



**ASTRA Network Narrative Report  
December 2016 – November 2017**

**IMPACT**

Further threats to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) have been taking place in the last year, with a rise in the activities from the opposition groups and also mobilization from the human rights groups. The retrogression is happening not only in Central and Eastern Europe but also on global level. With Trump's presidency in the US and the return of the Global Gag Rule the climate around women's rights has shifted and the undermining of civil society and women's rights in the region is continued.

ASTRA Secretariat continues to be hosted by its Polish member and one of the founding organizations, Federation for Women and Family Planning in Warsaw, Poland, where the ASTRA Network Coordinator operates. Currently the network consists of 39 [member organisations](#) from 21 countries.

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

- i. ASTRA and ASTRA Youth, as part of coalition of civil society organizations working on SRHR – You Act, CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality and the European Consortium for Emergency Contraception, continued its advocacy at the European Parliament to counteract the retrogressive actions targeted at reproductive rights in Poland. The group sent a [letter](#) to the representatives of the European Commission, to voice its concern on the developments in Poland. ASTRA received a response from the European Health and Food Safety Commissioner referring to the principle of subsidiarity and the competences of individual Member States on contraception that make it possible for the EU to only deliver recommendations.
- ii. The group of youth advocates from ASTRA, ASTRA Youth, YouAct and CHOICE for Youth & Sexuality met with Members of the European Parliament (FEMM Committee and the All of Us group) in January to advocate for a stronger European

parliamentary response to regressive legislation in Poland and throughout Europe. Throughout the year ASTRA has been delivering up to date information on the situation in Poland and in the region to the identified MEPs what resulted in a fruitful and close cooperation. FEMM mission decided to visit Poland in May and invited ASTRA to bring a regional perspective at the meeting. These activities contributed to the [bold stance the European Parliament](#) has taken on women's rights in Poland.

- iii. ASTRA Youth in coalition with PETRI-Sofia, Y-PEER, and YSAFE supported the creation and launch of the [Joint Youth Strategy](#) based on the input from young people in Council of Europe and Central Asia countries, which serves as an advocacy and awareness raising tool on SRHR of young people on the national, regional, and international level.

## II. Regional cooperation

- i. Lithuanian and Polish ASTRA members were engaged in the UN Universal Periodic Review at the Human Rights Council as part of a cooperation with the Sexual Rights Initiative. Oral statements for [Lithuania](#) and [Poland](#) were delivered at the Council.
- ii. ASTRA contributed to the discussion on the risks of limiting reproductive rights in Lithuania by sending letters to the [Lithuanian President](#), [Prime Minister](#) and [Speaker of the Seimas](#) on draft law to restrict access to abortion calling for withdrawal of these plans.
- iii. The new Chair of the European Parliament Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee (FEMM) - Ms Vilijia Blinkeviciute from Lithuania was approached by ASTRA through a [welcome letter](#).

## III. International cooperation

- i. New Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, Dr. Natalia Kanem, was informed about ASTRA's readiness to cooperate and contribute to UNFPA's work through a [letter](#) sent by ASTRA.
- ii. The Special Rapporteur on fundamentalism and extremism and the cultural rights of women was informed about the situation in the region and used ASTRA's input in her report that was presented at the 72<sup>nd</sup> session of the UN General Assembly.
- iii. ASTRA representatives contributed to discussion on conscientious objection on global level through participating in the [first international convening on conscientious objection to abortion](#).

#### IV. Recognition and outreach

- i. The Network has been working with a number of partners in the last months: the pro-choice All of Us group at the European Parliament, EuroNGOs, International Women's Health Coalition, IPPF, Center for Reproductive Rights and UNFPA. On numerous occasions ASTRA representatives had a chance to make an intervention; such as the IWHC and CRR event in Washington DC: *Resistance in the Face of Rollback: Lessons from Successful Opposition to Abortion Restrictions* and the EuroNGOs conference where ASTRA participated in the launch of the publication about the Black Protest and Network representatives were speakers at various sessions. At this conference ASTRA participated in a meeting for partners organized by the regional office of UNFPA. ASTRA is currently regarded as one of the expert SRHR organisations in Central and Eastern Europe.
- ii. Participating in preparation and dissemination of the Women's Rights Caucus Statement on the Conclusion of 61st session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women and contribution to the work of the Young Feminist Caucus and the Advocacy and Communications Caucus were main activities during this session.
- iii. ASTRA contributed to the work of the 36th session of the UN Human Rights Council and the discussion on *Protecting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in times of Backlash* by participating in a panel prepared by the Center for Reproductive Rights. ASTRA Network Coordinator informed the co-panelists and the audience about the situation in the region and the retrogression against SRHR.
- iv. The [monthly bulletin](#) continues to be an important source of information regarding SRHR in the region. It is distributed to listserves reaching over 2 500 subscribers and via social media. ASTRA members regularly contribute to the bulletin.
- v. ASTRA continues to be active on social media and ensures up to date news on its [website](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) accounts.

#### CHALLENGES

Women's reproductive and sexual rights are no longer in crisis; they are now questioned and openly under attack almost everywhere in the region. The status of women's rights in the region has been depreciating over the past few years, reaching its peak in 2016 when conservative and anti-women forces gained power and influence in several countries of the region and in 2017 we have seen these take action and lead to limiting access to emergency contraception in Poland and attack civil society and progressive universities such as in Hungary or Romania.

## **CHANGES**

ASTRA's new Advisory Board had been established in April and now consists of four members from Georgia, Romania and Poland. The role of the Advisory Board is to legitimize the work of ASTRA Secretariat and serve as advisors and representatives of ASTRA.

ASTRA continues to work towards advancing the voices of women from Central and Eastern Europe in support of sexual and reproductive health and rights and advocates for full implementation and recognition of these rights on international, regional and European level despite the unfavorable political climate.