



CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

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BURNING ISSUE

Croatia against abortions, alongside Trump, Poland and Hungary

The new priorities of the Croatia's foreign policy as it pertains to human rights are based on the protection of the rights of religious persons, the right to religious belief and the protection of the family. Croatia will devote special attention to the promotion and protection of the traditional family, based on the marriage between a woman and a man, as the "natural and fundamental unit of human society". The notion of sexual and reproductive health and rights has no consensual definition at the international level, or even at the EU level. "Taking this into consideration, Croatia opts to interpret this notion as excluding the right to abortion". Croatia maintains the right to promoted the above positions in all multilateral for a that it is a member to. These are statements taken from the Croatian comments to the Draft Council Conclusions on EU Priorities at UN Human Rights Fora in 2017. The contents of the document were published in print by [Novi list](#) on February 24.

The above are parts of a document dated February 22 2017; interestingly, the only comments to the Draft Council Conclusions came from [Croatia, Hungary and Poland](#). Croatia's position has had a particular impact, since Croatia became a member of the UN Human Rights Council in Fall 2016, thanks to a membership campaign endorsing some drastically different values, as is still evidenced by the [website of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs](#).

Voters' will

The quoted document is in accordance with the theses proposed by the Croatian Minister of Foreign and European Affairs and chief Government Coordinator for Human Rights Issues, Davor Ivo Stier. The necessity of promoting religion and the dangers of secularism, the importance of the influence of Catholic worldviews on institutions and Stier's own understanding of human rights, including the right of women to choose – all of these issues feature prominently in Stier's recent interview given to Catholic news portal [Bitno.net](#). In the interview, Stier confirms that the appointment of Ladislav Ilčić to the post of his Special Advisor for Human Rights is entirely in line with the new Croatian state policy, as Faktograf had [already reported](#).

When inquired by Novi list about when the change in Croatian policy positions on human rights came about, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs offered an interesting reply: "The upgrade of Croatian foreign policy occurred on September 11, 2016, when Croatian voters expressed their support for an option of Christian Democratic and Popular values in the elections".

The reply, however, does not hold true. Regarding the right to abortion, it should be stated that none of HDZ's key people had dared publicly express support to banning abortion, Stier himself included – this was not an election-winning platform for HDZ. Some parties in Croatia (such as HRAST) do base their programmes around these positions, but they have never gained substantial parts of the vote on their own.

Plenković spoke differently during the election campaign

As proof that this was not what the ruling party had promised voters, we will start with Stier. In the pre-election debate on [N1 Television](#), when inquired about abortion, he said that he would not focus on banning abortion but would instead focus on education.

Prime Minister Andrej Plenković stressed the same message prior to the elections. In the [last pre-election debate](#) between party heads Zoran Milanović and Andrej Plenković, Plenković had stated: "Our attitude is that life begins at conception, but banning abortion is not within the spirit of Croatian law. Women who find themselves in unwanted pregnancies should be helped. Abortion is an evil that should be avoided to the highest extent possible". When Milanović commented that he was glad to hear so because some HDZ members would ban abortion altogether, Plenković had replied that he does not pay attention to the fact and that his statement was "HDZ's position".

After the elections, in October 2016, [Večernji list](#) received the following statement on abortion from HDZ: "Abortions on demand should not be banned because this occurrence cannot be reduced through prohibitions, but through education. The 1978 Law on health measures for ensuring the right to free decision about childbirth should be modernized and the existing legal gaps on abortion regulation filled, such as ensuring psychological support for women, banning abortion when it is

performed in order to select the child's sex and regulating conscientious objection on part of doctors".

The first signs of this turn in human rights policies are not evident from the [programme of Andrej Plenković's Government](#), which stresses the importance of families and family values and demographic policy, implemented through improving living standards and conditions for parents, not by banning abortion.

Interestingly, some of the more prominent HDZ members have consistently stressed the importance of education, while at the same time ultra-conservative civil society organisations such as In the Name of the Family, Vigilare and Grozd, who have influenced the new Government, oppose health education. Recently, the new Human Rights Coordination, headed by Stier, rejected the National Anti-Discrimination Strategy, mostly due to disagreements with the provisions on the protection of LGBT persons, but also due to objections to the proposed educational programme, thus jeopardizing Croatia's access to EU funds.

It is also not true that the Christian Democrats' election victory necessarily means policy turns like these. Most governments in EU Member States are composed of Christian Democrats, and yet Croatia has only found like-minded ruling parties in Hungary and Poland, countries heading towards becoming illiberal democracies, already scrutinized by the EU due to rule of law breaches.

The EU is currently presided over by Malta, one of the most conservative Member States in terms of reproductive rights, but recently committed to the improvement of the position of LGBT persons. The Labour Government of Malta has made the issues of gender equality and freedom of sexuality its priorities for its term in presiding over the EU.

Europe vs. the new U.S. administration

According to unofficial information, European diplomats are quite shocked by the Croatian diplomacy's turn in human rights policies. A new opportunity for siding with the right-wing might appear in the form of the [She Decides Initiative](#), started by the Netherlands as a response to the actions of Trump's administration, which was soon joined by Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, Luxembourg, Finland, Canada and Cape Verde.

On March 2, a conference of 50 countries, including Croatia, will take place in Brussels. The Conference will be attended by European Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development Neven Mimica, who has published [a powerful press release](#) on February 1, endorsing development assistance for family planning and stating that the European Commission will continue to play a leading role with respect to ensuring access to health and family planning services to women, because "gender equality is a global priority endorsed by the European Commission".

Croatia will not contradict Trump

At the same time, a civic initiative called [One of us](#), which opposes assisted fertilization and abortion, started a [petition](#) against She Decides. One of us is a coalition of ultra-conservative movements across Europe, with ties to the Croatian NGO In the Name of the Family.

When inquired by Faktograf whether Croatia will be joining the conference in Brussels and what Croatia's position on the She Decides fund would be, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs sent the following reply: "The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs considers that the EU should make its own autonomous decisions on development assistance, and not act in reply to U.S. policies. Croatia endorses a further development of partner relations between the EU and the United States". Faktograf did not get a clear answer on whether Croatia will be taking part in the conference. However, this reply suggests that Croatia does not wish to respond to Trump's move, and possibly supports it.

Both family-planning and In the Name of the Family

Before his appointment to the ministerial post, Davor Ivo Stier headed the European Parliament's Committee on Development – the exact committee in charge of the issues of assistance – and had received high praise from European diplomats. Stier was also the rapporteur for [a highly progressive Report on the global development framework after 2015](#), which emphasizes the need for gender equality, sets forth ambitious goals for the well-being of women and girls, including their sexual and reproductive rights, stresses the need for a universal approach to health services, including family planning, and condemns the restrictions of humanitarian aid tied to bans on abortion. At the same time, during the campaign to hold the referendum on the Constitutional definition of the family in Croatia, [Stier invited the head of the referendum's initiator In the Name of the Family](#), Željka Markić, to the European Parliament.

Faktograf asked to comment upon the new approach in European institutions, Prime Minister Andrej Plenković and MEP Dubravka Šuica have additionally confirmed that Croatia had indeed made a turn in how it understands human rights ([N1](#)). PM Plenković said he did not understand what the uproar was about, while Šuica confirmed that the anti-abortion stance was assumed.

Source: [Kuća ljudskih prava Zagreb](#), [Faktograf.hr](#), [Human Rights House Network](#)

REGIONAL UPDATES

SRHR under EU priorities at United Nations human rights fora in 2017

On February 27, the Council of the EU adopted Conclusions on 'EU Priorities at UN Human Rights Fora in 2017'. In these Conclusions, the Council says: "Recalling its Conclusions on Gender in Development of 26 May 2015, the Council remains committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the ICPD and the outcomes of their review conferences and remains committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights, in this context'.

This text will inform the EU's position ahead of the 34th session of the UN Human Rights Council, which will run until March 24.

To access full text of Council conclusions click [here](#).

Source: [Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevoelkerung](#)

Polish Government wishes to limit access to emergency contraception

On February 14th the Polish Government announced that it accepted a project proposing to restrict access to the only emergency contraception pill available over the counter. This project is to be discussed in plenary and voted upon in the next session of the Sejm, possibly already in March.

As result of the C(2015)51 ruling from the European Commission, and upon recommendation from the European Medicines Agency (EMA), in January 2015 emergency contraceptive with ulipristal acetate, registered in Poland under the brand name ellaOne, received the authorization to be sold without prescription across the European Union (EU). The ulipristal acetate emergency contraceptive pill (UPA ECP) became available in Polish pharmacies without prescription from April 2015 contributing to rising the standard of reproductive health services and supplies for Polish women and girls, and expanding the postcoital contraceptive choices of women

In November 2016 the Polish Minister of Health announced that he is finalising a project which aims to restrict access to UPA ECPs and reinstate the provision of a mandatory doctor's prescription for emergency contraceptives, citing the 'misuse of the pill' by teenage girls in Poland. Today we can see how his words were put into actions.

While there is limited data on the patterns of use of ECP among different age groups, a recent market study by Millward Brown, the biggest age group purchasing UPA ECPs are women between 25 and 30 years of age (45%), followed by those between 30 and 35 (18%). Young women below 18 make up around 2% of all buyers.

The planned restrictions would greatly impede the lives of women and girls and contribute to the sales of this product from unsafe sources and also cause a rise in the number of unplanned pregnancies and abortions in a country, where access to a safe and legal abortion is already incredibly difficult.

ASTRA together with ASTRA Youth, as part of coalition of civil society organizations working on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights – You Act, CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality and the European Consortium for Emergency Contraception, sent a letter on December 1st, 2016, to the representatives of the European Commission, to voice our concern on the current developments in Poland with regards to women and girls' reproductive health and rights. That letter was resent in February and is available [HERE](#).

Another anti-choice attempt pending in the Polish Sejm

Attacks on women's right to choose are regular and come from both the anti-choice civil society and the Government. In November 2016 Human Rights Committee recommended that Polish authorities should refrain from adopting any legislative reform that would amount to a retrogression of already restrictive legislation on women's access to safe legal abortion. It is especially important in the light of the another petition for introducing a total ban on abortion which is pending in the parliamentary Petition Committee right now. The women's groups expected it to be rejected on 26th January 2017 because of its many imperfections. However, the Committee resolved the matter through issuing a formal request to the Prime Minister. Beata Szydło is expected to address the Petition Committee

with information about the Government's activity in the field of "life protection". Based on this feedback the Committee will decide on the petition's next steps.

Source: [Federation for Women and Family Planning](#)

Polish minority party wants to ban abortions in Lithuania

Representatives of the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania - Christian Families Alliance political group, announced on February 20th that they plan to submit a proposal to ban abortions this spring.

"We're talking about the need to consider the Law on the Protection of Prenatal Life, to talk about our country's general policy and our cultural views on life, which are based on Christian values," claimed MP Rita Tamašunienė, who chairs the party's faction in Parliament. The initiators claim that laws like this have been "successful" in other EU countries, such as Ireland, Portugal, Malta and Poland.

The party representing the Polish minority in Lithuania has been working towards an abortion ban since 2005. Their latest attempt took place in 2013, when Parliament approved the party's bill at the first reading and passed it on to various committees for consideration.

The bill sought to establish a blanket ban on abortion, with only two narrow exceptions - when the pregnancy poses a risk to the woman's life or health, or when the pregnancy comes about as a result of a crime. Had the bill been adopted in the end, doctors could have faced up to three years in prison for any abortion.

The bill is to be submitted in the spring session of Parliament, due to begin in March. At the same time, when asked to share his opinion on the initiative, the current minister of health, Aurelijus Veryga, [stated](#) that he was against the ban and would not support it.

Source: [Liberties.eu](#)

Free in vitro fertilization in Moldova

As of February 24, 2017, the medically insured couples that are infertile can apply for subsidized in vitro fertilization in the Republic of Moldova. Only the medically insured couples are entitled to free in vitro fertilization. These must personally submit the file to the assessment commission based at the Reproductive Health and Medical Genetics Center of the Mother and Child Institute. The file must contain the referral of the family doctor, the couple's application and consent and copies of identity cards and of health insurance policies. Based on the referral, the couple will have a number of medical examinations that confirm infertility, disease or medical contraindications.

In Moldova, about 140,000 couples are infertile. In the case of 3,000 couples.

Source: [IPN](#)

Russia: country where two-thirds of all new HIV cases in Europe are being recorded

HIV infections in Russia reach record-high and account for almost two-thirds of new cases in Europe. More than a million Russians now live with the virus and that number is expected to nearly double in the next decade, in what has been called Europe's HIV epidemic.

The statistics were revealed in a report by the European Centre for Disease Control and the [World Health Organisation](#), which found that 153,407 people across Europe were newly diagnosed with the illness in 2015. Of these, 64% of all cases were registered in Russia – equal to 98,177 people – which is up from the 60% of all cases in Europe a year earlier.

“HIV transmission is still a major concern in Europe,” the report warns. “Despite significant efforts dedicated to the prevention and control of HIV in Europe, the number of new HIV diagnoses has not declined substantially over the last decade in the western part of the region and has more than doubled in the east.”

The report said the increases were being driven mainly by heterosexual transmission in Russia and eastern Europe and in men who have sex with men in western and central regions. It calls for a new action plan to tackle the “HIV epidemic in Europe and end the AIDS epidemic as a public health threat by 2030”.

[Aidsmap](#), which interpreted the findings, said the 98,177 new cases recorded in Russia last year equated to one HIV diagnosis for every 1,493 Russians. That compared with one diagnosis for every 13,157 people across the rest of the continent. HIV diagnoses in Russia have more than doubled over the last ten years, up 133 per cent since 2006 and 15 per cent in just a year.

Source: [The Independent](#)

Slovenia legalises same-sex marriage

Same-sex marriage has become legal in Slovenia since February 24th. Although the law will give couples largely the same rights as heterosexual ones, it still bans them from jointly adopting children. The law was passed around ten months ago, [after a referendum rejected a draft that would have also granted adoption rights](#).

LGBT rights advocates have praised the introduction of marriage equality, but say more still has to be done. “This is a big step forward,” said Lana Gobec, spokeswoman for the Legebitra LGBT rights campaigning group. “But we will continue to strive for complete equality of heterosexual and same-sex couples.”

Same-sex couples have been able to register their relationships in the country since 2006 and can adopt children from a partner’s previous relationship but not unrelated children. Two years ago, an MEP for the country [said it was “shameful”](#) that the country had stopped same-sex marriage through a referendum.

Source: [PINK News](#)

From ASTRA Members

Armenian NGOs question recommendations of the CEDAW Committee

A group of Armenian NGOs (Women's Resource Center, Women's Support Center, Society without Violence, PINK Armenia, Sinjar Yezidi National Union and Center for Gender and Leadership Studies) working in the field of sexual and reproductive rights, raised their concerns to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women's periodic review of Armenia on November 4th, 2016 to bring to their attention issues that have arisen in relation to the Committee's concluding observations on sex selective abortion. In its Concluding observations on the Combined 5th and 6th periodic reports of Armenia, dated 18 November 2016, the Committee stated:

"The Committee notes the amendment of the Law on Human Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights in August 2016, prohibiting sex-selective abortions, introducing counselling, as well as a three day period of reflection before the final decision for women who applied for abortion and defining procedures for medical staff acting against this legislation. The Committee also notes the recent decrease in the bias of sex-ratio. However, the Committee remains concerned by the wide-spread practice of sex-selective abortion." (para. 28).

"The Committee recommends that the state party: (a) Implement the newly adopted law to eradicate the practice of sex-selection abortion; (b) Ensure that the practice of sex-selective abortion is immediately halted through measures such as broader gender equitable policies and support for families with girls, as suggested in the 2012 study on "Sex Imbalances at Birth: Current trends, consequences and policy implications" conducted on the initiative of the Ministry of Health." (para. 29).

By calling for the implementation of the amended Law on Human Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights, and noting that the amendments introduced a mandatory three-day waiting period and mandatory counselling the Committee's concluding observations indirectly give the impression that it approves of the introduction of these procedural barriers to women's access to legal abortion services in Armenia. While sex selective abortion is a real problem in Armenia the amendments to the Law on Human Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights do nothing to address it. Instead these amendments undermine women's reproductive autonomy and equality. The Committee has previously recognized that mandatory waiting periods and biased counselling violate women's equal right to health under Article 12. For example, in the Concluding Observations on the Combined 7th and 8th periodic reports of Hungary, dated 26 March 2013, the Committee recommended the state "to ensure access to safe abortion without subjecting women to mandatory counselling and a medically unnecessary waiting period as recommended by the World Health Organization."

In light of the above, the organizations hope that the Committee will reconsider clarifying its recommendations to Armenia to remove any contradiction with its previous recommendations.

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

Georgian Civil Society Forum (CCM)

More than 50 representatives of NGOs, government institutions and relevant international agencies gathered on February 23rd to share experiences and good practices at the Georgian Civil Society Forum on HIV and control initiatives and the role of the civil society in their implementation. The participants were welcomed by CCM Chair, Minister of Labor, Health and Social Affairs, Mr. David Sergeenko and The Global Fund Portfolio Manager.

The new transition and sustainability plan, Global fund New Funding Model and prospects of HIV and TB programs financing with next allocation period were presented. The discussion was held on anticipated challenges of transition period and role of the CSO in this process. The event was also dedicated to presenting local and regional Harm Reduction programs; Georgia Drug Policy and HIV related stigma and discrimination challenges and other relevant issues.

Georgian Plus Group and “PAPA” HIV positive community Group supported by Association HERA-XXI’s, presented live cases and evidence based documented stories on the barriers to access HIV and other relevant services for HIV positive people.

Source: [HERA XXI](#)

Capacity Building Training on Anti-Discrimination and SOGI Issues for Armenian Journalists

Within the “Solidarity Network for LGBTI in Armenia and Georgia” project, the organization Society Without Violence conducted a successful two-day capacity building training for journalists to improve their knowledge about sexuality, SOGI, anti-discrimination. This was the second training for journalists, following one that took place in November. The aim of the training was to increase the awareness of the (mass) media representatives on LGBTI issues and rights, train them about hate speech and its consequences, and how to report on LGBTI issues without airing uncensored hate speech, sensitize them about their ethical obligations as journalists, increase their capacity to deliver better quality coverage, articles, and programs on LGBTI issues and community, and reduce the use of offensive language and violation of LGBTI rights in Armenian mass media. The theme of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) was also thoroughly discussed - how LGBTI people face discrimination while trying to access health services for SRHR, how LGBTI people living with HIV face double discrimination, etc.

The training took place on 18-19 February with a group of 10 journalists and independent bloggers from Yerevan and different regions of Armenia.

Source: [Society Without Violence](#)

GLOBAL UPDATES

„She Decides”, a global advocacy and fundraising initiative in support of women’s human rights, kicks off on March 2nd in Brussels with international conference

After Trump’s reinstatement of the “Global Gag Rule”, a policy which bars international health organizations that receive U.S. funding from mentioning abortion as a family planning option, the Netherlands announced in January the launch of a global fund to help women access abortion services. The Dutch ministry announced a donation of 10 million euros to She Decides, and Belgium and Denmark followed with matching grants. The "global gag rule" would cause a funding shortfall of \$600 million over the next four years. Such restrictions have devastating effects on international organizations, often forcing them to close their clinics or reduce their services, denying women access to help from safe providers and even hampering HIV prevention efforts. Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Luxemburg, Finland, Canada and Cape Verde have all lent their support to the She Decides initiative.

The She Decides Conference will be held on Thursday 2nd March in Brussels and will formally kick-start the global advocacy and fundraising initiative for women’s health care, dignity and fundamental rights. Jointly convened by Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden, the She Decides international conference will be an important and powerful moment to help shape the global governmental sexual and reproductive health and rights agenda.

The conference is an initiative of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Development Cooperation Alexander De Croo. The Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden are co-organizing. The conference 'She Decides' should be a formal starting point for a broad movement that will keep the rights of girls and women high on the international agenda in the following years.

In total, about 400 representatives of governments, international organizations and NGOs will rally support during the conference for the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls. In addition to the four co-organizers, the Ministers in charge of development cooperation, healthcare and equal rights of Afghanistan, Albania, Canada, Cape Verde, Chad, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Luxembourg, Mali, Moldavia, Mongolia, Nepal, Norway, Portugal and Vietnam will take the floor in Brussels to express their support.

At the same time, a civic initiative called [One of us](#), which opposes assisted fertilization and abortion, started a [petition](#) against She Decides. One of us is a coalition of ultra-conservative movements across Europe, with ties to the Croatian NGO In the Name of the Family.

Source: [Alexander de Croo](#), [Reuters](#), [New York Times](#), [She Decides](#), [Faktograf.hr](#)

Global CSO Statement in Opposition to the Global Gag Rule

ASTRA is part of the 450 global health nongovernmental organizations from Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia who signed the Global CSO Statement in Opposition to the Global Gag Rule. The statement, along with a corresponding high-level statement signed by former heads of state, more than 300 parliamentarians, and leading activists has been shared with policymakers in the United

States, Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia. The statements have also been shared with countless journalists and referenced in numerous articles outlining the unwavering opposition to the Global Gag Rule. It was also released in the [Huffington Post](#).

Read the Global CSO Statement [here](#).

The International Women’s Strike on March 8th

The International Women’s Strike (IWS) is a grassroots movement established by women from different parts of the world as a response to the current social, legal, political, moral and verbal violence experienced by contemporary women at various latitudes. On 8 March 2017 an International Women’s Strike is going to take place. The idea was initiated by the Polish Women’s Strike coalition - an informal, nonpartisan initiative of feminist organizations and activist groups that was created after the Black Monday protests on 3 October 2016 that happened in over 200 cities in Poland and abroad. The Black Protests resulted in the ruling party withdrawing from the parliamentary proceedings of the draft bill introducing a total ban on abortion. The Polish Women’s Strike started a series of women’s protests in different countries – soon after women from South Korea and many countries in Latin America took to the streets. Women are a powerful force that is capable of stemming the tide of populism and that is flooding the world – after all, we are everywhere. The International Women’s Strike coalition consists of women from over 30 countries and on 8 March 2017 they will engage in various events under the slogan “Solidarity Is Our Weapon.”

Visit the IWS website <http://parodemujeres.com> and see more information [HERE](#).

Join Facebook event [HERE](#).

Source: [International Women’s Strike](#)

The 34th session of the UN Human Rights Council

The 34th session of the UN Human Rights Council is taking place from 27 February to 24 March 2017. Find below information about anticipated sexual rights-related [resolutions](#), [panels](#) and [reports](#), [UPR outcomes](#) and [parallel events](#) taking place during the 34th session. Outcomes from the 26th session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) will also be adopted during this session of the HRC. The 26th session of the UPR was held from the 31 October to 11 November 2016. Fourteen countries were reviewed, among them Lithuania and Republic of Moldova.

[Click here to access the full Programme of Work for HRC34](#)

Source: [Sexual Rights Initiative](#)

YOUTH

Support European Activists for Youth Rights - YouAct

Do you believe that all young people should have access to information and services that enable them to make informed decisions and choices about their health and life? This is the world that young European activists dream about. YouAct works to safeguard and advocate for Sexual and Reproductive Rights. If you want to support their vision and the work that they do, join this crowdfunding campaign to help YouAct sustain their youth-led network.

YouAct is an entirely youth-led, independent NGO working to support young people in advocating for their Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) in Europe. Our organization connects youth activists, engaged as volunteers, from across Council of Europe member states, from Georgia to Ireland and from Cyprus to Sweden. YouAct offers an international, dynamic and unique environment, where we stimulate young people to build their capacity, leadership and participation in decision making processes.

Join the crowdfunding campaign [HERE](#).

Source: [You Act](#)

Empower Women Holding Online Consultation for the Youth Forum at CSW61

The Youth Forum is a critical opportunity for young people in all their diversities to openly and strategically discuss the challenges and opportunities for achieving gender equality and sustainable development in our local, national, regional, and global contexts, and to amplify common concerns and advocacy efforts in advance of CSW61. Recognizing that many young people will not be attending the Youth Forum and CSW61 in person, all young people and stakeholders from around the world are invited to participate in this online consultation and provide their input on the key themes of the Youth Forum: Young Women's Leadership, Young Women's Economic Empowerment, Partnerships with Young Men in Gender Equality, and Inter-generational Partnerships.

Between February and March, young people and stakeholders from across the globe will be invited to contribute to the discussion using the Empower Women's web platform and respond to prompts related to the four main themes of the Youth CSW61.

Young people aged 18-35 are encouraged to add their voices!

Hashtag used on social media: #YouthCSW61

Source: [Empower Women](#)

Valentine's Day Silent Disco in Warsaw

On 12 February, the Sunday before Valentine's Day, the Ponton Group of Sex Educators organized a silent disco - an event where participants listen to music individually on their headphones but all dance together. We used this holiday of love to gather in the center of Warsaw and promote HIV testing. At 3 PM we set off from the square in the heart of Warsaw and danced our way to the consulting-diagnostic point at 4 Chmielna Street. Despite the frosty weather it was hot, colorful and energetic. While dancing, one of our volunteers talked through a megaphone about the current situation in Poland regarding HIV, as well as how and where one can get tested. Passersby were called to join in and dance along. Ponton's new mobile app - [HIV Quiz](#) - was promoted throughout the whole event. Volunteers handed out leaflets with condoms and encouraged to get tested for HIV.

Photos from the event available [here](#) and [here](#). You can see watch a video [here](#).

The project is financially supported by Gilead Sciences Poland as part of the [Pozytywnie Otwarci](#) grant.

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

UPCOMING EVENTS

First Regional Symposium of International Federation of Professional Abortion and Contraception Associates to be held in Bulgaria

The first FIAPAC regional symposium, "Following the best practices in abortion care", will take place in Sofia, Bulgaria, on April 1st. The aim of this meeting will be to introduce to the participant the principles of safe medical and surgical abortion, techniques and protocols, clinical follow-up and complication management. Well-known experts will present their knowledge about first and second trimester abortion procedures and will share their experience with auditorium. See the conference programme [here](#).

Source: [FIAPAC](#)

61st session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women

The sixty-first session of the [Commission on the Status of Women](#) with priority theme of "Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work" will take place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 13 to 24 March 2017. Representatives of Member States, UN entities, and ECOSOC-accredited non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from all regions of the world are invited to attend the session.

Source: [UN Women](#)

50th session of the UN Commission on Population and Development

The 50th session of the Commission on Population and Development will take place at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 3 to 7 April 2017. The priority theme of the Session is “Changing population age structures and sustainable development.” Online pre-registration will run from November 2016 to March 2017. Please visit the website of the Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs for more information on NGO participation in the Session of the Commission [here](#).

Source: [UNFPA](#)

2017 EuroNGOs Annual Conference

The 2017 EuroNGOs Conference will be held across two days in Brussels – on the 15th and 16th of June. The Annual General Meeting for members will take place on the 14th of June.

Source: [EuroNGOs](#)

PUBLICATIONS

New country rankings on access to contraception in Europe

[The Contraception Atlas](#) -- a map that scores 45 countries throughout geographical Europe on access to modern contraception was launched on St Valentine’s Day in Brussels. The rankings -- which are based on access to contraceptive supplies, family planning counseling and online information -- reveal a very uneven picture across Europe. [The European Parliamentary Forum on Population & Development](#) (EPF) has produced the Atlas in partnership with Third-i, while experts in sexual and reproductive health and rights designed the methodology.

“Access to contraception should be a key concern of governments in empowering citizens to plan their families and lives. Yet every country we analysed should be doing more to improve access. Our findings show that for many European countries, ensuring that people have choice over their reproductive lives is not a priority.” commented Neil Datta, EPF Secretary. “This is borne out by statistics on unintended pregnancy: over 43% pregnancies in Europe are unintended. Contraception is used by 69.2% of European women aged between 15 and 49 who are married or living with a partner -- lower the usage rates of both the North America and Latin America/Caribbean regions.”

Source and detailed information: www.contraceptioninfo.eu

"Solidarity in Struggle: Feminist Perspectives on Neoliberalism in East-Central Europe"

Interesting publication on the recent developments in the CEE region - "Solidarity in Struggle: Feminist Perspectives on Neoliberalism in East-Central Europe" by the [Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung](#), edited by Eszter Kovats. The publication includes several case studies and theoretical approaches by experts from Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania and Poland.

Access the publication here: <http://bit.ly/2kzZCde>

WHO issues new guidance on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women living with HIV

WHO launched the Consolidated guideline on sexual and reproductive health and rights of women living with HIV, which takes a woman-centred approach throughout to effectively address and represent the needs of girls and women, as well as those of their families and communities.

Manjulaa Narasimhan, Scientist at WHO comments, "Supporting evidence based recommendations and building an enabling environment will help advance the health and well-being of women living with HIV in all their diversity." Taking this approach, the process adopted for the development of the guidelines was unique in its meaningful engagement of communities of women living with HIV. In taking a woman-centred approach, the new WHO guideline are founded upon the guiding principles of human rights and gender equality.

Access the publication [here](#).

Source: [WHO](#)

Call for Papers: Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in humanitarian crises

Deadline: 1 May 2017, publication: October 2017

For this issue of Reproductive Health Matters, we invite articles that offer new insights and evidence to contribute to the global knowledge base regarding SRHR in humanitarian crises, particularly in relation to the following thematic areas: heightened risk and vulnerability, interventions and responses, and legal and policy issues.

Visit <http://www.rhmjournal.org.uk/journal/call-papers> for more information.

MEMBER OF THE MONTH

Real People Real Vision, Georgia

Real People Real Vision (RPRV) is the organization established in 2010 by People Living with HIV (PLHIV) for PLHIV. The main of the organization is to support vulnerable and marginalized groups to live in a stigma free environment and to advocate for equal access to medical and social services. The basic work includes, but is not limited to, raising awareness on HIV prevention and provide access to HIV testing services among risk/vulnerable groups such as drug users, commercial sex workers, men having sex with men, mobile population out of social support systems (including internally displaced people), people beyond the poverty line, young girls and boys- mobilizing and strengthening the community leaders and supporting full participation of the mentioned groups in advocacy processes who encounter problems in their everyday life, contributing to developing of medical/social referral mechanism. Recently RPRV is involved in the CSOs participation in the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB Malaria (GFATM) to state funding transition advocating for sustainability of HIV/HCV continuum care as the national Policy and Advocacy Advisory Council member.

RPRV joined ASTRA Network in 2013. Becoming a member of ASTRA Network was the turning point for our organization as it opened doors to participation to UN lead processes including Post 2015 Development Agenda and ICPD beyond 2014 that strengthened the image of organization on the local level as well. The capacity of the organization increased in terms of advocating women SRHR rights, dealing with diversities and bringing up grassroots level activism to meaningful high level advocacy. The image of ASTRA Network supported the organization to become the member of national Policy and Advocacy Advisory Council (CCM) operating through GFATM Country Coordinating Mechanism delegated by the CSOs themselves to stand for the rights of PLHIV in Georgia.

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Real People Real Vision team

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

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