual Member States and to submitting a pilot project proposal for the year 2016 on “*Inequalities in access to reproductive health goods and services in the EU*”.

II. Regional and international cooperation

- i. ASTRA Network contributed to the civil society struggle to react against anti-abortion restrictions in Macedonia by actively participating in the national conference on abortion organized on September 28 on the occasion of the International Day of Action for Safe and Legal Abortion by ASTRA member H.E.R.A. in Skopje. ASTRA Coordinator presented the situation on access to safe and legal abortion in the Central and Eastern European region and participated in press conference which was widely used by the Macedonian [media](#).
- ii. As a result of the annual workshop (October 12-13, Plovdiv, Bulgaria) ASTRA Network members developed the [“Plovdiv Call to Action”](#) directed at the European Union institutions, UN agencies, regional and global foundations and donors and national governments to point to the vast challenges posed to non-governmental organisations in our region; in particular the increasing challenge to secure funding for the existence of NGOs. The call had been distributed among partners, UN agencies, Members of the European Parliament, international civil society, donors and other stakeholders.
- iii. At the annual workshop (October 12-13, Plovdiv, Bulgaria) 24 ASTRA Network members exchanged information and knowledge about their organisations and the biggest challenges they experience. Participants were trained on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and about access to emergency contraception in the region during the annual ASTRA meeting in Plovdiv.
- iv. ASTRA Network continues to be active within the Civil Society Platform to Promote SRHR beyond 2015 as member of the Coordinating Committee and contributed to including reproductive health and rights and sexual health in the [2030 Sustainable Development Agenda](#) which was adopted by the UN in September 2015. As a result of this international coalition of NGOs ASTRA was also able to participate and influence the process that lead up to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the Intergovernmental Negotiations on the outcome document. Additionally throughout the year ASTRA participated in closed meetings of the Civil Society Platform with UN Women and UNFPA and advocated for a greater civil society inclusion in United Nations processes as well as including SRHR in the post-2015 development agenda.
- v. ASTRA provided country mapping and regional expertise through issuing statement directed towards decision makers from [European Union](#) countries and [Eastern Europe, Balkans and Caucasus](#) at the 59th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (March, New York).
- vi. ASTRA ensured vocal support for SRHR in the post-2015 Development Agenda by submitting a [written statement](#) for the 48th session of the UN Commission on Population and Development.
- vii. ASTRA, alongside other European civil society organisations, [addressed the European Union](#) while it was coordinating for the post-2015 negotiation session on

Recommendations for the follow up, review, monitoring and accountability mechanisms of the post-2015 agenda.

III. Recognition and outreach

- i. The [monthly bulletin](#) continues to play a critical role as an important source of information regarding SRHR in the region. It is distributed to six listserves reaching over 2 500 subscribers.
- ii. ASTRA continues to be active on social media and ensures up to date news on its [website](#), [Facebook fanpage](#) and [Twitter](#) accounts. These have become reputable sources of information with a steadily growing number of followers and citations.
- iii. Strengthened visibility of ASTRA Network members and Network's position of regional expert are results of the ASTRA Public Hearing at the European Parliament, the September 28 conference on abortion in Macedonia and the "Plovdiv Call to Action".

IV. The network and membership development

- i. ASTRA Network strengthened its visibility by celebrating its 15th anniversary and producing a short [film](#) about its history and mission. Members have contributed to the film by submitting photos, films and sharing memories. All photos sent by members on the occasion of 15th birthday have been posted [online](#).
- ii. Currently the network consists of 39 [member organisations](#) from 21 countries.

PROBLEMS

The harsh climate surrounding SRHR has thickened in the last years especially. Many countries of the CEE region are experiencing attempts to limit women's rights, especially reproductive rights and the rights to safe and legal abortion. The religious and far-right political groups have declared a war on "gender ideology" (term coined to fight gender equality policies and education), a trend that can also be observed in other countries in Europe. The attacks on reproductive rights should be seen in context of the financial crisis and low birth rates in all countries of the CEE region which feed the nationalistic rhetoric. The specific socio-economic situation of the post-communist countries is neglected in the global perspective. The region is currently perceived as middle to high income region despite still a high level of social and economic disparities. This view is additionally enforced by the fact that some countries of CEE region are members of the European Union. Withdrawal of funding from the region further worsens the situation in the area of SRHR. This leads to a situation where funds from the most influential institutions have been relocated to other regions and to big international organisations working on these issues whilst local and grassroots organisations struggle to continue their work. Additionally the discrepancy

between compliance with human rights standards on national level and the obligations to international agreements is they key area of activity for non-governmental organizations.

CHANGES

One of the biggest achievements within the Network is its wide recognition within the international community and on European Union and UN level. ASTRA is considered one of the strongest voices defending SRHR in the Region. Member organisations have been actively involving ASTRA in their work on national level such as in Macedonia by inviting ASTRA representatives to participate and provide input at various events. Moreover ASTRA has become a platform of support for its members.

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