



CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

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BURNING ISSUE

Polish anti-LGBT zones growing in power, EU reacts

In the recent months in Poland, around 93 local councils in around 14 districts (voivodships) in Poland have adopted anti-LGBTI statements or resolutions.

These resolutions are incompatible with the Polish Constitution and basic standards of the international human rights law Poland has undertaken to respect. Their language is scandalous: the resolutions speak of “stopping of the gender and LGBT ideology”, “aggressive homosexual propaganda”, “stopping homoterror and sexualisation of social life”. e resolutions drive fear, contempt and hate towards LGBTI persons. Polish activists created the [Atlas of Hate](#) showing the towns and villages that adopted shameful resolutions. These resolutions are mostly concentrated in

the south-east of the country and account already for around 30 % of Polish population. Most recently the local council in one of the biggest Polish cities, Łódź adopted so called Local Charter of Family Rights based on the model put forward by Polish anti-rights organisation Ordo Iuris. This is done in the name of “protection of traditional family” which is allegedly threatened by the LGBTI+ persons. In practice, it means that no training on countering discrimination or sexuality education could take place in the communities under the resolutions.

Great Coalition for Equality and Choice (*note: a Polish coalition of over hundred feminist organisations and informal groups united under the themes of women’s rights umbrella (SRHR and combatting violence against women)*) sent a letter to mayors calling them to deem invalid these scandalous resolutions, in hope for some reasonable and humane reaction.

On 18 December 2019 the European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) condemning Poland's 'LGBTI-free zones, demanding that EU ministers unblock an EU directive on non-discrimination. On 4 February 2020 the EU Commissioner for equality, Helena Dalli [spoke out](#) against towns in Poland that have labelled themselves "free" from lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex communities.

In practice, people are the target, individual human beings, not an ideology. Accepting of hate speech which allows for violence is totally unacceptable. Additionally shocking is that it originates from the public authorities who should be responsible for the promotion of antidiscrimination and protection of human rights.

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

REGIONAL UPDATES

Armenian Baby-Selling Scheme

A scandal erupted in Armenia after a baby trafficking scheme became public. A black-market network - involving senior officials, doctors and orphanages - has most likely been operating for decades, with some of the accusations reaching as far back in time as the 90’s. Newborn children were to be taken away from the mothers, usually by blackmailing or claiming that the child had died, and given up for illegal paid adoptions to foreigners.

Armenian National Security Service had informed of launching a criminal investigation into the mafia-controlled rigamolare. Several members of the gang, including an obstetrician, a head of one of Armenian orphanages and a number of public officials were arrested by December 2019.

A short video with statements from Armenian Minister, mother of a missing child and lawyers working on the case can be accessed via Radio Free Europe's [website](#).

The invisible women of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Women of Bosnia and Herzegovina still suffer from consequences of the Bosnian War (1992-1995) up to this day. Studies show that during and after the war, women were excluded from the peace-making processes and their needs were not taken into consideration, what resulted in them not being properly addressed. Patriarchal values are now the foundation of Bosnian society:

*Zilka Spahic Siljak, a leading local gender studies scholar, emphasizes the immense impact of the predominantly masculine political environment in a country with patriarchal values. As she notes in her recently published book *Bosnian Labyrinth*, traditional social values and ensuing gender stereotypes impact everything, including the positions of women in high leadership.*

Political exclusion of Bosnian women takes toll on the society – despite gender equality being included in institutional solutions, Bosnian women still suffer from high rates of different forms of violence, including domestic, physical, psychological and sexual violence.

More details on the situation, as well as a full analysis of Bosnian context is available [online](#).

Russia faces a demographic decline

The government's statistics agency, Rosstat, released figures in December showing a natural population decline of 259,600 in the first 10 months of 2019. The predicted decline for the whole year: more than 300,000, a loss three times greater than the year before.

For the past 3 years, Russian population has been declining. Although experts are not surprised by this fact, Russian decrease in birth rate is a result of low birth rates of previous generations.

Despite the government's efforts to introduce family-friendly policies and systemic solutions, the trend will most likely not change in the upcoming years, although Russians may note an increase in overall population if migration rates go up.

Read more [here](#).

FROM ASTRA MEMBERS

Armenian workshops for reproductive health specialists

The Training Module on rights-based and non-discriminative approach on providing reproductive health services was developed by the “Advocates for Reproductive Health and Rights” network initiated by the Women’s Resource Center. The Module for gynecologists and obstetricians has been accredited by the Ministry of Healthcare of Armenia. On 30,31 January field’s specialists did 2 days trainings for 25 obstetricians-gynecologists to raise awareness of reproductive health and rights issues among different groups of women including ezidi women, women who have disability, women who live with HIV, Lesbian bisexual and trans women.

Source: [Women’s Resource Center Armenia](#)

B&H endocrinologists at the training on human rights and needs of trans persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina

On 18 January 2020, Sarajevo Open Centre (SOC) held the training for endocrinologists named “Medical aspects of gender reassignment: On adequate, trans specific and inclusive services and support providing to trans persons in the transition process”.

Education was led by Katja Dumić Kubat MD, specialised in pediatrics, pediatric endocrinology (Clinic Hospital Center Zagreb) and Asmira Topal, activist for human rights of transgender, intersex and gender variant persons, trans man (Trans Aid Croatia). Asmira is also one of the authors of the publication Medical Aspects of Gender Reassignment: Manual for medical professionals and healthcare workers on providing services and support to trans persons in the transition process, that was published in September 2018 by Sarajevo Open Centre.

This half-day training gathered around 10 medical experts from the public health institutions - clinical centres, hospitals and health care institutes from Sarajevo, Goražde and Banjaluka. They presented to the participants endocrinology perspectives in the process of transition of gender variant/ non-conforming, transgender and transexual persons, needs and experience, guidelines for protection of health of trans persons, as well as the experience of trans persons from BiH.

So far, SOC organised trainings for psychologists and psychiatrists, medicine and psychology students, gynaecologists and urologists, and after this one we plan to organise education for plastic,

reconstructive and aesthetic surgeons on this topic, with hope of intensifying further efforts towards enabling adequate medical gender reassignment services in BiH and raising awareness on trans identities, problems, needs and human rights of trans persons within the BiH healthcare system.

More details available here (in B/C/S language): http://soc.ba/trening-za-bh-endokrinologe_inje-o-medicinskim-aspektima-prilagodbe-spola/

Source: [Sarajevo Open Center](#)

Innovative Project Expected to Improve Women's Access to Abortion in Moldova

On December 10, 2019, the Reproductive Health Training Center (RHTC) in Moldova organized a round table meeting to announce the official launch of the pilot project “Medical Abortion via Telemedicine for Women and Adolescents in Rural Moldova: Breaking Barriers with Technology,” which is supported by Grand Challenges Canada within the Options for Pregnancy Termination (OPTions) Innovation Initiative. Representatives from the Moldovan Ministry of Health, the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Nicolae Testimitanu,” and UNFPA, along with ob-gyn providers, family doctors, and nurses practicing in rural areas, participated in the event.

Up until now, women and girls in Moldova, especially those in rural areas, have needed to travel to regional medical centers to obtain an abortion from a certified gynecologist. This has created barriers to accessing safe abortion that disproportionately affect poor women and girls, through loss of wages due to missed work and accrued costs due to transportation. This innovation is a novel service delivery model that allows self-management of medical abortion (MA) with remote guidance from a provider.

RHTC hopes to demonstrate the feasibility, effectiveness and acceptability of telemedicine MA services in Moldova so that it can thus be integrated into the national public healthcare system. As a result, this project should serve as a model that could be adapted and implemented in nearby countries within the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region.

Source: [Reproductive Health Training Center](#)

First Assessment of Youth Policy in Georgia

In 2019, the Parliamentary Committee on Sport and Youth Affairs of the Parliament of Georgia established a Youth Policy Monitoring and Development Working Group to develop recommendations and prepare relevant reports regarding implementation of State Youth Policy and its following action plan (2015-2020). Georgian Youth Policy Document had been officially approved by the Government of Georgia in 2014. The aim of youth policy is to promote the creation of an environment conducive to the full development of youth, where young people can realize their full potential and be actively involved in all areas of public life.

In January 2020 Youth Policy Monitoring and Development Working Group prepared the report, which includes key findings and conclusions from the consultancy and is complemented by:

- Recommendations on strengthening youth policy coordination and implementation at national and local levels;
- Recommendations on creating a model for structural dialogue with youth;
- Recommendations for the continued enhancement of youth policy in Georgia;
- A comparative analysis of EU Member States' best practices in the Area of Youth Policy.

The implementation of existing youth strategy and recommendations outlined by the report has been assigned to newly established state structure Youth Agency whose function is to create, develop, implement and coordinate the Government's youth strategy. On the other hand, the Agency should facilitate the development of youth policy and youth activities at the municipal level.

Association HERA XXI as a member of the Youth Policy Monitoring and Development Working Group has been actively involved in the following processes and has contributed consultancy and development of recommendations.

Study On the Needs and Barriers of Women and Girls with Disabilities Regarding Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

The Association HERA XXI has conducted study focusing on SRHR needs and barriers for women and girls with disabilities. Nowadays, in Georgia sexual and reproductive health and rights, especially for people with disabilities, are often neglected. The study aims to identify key challenges and obstacles faced by this part of society, highlights the problems from the perspective of health service accessibility and realization of sexual rights and analyses the level of awareness about these issues.

The study reflects current problems and needs faced by women and girls with disabilities. The documents analyze the legislative framework and international obligations of the country from the topic perspective.

Capability Statement

Association HERA XXI has developed a capability statement on gender-based violence. The statement highlights Association HERA XXI's work on gender and SGBV in relation with SRHR. Throughout its work, main strategy of organization has been empowering people and preventing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence through advocacy, education, outreach, and support which has led to:

- ✓ Adoption of the National Action Plan on Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence and Measures to be Implemented for the Protection of Victims (Survivors) 2018-2020
- ✓ Strengthened capacities of social workers, healthcare workers and teachers to address gender-based violence.
- ✓ Improved services for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, including mental health and legal services

Source (for the last three paragraphs): [HERA XXI](#)

Adolescent pregnancy in the Republic of Moldova. Qualitative study summary

Author: PAS Centre, UNFPA

The goal of the qualitative sociological study is to explore and identify the key factors and behavioral patterns that lead to adolescent pregnancy, thus helping to identify the necessary interventions to prevent them. The study was based on 5 focus groups (2 with adolescents and 3 with specialists) and 68 in-depth interviews with young girls with pregnancy experience under age of 18 years, with the male partners of the young girls, the parents of adolescents and adolescents with pregnancy experience at age under 18 years old, specialists who had experience in teenage pregnancies in the past 3 years. For the collection of data, an interview guide adapted to each category of respondents was used. Data collection took place between December 2018 and March 2019.

More details available [here](#).

Source: Family Planning Association of Moldova

SRHR and mental health come together in a Belarusian social campaign

As a part of the initiative “Young Women Changing Narratives around SRHR and mental health”,

YWCA Belarus champions run SRHR & Mental health awareness campaign in Belarus. During the

period of January,

- Telegram stickers were realized. They remind about principles of consent and trust between partners, as well as mental health aspects need to be taken into account. Stickers can be downloaded by this link: t.me/addstickers/femfm
- Two podcasts were recorded. Topics are the following: contraception in Belarus and in general, reproductive health, environmentally friendly and non-traumatic hygiene, myths about sexual health. They are available in Russian language:
https://www.mixcloud.com/FemFM_podcast/
- An Instagram campaign started with on-line “Self-Care diaries”, topics like bodily autonomy and right to decide touched upon: <https://www.instagram.com/ostanovinasiliye/>

The initiative “Young Women Changing Narratives around SRHR and mental health” in Eastern Europe is supported by Government of Finland and encourage young women to identify and transform core, dominant cultural narratives found in policy debates, news media and social media on young women’s SRHR and mental health.

A guest note from [YWCA Belarus](#)

RESOURCES

Center for Reproductive Rights has recently published their newest factsheet titled “European Abortion Laws. A Comparative Overview”. *For more than sixty years Europe has led the continuing global trend towards the liberalization of abortion laws and the legalization of women’s access to safe and legal abortion. Today almost all European countries allow abortion on request or on broad social grounds and only a very small minority maintain highly restrictive*

laws prohibiting abortion in almost all circumstances. The standard practice is to legalize abortion on request or broad social grounds, at least in the first trimester of pregnancy. Almost all countries also ensure that abortion is legal throughout pregnancy when necessary to protect a pregnant woman's health or life. Since 2018 several European countries have enacted important progressive reforms or taken steps to remove harmful procedural and regulatory barriers that can impede access to legal abortion.

Whole publication can be accessed [here](#).

UPCOMING EVENTS

9-20 March 2020 – 64th United Nation's Committee on the Status of Women

In 2020, the global community will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the [Fourth World Conference on Women](#) and adoption of the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) (1995). A five-year milestone will be reached towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). 2020 is therefore a pivotal year for the accelerated realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, everywhere.

The sixty-fourth session of the [Commission on the Status of Women](#) is planned to take place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 9 to 20 March 2020. 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](#)

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; BOCS Foundation; 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 - Novgorod 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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