



CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

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BURNING ISSUE

Women Deliver Conference and ASTRA panel

Women Deliver's 4th Global Conference took place on 16-19 May 2016 in Copenhagen, Denmark. It was the largest gathering on girls' and women's health and rights in the last decade and one of the first major global conferences following the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The focus of the conference was on how to implement the SDGs so they matter most for girls and women, with a specific focus on health – in particular maternal, sexual, and reproductive health and rights – and on gender equality, education, environment, and economic empowerment. The conference brought together world leaders, advocates, policymakers, journalists, young people, researchers, and leaders of corporate companies and civil society to showcase what it means and how it works when girls and women become the focus of development efforts.

ASTRA Network held a panel discussion on Monday, May 16th on „Threats to Reproductive Health and Rights in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia” with speakers from Poland, Romania, Macedonia and Armenia and moderated by ASTRA Coordinator.

Krystyna Kacpura from the Federation for Women and Family Planning, Poland presented the current situation in Poland in regards to reproductive health and rights with special focus on the recent anti-choice initiative aiming to introduce a total ban on abortion. She also discussed the possible consequences if such a ban and presented the wide international support received by the organisation. Daniela Draghici representing Society for Feminist Analyses AnA, Romania presented historical background on the influence of Ceausescu’s regime on women and their reproductive health and rights as well as presented the ongoing anti-choice movements in the country. Macedonia is also experiencing a backlash on SRHR, with the government introducing barriers in access to abortion services such as waiting periods, as described by Bojan Jovanovski from Macedonian organisation H.E.R.A. Armenia, represented by Lida Minasyan from Society Without Violence, expressed the importance of introducing Comprehensive Sexuality Education programmes in schools and the forces opposing such solutions.

Source: <http://wd2016.org>, ASTRA Network Secretariat

REGIONAL UPDATES

Protest for women’s rights in Zagreb, Croatia: In defence of freedom of choice

Faced with aggressive attacks on women's reproductive rights, various feminist activists, initiatives and organisations from the cities across Croatia have joined forces to organize a protest „In defence of freedom of choice“, which was initiated by Women’s Network of Croatia. Protest was held on Saturday, May 21st in Zagreb's downtown, gathering around 500 protesters, as a reaction to the so called first national „March for life“ that was announced as “celebration of life, family and Croatia” with the main aim at criminalization of abortion. The counter protest was organized in the park next to the street where marchers were passing by. Approximately 7.000 participants, family members of all generations, attended this march which is a part of the global movement of radical catholic conservatives and fundamentalist that gathered 80.000 participants in Slovakia and 30.000 participants in Italy last year. Today’s March imposed the false picture of happy and perfect Croatian Catholic family and state while its real purpose was to drastically restrict fundamental women’s rights.

Željka Markić, organizer of the first referendum against marriage equality in Croatia (2013) was one of the organizers of this march financially supported by the City of Zagreb and mobilized by Catholic Church. The spouse of the new Croatian Prime Minister Sanja Orešković also participated in the first rows of the march against Croatian law on free abortion right. She stated that "any reasonable person should support initiative March for life, and choose life against death”.

The most dramatic event was a moment when the marchers were passing by the counter protest and two women counter protesters stood in front of the March, after which they were quickly attacked physically by the members of the march and arrested by the police. As a reaction 30 protesters stood

in front of the police station for two hours, until painter Dunja Janković and musician Dunja Ercegović were released without any charges pressed against them. Dunja Ercegović stated that she reacted instinctively because she couldn't just stand and whistled against pro-fascist tendencies in the society. Dunja Ercegović said that she came to the counter protest to defend her right to decide about her own body.

Two women protesters were exposed to violence from March security and police while the attackers from "March for life" that violently acted against them have not even been asked for their names of questioned whatsoever. This kind of police reaction is illustrative for current antidemocratic tendencies in Croatia. Media reported about incident against peaceful walk for life, and organizers of this March stated in their press release that these two women were evidently distraught, and possibly alcoholised, which was absolutely not the case.

Protesters speakers included Bojana Genov from Women's Network Croatia, Nataša Vajagić from the Centre for citizen initiative, Sanja Juras from Lesbian group Kontra, Sara Kekuš from the Initiative Refugees Welcome, Martina Horvat from the Platform 112, Alan Sorić from Centre for Civil Courage and Protagora, Mia Gonan from Zagreb Pride, trade union activist Jagoda Milidrag Šmid and actress activist Urša Raukar. The support letter from the initiatives of Doctors against conscience objections in medicine was read. Musical program was performed from drummers Drum 'n' bijes, Zdenka Kovačiček, Denis Katanec, U pol' 9 kod Sabe and Lovely Quinces. The protest was a follow-up on many feminist actions against attempts to stop the right on abortion in Croatia since 1991, and most recently action of Women's Network of Croatia under the title „We do not want to go back to the illegal abortion!“ which was held on the 29th of December 2015, shortly after a new right-wing coalition government was formed.

See photos from the protest [here](#).

Source: [Obrani PRAVO NA IZBOR](#)

Feminist protests at the World Congress of Families

Several thousand social-conservative activists from around the world gathered in Tbilisi, Georgian capital on May 15-18 for the [World Congress of Families](#), an international umbrella organization of groups supporting conservative social values. Its positions include defending traditional marriage, opposing abortion, and opposing antidiscrimination measures intended to protect people of all sexual orientations.

The Georgian Feminist Independent Group organised a protest in front of Radisson Blu Hotel in downtown Tbilisi, where the event was taking place on Sunday. The activists carried slogans such as 'Hatred is not a family value', 'Don't force women to give birth to unwanted children', and 'It is not a male privilege to make decisions on rape and abortions'.

Source: [Radio Free Europe](#), [Democracy and Freedom Watch](#)

Anti-women changes in abortion law in Russian Federation

Well planned activities of opponents of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in the Russian Federation are currently in action. Strategies and tactics of anti-choice groups have been modified too in order to let regulations, orders and by-laws pass without public discussion or debate.

As a start the mandatory procedure of conducting ultrasound and listening to the heartbeat of the embryo before the abortion procedure was introduced through a by-law without public discussion. Moreover the Consent form, which women are obliged to sign before an abortion, now contains misleading unscientific information about risks and consequences of abortions.

Next objective for anti-choice groups is to introduce additional licensing system for abortion services. If this step will be successful, it will be probably followed by extraction of abortion services from the system of State Mandatory Medical Insurance, which will create barriers for women in accessing the procedure.

Source: [Coalition for Reproductive Choice “The Rowan bunch”](#)

Training on comprehensive abortion care in Transnistria, Moldova

The third training in comprehensive abortion care and WHO recommendations took place in Tiraspol, Transnistria on 16-20 May, 2016. The activity is part of the SAAF project “Increasing the quality of abortion care within a comprehensive package of reproductive health services in Transnistria”. 24 gynecologists, obstetricians and midwives from Transnistria have been trained.

The training was organized by the Reproductive Health Training Center, Chisinau, in collaboration with Natalia Slepaha, head physician, Republican Center of Mother and Child, Oxana Ceban, head, Center for Reproductive Health, Tiraspol and with the consent and support of the Ministry of Health (MoH) of Transnistria. The purpose of training was to increase the quality of abortion services, to train the medical staff to provide safe abortion methods in accordance with the WHO recommendations.

Participants were trained by Rodica Comendant, MD, PhD, WHO expert in safe abortions, RHTC director, Chisinau, Stelian Hodorocea, MD, PhD, WHO expert in perinatal technologies, Chisinau, and Oxana Ceban, obstetrician gynecologist, Reproductive Health Center Director, Tiraspol. Each of participant has had the chance to practice on pelvic model and to perform an MVA abortion on a real patient, with local anesthesia, after offering the counselling and obtaining informed consent.

Three medical institutions in which will be created three future model centers have been equipped with supplies and meds.

Source: [avort.md](#)

Awareness-raising events during the All-Ukrainian Family Planning Week

Various awareness-raising activities within the All-Ukrainian Week of Family Planning and Reproductive Health were held from May 11th to 17th. This was the initiative of Woman Health and Family Planning Charity Foundation and support of USAID SPECSI Project, civil society organizations - members of the All-Ukrainian Coalition of Reproductive Health and Family Planning in cooperation with partners such as USAID SPECSI Project and the USAID Healthy Woman of Ukraine Programme. In more than 80 settlements across Ukraine activities were held for different target groups: adolescents and their parents, young people, men and women in reproductive age, military and police representatives etc.

In particular, the Family Planning Week activities were conducted in Berdichiv and Novograd Volynskyj of Zhytomyr oblast, Zaporizhia city, Dnepr city and Novomoskovsk of the Dnipropetrovsk oblast, Kirovohrad city, Kyiv city, Lugansk city and Severodonetsk, Luhansk region, Lviv city and the region, Odesa city and Odesa region, Sumy city and Shostka of Sumy oblast, Ternopil, Kharkiv, Kherson and in a number of regional settlements. Among other there were held thematic contests, lectures, trainings and workshops, street art-events, exhibitions, round tables. During these events information materials on SRHR developed and provided by WHFP were distributed.

Source: [Women Health and Family Planning](#)

State Program on Reproductive Health in Ukraine

In May 2016 the Concept of new Ukrainian State Program on Reproductive Health of the Nation for the period 2017-2021 was developed through a number of Working Group meetings. The meetings were mainly focused on determination of the key outcomes and indicators according to the Concept sections - mother and child health, family planning, adolescents' reproductive health, and prevention of reproductive system cancer. To participate at the meetings have been invited Ukrainian experts in the areas devoted to the topics of each meeting, including representatives of the USAID Healthy Woman of Ukraine Program and experts of WHFP. The final version of the Concept will be presented to the participants of the Coordination Council of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine in following months.

Source: [Women Health and Family Planning](#)

Workshop Devoted to the Promotion of Coordinated Response to Domestic Violence in Armenia

The workshop conducted by ASTRA member, the Women's Rights Center, was devoted to the promotion of coordinated response to domestic violence cases. It took place on April 28, 2016 in Yerevan. School teachers and psychologists, social workers, police officers as well as representatives of Yerevan Municipality, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Police Academy participated in the event. The workshop was opened with presentation of domestic violence problem and distinctive criteria for definition of domestic violence victim. Women's Rights Center's attorney introduced the

Manual on Domestic Violence republished by the organization which clarifies the role of police officers and ways of intervention to domestic violence cases. Representative from Police Academy introduced their educational system and how domestic violence is taught. The official representative of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs presented the draft of Domestic Violence Law and the role of Department of Women and Children Affairs of the Ministry in prevention of domestic violence. The second part of the workshop was concentrated on the revelation of the support to domestic violence victims by the specialists from different structures. As result the workshop participants came to the conclusion that all the structures dealing with domestic violence victims should cooperate and provide coordinated professional response.

Source: [Women's Rights Center](#)

Flash mob on cervical cancer prevention in Yerevan

The Ministry of Health organized a flash mob in the center of Yerevan on May 1. It was aimed at raising society's awareness on free of charge screening examinations in policlinics and ambulatories which are available since 2015. These screenings are mainly for early detection and prevention of cervical cancer among women aged between 30-60 years and people who have diabetes and blood pressure.

Source: [Ministry of Health](#)

Armenia with a comprehensive counteraction national plan for HIV/AIDS

The World Trade Organization and the World Health Organization's expert's team have been working in the National Center for AIDS Prevention in Armenia. They visited the National Center for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute of Health, as well as some other organizations providing medical services. The expert's team should provide the results of the investigation about the eradication of mother-to-child transmission of HIV as well as their suggestions on the issue. According to the experts Armenia has comprehensive counteraction national plan for HIV/AIDS. Based on the group's report to the World Trade Organization, Armenia can get the status for elimination the mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

Source: [Ministry of Health](#)

Anti-discrimination Action Plan adopted by Bosnia and Hercegovina Council of Ministers

The BiH Council of Ministers, the state government of Bosnia and Herzegovina, adopted on April 26th 2016 its first Anti-Discrimination Action Plan and an Anti-Discrimination Report.

Even the Anti-discrimination law from 2009 does oblige the BiH Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees to produce annual reports; this Anti-discrimination report is the first of its kind. The Anti-Discrimination Report presents official data gathered from institutions. Discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity is being presented, focusing on data which is coming from the

BiH Human Rights Ombudsman Institution, the BiH Constitutional Court and the Gender Centres of the two federal units – the Republika Srpska and the Federation BiH.

The Anti-discrimination Action Plan presents 32 measures to be taken by institutions. It is important to point out that this action plan is the first public policy document in Bosnia and Herzegovina on state level which does include LGBTI related activities. 6 of 32 activities are related to LGBTI rights.

Those measures are:

- to initiate changes of health protection laws in order to provide access to sex reassignment surgeries for transexual people,
- to initiate changes of the Birth Register Books Law of the Brcko District,
- to amend the BiH Gender Equality Law and BiH Anti-Discrimination Law in order to clearly include sexual orientation and gender identity,
- to develop an multi-annual LGBTI Equality Action Plan,
- to introduce trainings for judges, prosecutors, police officers and civil servants on discrimination of LGBTI people, and
- to initiate changes of criminal laws in BiH in order to include hate crime regulation, covering sexual orientation and gender identity.

Activities will be implemented during 2016, with the involvement of ministries and institutions on state, entity and cantonal level. Both documents will be now presented to the BiH parliament.

Source: [Sarajevo Open Center](#)

According to an external expert Latvia should not sign the Istanbul Convention

A lawyer employed by the Justice Ministry of Latvia offered an expert opinion on the Istanbul Convention. The opinion recommends that Latvia does not sign the [Istanbul Convention against Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence](#) because to do so would conflict with statements made in the preamble to the Latvian constitution and constitute discrimination against men. Among other objections the legal opinion also states the convention would be in contravention of Article 1 of the Latvian constitution by "forcing the entire population to be of one ideology - radical feminism."

So far, 41 states have signed the convention - the most recent being the Czech Republic on May 2 - and 21 have fully ratified it. Latvia is now the only European Union member state to have neither signed nor ratified the convention. Other nay-sayers among Council of Europe member states are Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Liechtenstein and Moldova.

Source: [lsm.lv](#)

Homophobic Campaign on the definition of family reaches the Romanian Supreme Court

Since the beginning of 2016, a coalition of NGOs with the explicit support of the Romanian Orthodox Church unfolded an unprecedented campaign against the LGBT community in Romania. The Coalition for Family, a member of the European Citizen's Initiative to Protect Marriage and Family, mobilized throughout Romania in order to gather three million signatures to petition the Supreme Court to revise the constitutional definition of family – making it explicit that a family can only be comprised of a woman and a man. In Romania, the Civil Code already describes marriage as a union between a man and a woman (art. 59) and explicitly forbids marriages between same sex couples. The Romanian civil codes also has explicit provisions about the voidness of civil partnerships or marriages between same sex partners contracted in other countries (Art. 277). In spite of the obvious legal barriers the same sex couple face in Romania regarding their family rights, Romania remains also among the most homophobic countries in the EU, according to the EU Discrimination Barometer in 2015. With this background the joint forces, of a Romanian Orthodox Church worried about its popularity quotas and those of fearmongering conservative nationalists unleashed a strong hate campaign against LGBT people living in Romania. As part of the gathering of signatures for a purposeless legal action (a change in the constitutional definition of something that is nonetheless otherwise illegal), the Coalition mobilized teachers to gather signatures from parents with school age children, priests gathered signatures at Sunday masses while door to door campaigners further increased the numbers. Moreover in all major cities tents with the drawings of heterosexual families were placed on the public domain where anti-gay marriage activists were actively sharing hate inducing arguments – depicting homosexuality as a sign of moral decay, a sin and a national threat to the country's demography. To make things worse, public media figures also endorsed the campaign arguing that homosexuality can impact the well being of children. While the arguments might seem commonplace among anti gay marriage campaigners all over Europe, the distinct Romanian flavor was that this explicit homophobic coalition was credited by public institutions and invited to debates over sexuality education in schools as well as to other debates concerning child welfare. Moreover the initiative launched by the coalition is also coupled with the electoral debates of this summer as both local and parliamentary elections are to be organized in June and November. The coalition will attempt to channel their messages to candidates and future decision-makers.

Homophobia and hate speech against the LGBT community is also shaping future generations of Romanians. ACCEPT association launched on the 28th of February 2016 a study on experiences of LGBT high school children. The study (based on 324 answers of LGBT identified youth) showed that 71% of LGBT youth perceived the school environment as dangerous especially for emotional violence. 91% of high-school students consider that the term homosexual or lesbian are used with a negative undertone while 64% of respondents said that teachers make homophobic remarks in class. Now, with 3,000,000 signatures gathered in a homophobic campaign, there are few incentives to shape new generations in the spirit of nondiscrimination, tolerance and respect for diversity and human rights.

Sources: [Adevarul](#), [ALEG](#)

Law proposal banning religious early marriages rejected in Kyrgyzstan

The law proposal, which would outlaw the religious consecration of marriage rites for minors, was rejected by the Kyrgyz parliament. As National Statistics Commission argues, 15% of married women between 25 and 49 years of age got married before turning 18 and 1% did it under the age of 15. In recent years, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child voiced concerns over child, early and forced marriages in Kyrgyzstan.

The law proposal specifically related to religious marriage rites (nikah), as opposed to marriages registered with the state. Amendments proposed by Ata-Meken party deputy Aida Salyanova aimed to criminalize the forcible imposition of religious marriage rites before their official registration. The proposal was supported by 44 MPs and opposed by 61.

Source: Eurasia.net

Specialized services for victims of domestic violence are absent in Moldova

In Moldova, there is an acute shortage of specialized services for victims of domestic violence. There is only one national center that provides multilateral assistance to the victims – Association against Violence “Casa Marioarei”. There are also some entities that offer general assistance, without providing shelter if necessary, representatives of the National Coalition “Life without Violence in the Family” said in a [news conference](#) at IPN.

Director of the Association against Violence “Casa Marioarei” Elena Burca said the center provides social, psychological and legal assistance to persons as well as shelter if they need it. There are also maternal centers that provide complex services, but these are insufficient. “In the Republic of Moldova, there are nongovernmental organizations that can open centers offering assistance to victims of domestic violence, but these do not have financing because the NGOs work only based on international donations. The state budget does not include resources for supporting the fight against violence,” stated Elena Burca. Coordinator of the National Coalition “Life without Violence in the Family” Veronica Vition said the maternal centers are located in different areas of Moldova and the women who need assistance encounter difficulties in reaching them. Also, the funds for the centers that are financed by the public authorities have been reduced. Head of the Platform for Gender Equality Valentina Bodrug-Lungu said the victims of domestic violence must be helped to have their moral capacities strengthened. “In this regard, we ask for the development partners’ assistance in ensuring the economic rehabilitation and social integration of the victims. Within these services, special emphasis must be placed on strengthening the survival and resistance capacities,” she stated.

In the news conference, the National Coalition “Life without Violence in the Family” and the Platform for Gender Equality launched the international campaign “WAVE Step Up!” in Chisinau. The campaign promotes the rights of the victims of domestic violence.

Source: IPN

Bill instituting gender quota passed in final reading in the Moldovan Parliament

The MPs adopted in the final reading the bill aimed at ensuring gender equality in the political and public spheres. The law provides that at least 40% of the candidates on party lists must be women. The parties that will not obey this quota will be penalized. The law also institutes penalties for sexist language and a two-week paternity leave. The commission decided that the penalty for not ensuring the 40% quota will be not the exclusion of the party from the electoral race, but deprivation of this of financing for a year.

Source: [IPN](#)

Moldova to benefit from the international experience in order to overcome the demographic challenges

The first meeting of the International Advisory Panel on Population and Development – Republic of Moldova took place in Chisinau on 21-22 April. The Advisory Panel members are renowned international experts, with expertise in areas related to fertility, demography, aging and sexual and reproductive health. The Panel was created following the UNFPA Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia initiative. It has the aim to support countries transiting through different demographic stages to find evidence based solutions and taking into the account the experience of other countries in the field. Moldova will be the first country to benefit from the international expertise and UNFPA assistance in this regard.

Moldova, like many other countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, faces a number of significant changes in terms of the population dynamics. Being one of the youngest countries in Europe (25% of the population are young people between 16 and 30 years old), its population is aging rapidly (16.2% are 60 years old and older). Meanwhile, the fertility rate in Moldova is 1.24 that is below the replacement rate of 2.1.

The representatives of the Government and the Parliament of Moldova, the UNFPA Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (Istanbul), the international experts, the academia and civil society from Chisinau discussed the possible action options in order to reply to the challenges faced by Moldova in the areas of (1) demographic security, (2) fertility and sexual and reproductive health, and (3) aging population during two days. The next meeting of the International Advisory Panel on Population and Development - Moldova will take place in September 2016.

Source: [UNFPA](#)

Training social science teachers

In the frames of its Education and Empowerment pillar Society Without Violence advocates for the integration of gender education in the high school curriculum and in May we have organized two 2-day trainings on “Gender Equality and Domestic Violence” for 50 Social Sciences teachers of Lori region. Teachers actively discussed topics on gender equality, sexuality, gender roles, SRHR issues and violence against women. Many stereotypes were noticed in their viewpoints, which mainly

concern to the Armenian characteristics and national trait. There was a viewpoint that women's rights are being brought to our culture artificially evoking conflict among right, morals and culture.

The term "Gender" was mainly discussed in the frame of family emphasizing the role features and the household responsibilities of men and women. Morals was mentioned as the most important feature for a woman however they had stereotypical and incorrect imagination on morals.

Teachers emphasized that the gender equality should start from the family and be continued in the schools. In this regard, the participants represented a range of proposals such as periodical trainings for teachers, interactive methods, social advertisements, conversations with pupils and their parents, state projects, etc.

Source: [Society Without Violence](#)

Developing a long-term advocacy strategy addressing the issues of LGBTI people

Society Without Violence NGO, conducted a research on the human rights situation of LGBTI people in Armenia, within the context of "Solidarity Network for LGBTI in Armenia and Georgia" project. During the project, various violations of basic human rights were discovered, some of them related to sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR). The research uncovered that these violations are due to widespread discrimination and homophobia in almost all levels of society.

Due to discrimination in the sphere of employment, LGBTI people are often pushed to informal work, specifically sex work, where they become more prone to human rights violations, including SRHR. Moreover, lack of awareness and understanding regarding human sexuality, lack of confidentiality of HIV/AIDS status, lack of medical services for trans and intersex people, and discrimination and mistreatment of LGBTI people in the health care system were noted.

To counter these issues, and to ensure the enjoyment of SRHR by LGBTI people, SWV is developing a long-term advocacy strategy. Regarding SRHR, the strategy will target educational institutions, the health care system, and relevant government ministries to increase and improve their capacities to respect, protect, and fulfil SRHR of LGBTI people, and insure that health services are available, accessible, acceptable and of highest quality possible.

Source: [Society Without Violence](#)

GLOBAL UPDATES

May 28 International Day of Action for Women's Health

May 28 is the International Day of Action for Women's Health. May 28th has been commemorated by women's health advocates and their communities since 1987 and has been crucial in the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) movement building. May 28 provides a great opportunity to remind our government leaders that Women's Health Matters.

With the recent adoption of Agenda 2030, governments have acknowledged gender equality and women's empowerment as crucial to sustainable development, while reaffirming the outcomes from the ICPD Programme of Action and the Beijing Platform for Action. Central to women's empowerment, however, is the respect, protection, and fulfilment of the human rights of women and girls in all their dimensions, including their sexual and reproductive rights, and acknowledging the actual needs of all women and girls in all their diversities.

More information and resources on the campaign: www.may28.org

YOUTH

ASTRA Youth at Women Deliver 2016

Women Deliver 4th Global Conference took place on 16-19 May 2016 in Copenhagen, Denmark. It was a large gathering on women's health and rights of 5000 participants, among which there were world leaders, advocates, policymakers, journalists, young people, researchers, corporate companies' representatives and civil society.

ASTRA Youth members from Croatia, Romania, Poland, Armenia and Ukraine attended the conference as participants of Women Deliver Young Leaders Programme and scholarships' recipients. Young activists participated in Women Deliver Youth Pre-Conference, during which they gained knowledge and skills on advocacy, youth leadership, coalition building, accountability and media representation.

ASTRA Youth members represented the network also at panel discussions during the conference. Representative of Croatian AY member organization CESI was a speaker at a panel 'Using accountability to defend rights', where she presented data collection on abortion accessibility in Croatia and how civil society used it for advocacy actions. She was involved in the Youth Zone session 'Broadcasting Youth Voices', where she discussed her journalist experience in mainstreaming information on SRHR. She also facilitated the break-out session on health education, being a part of Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Caucus, organized by RODA-Parents in Action. Participants of the session were talking about challenges related to sexuality education in their countries and provided solutions. ASTRA Youth coordinator was a speaker at the panel discussion organized by Amnesty International 'The impact of criminalizing sexuality and reproduction: a Human Rights violation', where she reviewed limitations of young people's SRHR in the region as well as discussed recent anti-choice mobilization in Poland.

During the conference, ASTRA Youth and Amnesty International conducted a joint participatory session 'Respect My Rights, Respect My Dignity: Participatory Ways to Tackle Taboo Topics' at Youth Zone. ASTRA Youth members from Armenia, Romania and Croatia facilitated part of the session, focused on social theatre methods and their usage for discussing SRHR issues. Session participants had an opportunity to be involved in social theatre exercise, thanks to which they learned how to work on taboo topics in a participatory way.

Source: [ASTRA Youth](http://ASTRAYouth)

Sexuality education – still a taboo topic in Macedonia

Macedonia rates of unwanted teen pregnancies have risen three times in comparison to any European country and the numbers of sexually transmitted infections are growing. According to H.E.R.A., which for years has advocated for introduction of sexuality education in schools, this data is not surprising, as the rate of modern contraception usage is the lowest in Europe.

H.E.R.A.'s initiatives to introduce sexuality education were supported by the Parliamentary Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and in 2011 the relevant curriculum was developed. However, as it included explanation of gender identities and information on diverse sexual orientations, the curriculum was finally rejected.

The Ministry of Education until now repeatedly argued that a separate subject of sexuality education is not necessary. As the Ministry explains, the Life Skills subject includes information on adolescents' growth and development and involves a section related to sexuality education.

Source: [Telma](#)

Civil society appealing to Lithuanian Ministry of Education for CSE

At the moment, the working group for preparation of a new sexuality education programme is working in Lithuania. The working group members are mainly priests, parents of conservative attitudes, members of NGOs that act for saving life from the zygote. So that is the main reason why all suggestions to develop gender equality, science and human rights based programme were mainly crossed out. What's more, those who disagree with conservative opinions are being called killers, murderers, pornography company members who want to prepare "sex users". The bigger conservative side is winning at this point. But, the draft of this program was shared and lots of human rights NGOs started to talk.

Over thirty non-governmental youth, human rights and women's organizations signed a letter to the Ministry of Education to review the upcoming sexuality education programme. The organizations claim that the current draft programme on sexuality education doesn't provide high quality information enabling young people to develop interpersonal relationship and engage in safe sex practices. According to letter authors, the programme should be focused on age-adequate and scientifically-based information for students and shouldn't distort the reality with biased, negative information. The signatories call the Ministry to pay appropriate attention to this topic and develop an alternative, human rights and scientific-based sexuality education programme. They also expressed concern about the Minister of Education claim that science and human-rights based sexuality education programme introduced by NGOs is influenced by business interest. The Minister asked for explanation on the facts justifying the necessity for sexuality education programme.

With contribution of Julita Valancauskyte, FSPHA Lithuania

Source: [Mano Teises](#)

Outdoor game on STIs for teenagers

Polish ASTRA Youth member, Ponton Group of Sex Educators has organized an outdoor game for young people. The main goal of the game was to increase knowledge and raise awareness about HIV, AIDS and other STIs among adolescents. Participants were young people aged 15-19 from educational care centres. The game took place in the forest near Warsaw. Ponton volunteers prepared 9 stations, where participants took knowledge test on STIs, played quiddity and played roles related to the topic. They also had an opportunity to develop group work and decision-making skills.

Source: [Ponton Group of Sex Educators](#)

Moldovan Government approves draft Law on Youth

The draft new Law on Youth, approved by the Cabinet on May 4th, aims to promote the interests of young people in public policies and to adjust the youth policies to the present time. It is also aimed at creating a viable mechanism for supporting the youth. The Law on Youth hasn't been updated since 1999. That's why the Government thought to promote a broader legal act adjusted to the realities and current needs of the young people.

The law refers to the people aged between 14 and 35. The current law covers the people from the 16-30 age bracket. This way there will be ensured the broader participation of young people in extracurricular activities, including of those from rural areas, and their involvement in national and international economic programs. The bill envisions the stimulation of entrepreneurial initiatives of young people, facilitation of their employment, development of aptitudes and professional skills, creation of an appropriate environment for physical development and promotion of a healthy lifestyle, and provision of dwellings to young people. The new legislative regulations recommend the local public authorities to engage young people and youth organizations in the drafting and implementation of youth policies.

There will be created the National Agency for the Development of Youth Programs and Activities that will deal with the implementation and promotion of policies in the field and will ensure the quality of services intended for young people at national and local levels. The new law provides that such informal youth bodies as initiative groups, student senates and youth organizations of political parties will be recognized.

According to official data, in Moldova there are over 870,900 young people. Of these, 58.6% live in villages, while 41.4% in towns.

Source: [IPN](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS

2016 EuroNGOs Conference

In the past few years, the SRHR community has heavily engaged in the post-2015 process, which culminated in the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The main aim of this year's EuroNGOs conference is to ensure that the SRHR community is ready to effectively engage in the implementation, follow-up and review of the SDGs, and strategically use them to advance our advocacy on SRHR in a global perspective. There will be panels with high-level speakers, global development experts and SRHR advocates as well as interactive discussions and workshops.

The 2016 EuroNGOs Conference "A Strong Start - Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in the 2030 Agenda" is hosted by [Le Planning Familial](#) and will take place in Paris on 4-5 October. Registration is already open with deadline of August 31st.

Source: [EuroNGOs](#)

PUBLICATIONS

New research on abortion from Guttmacher and WHO: Eastern Europe experienced the largest decline in abortion rates between 1990 and 2014

Abortion rates declined significantly across most developed regions between 1990 and 2014. However, during the same period, they remained largely unchanged in developing regions. The findings come from a new study by the [Guttmacher Institute](#) and the [World Health Organization](#). It found that between 1990 and 2014, the overall number of abortions per 1,000 women of childbearing age (15–44 years old) in developed countries dropped from 46 to 27, while in developing countries, it changed little, from 39 to 37, a nonsignificant difference. The study's findings appear in an article, "[Abortion incidence between 1990 and 2014: global, regional, and subregional levels and trends](#)," by [Gilda Sedgh](#) et al., published in [The Lancet](#).

When countries were grouped according to their abortion laws, the researchers found no significant difference in abortion rates for 2010–2014 between countries where abortion is legal and where it is restricted. In countries where the procedure was prohibited altogether or permitted only to save a woman's life, the abortion rate was 37 per 1,000, and in countries where it was available on request, the abortion rate was 34 per 1,000.

Across regions, Eastern Europe experienced the largest decline in abortion rate, from 88 in 1990-1994 to 42 in 2010-2014. Despite this decline there is a persistent gap in rates between Eastern and Western Europe (42 vs 18) likely reflecting lower use of effective contraception in Eastern Europe.

Source: [Guttmacher's website](#)

Women Help Women contribute to the movement to end abortion stigma

New resource on fighting abortion stigma by Women Help Women - "Supporting the Independent Use of Abortion Medicines: Fighting Stigma One Email at a Time" is available [ONLINE](#).

Source: [Women Help Women](#)

IPPF report on comprehensive sexuality education

IPPF published a report **Everyone's right to know: delivering comprehensive sexuality education for all young people**, underscoring the importance of CSE for young people. The report discusses the features of quality comprehensive sexuality education and its impact on youth sexual and reproductive lives. It also explores the methods of providing CSE in formal and non-formal settings and recognizes the value of peer education. The publication also points out to social media as a new way of reaching out to young people. The report aims to inform advocates and decision makers about how to support sexual and reproductive rights of young people around the world.

The report is available [here](#).

Source: [IPPF](#)

European Parliament prepared report on **Women's Empowerment & Its Links to Sustainable Development** - In-Depth Analysis, available [HERE](#).

Member profile

H.E.R.A. – Health Education and Research Association from Macedonia

H.E.R.A. is non-profit organization from Macedonia, founded in February 2000 as a volunteer's movement of university students in response to the country need for improved HIV education and treatment and care of People Living with HIV. Since the very beginnings HERA recognized the need of linking SRH services and advocacy interventions in their HIV activities, seen as a comprehensive public-health approach that significantly improve the quality of people's lives. With 23 devoted staff people in the team, more than 70 volunteers and 30 service providers, today HERA is a leading national NGO working in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights. In 2014, HERA approved the new strategic framework 2014 – 2017 with the mission of advancing human rights of all people in the field of sexual and reproductive health grounded on the principles of gender equality and social justice.

HERA focuses on four strategic areas towards advancing sexual and reproductive rights and gender equality: Advocacy, Access to Information and Services, Development and Research, and Resource Mobilization. The primary target groups of HERA are youth and women, with focus on groups that are marginalized and socially excluded, as well as policy and decision makers.

Throughout the 16 years of work, HERA has been implementing variety of activities and interventions, such as:

Service provision

- Psycho-social treatment, care and support of women and children victims of domestic violence and Psycho-social treatment of perpetrators of domestic violence
- Outreach HIV Voluntary Counseling and Testing, with focus to most at risk populations
- Sexual and reproductive health services for young people with focus to vulnerable and poor groups, in particularly Roma people (Youth friendly clinics “I want to know”)
- Roma Health Mediators

Information, Education and Capacity Building

- Empowerment and mobilization of Roma community for reproductive and antenatal care rights
- Capacity building trainings SRH to different stakeholders (Service provider from Health, Social and Education institutions; Member of Parliament; representatives from Civil Society organizations)
- Development of IEC materials and organizing social marketing raising awareness campaigns of SRH related topics
- Conducting researches on topics related to SRHR (KAP survey, need-assessment, desk research)

Advocacy

- Adoption of Protocol determining the procedure for processing complaints of discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity by the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, as its internal act
- Parliamentary advocacy for advancing SRH agenda (Women rights and gender issues, Social inclusion of Roma people, Social inclusion of PLHIV and minorities affected by HIV)

Introduction of sexuality education in schools

- Integrating Youth friendly services “Sakam da znam” and HIV services in the overall public health system
- Integrating Roma Health Mediators programme within government programmes

H.E.R.A has been a member association of ASTRA Network for almost five years. Through these years, ASTRA members has always supported HERA`s initiatives and efforts towards society where gender or sexuality are no longer a source of inequality or stigma, sexual and reproductive rights are guaranteed for everyone and the right to choose is respected.

Website: www.hera.org.mk

Facebook: www.facebook.com/hera.macedonia

Twitter: www.twitter.com/hera_mkd

YouTube: www.youtube.com/HERAMacedonia



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H.E.R.A. team- photo submitted in [solidarity with Polish women](https://www.facebook.com/hera.macedonia).

ASTRA Network Members: Albania - Albanian Family Planning Association; Armenia - Society Without Violence; Armenia - Women's Resource Center; Armenia - Women's Rights Center; Azerbaijan - Center "Women and Modern World"; Belarus - Women's Independent Democratic Movement of Belarus; Bulgaria - Bulgarian Family Planning and Sexual Health Association; Bulgaria - Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation; Bulgaria - Gender Education, Research and Technologies; Bulgaria - Demetra Association; Bulgaria - Gender Alternatives Foundation; Bosnia and Herzegovina – Sarajevo Open Center; Croatia - B.a.b.e.; Croatia – CESI; Croatia - Women's Room; Georgia – HERA XXI; Georgia – Real People, Real Vision; Georgia - Women's Center; Hungary – PATENT; Kazakhstan - The Legal Center for Women's Initiatives "Sana Sezim"; Lithuania - Family Planning and Sexual Health Association; Latvia - Latvia's Association for Family Planning And Sexual Health; Macedonia - Association for emancipation, solidarity and equality of women; Macedonia – H.E.R.A.; Macedonia – Shelter Center; Moldova – Family Planning Association; Moldova - Reproductive Health Training Center; Poland - Federation for Women and Family Planning; Romania - A.L.E.G.; Romania - AnA: Society for Feminist Analysis; Romania - Euroregional Center for Public Initiatives; Romania - The East European Institute of Reproductive Health; Russia - Novogorod Gender Center; Russia – Russian Association for Population and Development; Slovakia – Pro Choice; Tajikistan – Gender and Development; Ukraine - Women Health and Family Planning; Ukraine - Charitable SALUS Foundation; Uzbekistan - Future Generation

Prepared by Marta Szostak

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