



CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

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BURNING ISSUE

ASTRA's regional report published

We are proud to announce that ASTRA Network has just published a new report on state of sexual and reproductive health and rights in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Introduction to the report with basic information about it is included below and full report is [available online](#).

The year 2019 marked ASTRA Network's 20th anniversary of existence. For two decades, we have been monitoring the situation of sexual and reproductive health and rights in Central and Eastern

Europe and Central Asia. Our work focuses on supporting grassroots organisations in the region and providing them with opportunities to forward their work even further – including the international arena. Our members are amazing actors in their home countries, who do game-changing grassroots work on community organizing, providing healthcare and education, mobilizing the general public and reacting to current political and social events. It is honouring and humbling to be able to bring together such initiatives. We are more than proud to say that today ASTRA Network consists of 42 organisations based in 21 countries. The past 20 years were extremely exciting and eventful. Starting from repetitive attempts of fundamentalist movements to limit access to abortion and contraception, attacks aimed at women's and sexual and reproductive rights activists, numerous attempts to alter the law in several countries of the region so that women would struggle to actively exercise their basic human rights to decide about themselves and their bodies... And this is just the tip of the iceberg – all of the above, and so much more, is the norm for women living in Central and Eastern Europe, and Central Asia. However, the fact that women of the region do fight back cannot go unseen – and they have been doing so for years. Protests that gained international attention, just like Polish Black Protest or Slovak Nebudeme Ticho to name the latest ones, have had the power to stop draconian laws and keep the legislature intact.

However, Poland and Slovakia are not the only ones that can mobilize the people – similar initiatives, often organized or coordinated by ASTRA Network member organisations, were attended by tens of thousands in different countries of the region as well. Activists defending human rights are fighting relentlessly to not let the far-right and religious fundamentalists alter the system. Despite that fight, the situation remains a dynamic one. Today, at the beginning of a new decade, we are presenting you with the newest and most comprehensive publication about sexual and reproductive health and rights in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The report is a coherent overview of 14 countries' situations regarding abortion, contraception, pre- and antenatal care, sexuality education, LGBTQI+ rights and gender-based violence – all written from the perspective of local activists. In the spirit of providing a platform for regional initiatives, all the inputs were provided by our member organisations and their national associates. Central and Eastern Europe, and Central Asia tend to be left out of the conversation when it comes to building civil societies and protecting human rights. Hopefully, this report will change the way you think about our region – which is an unnoticed bastion of fight for basic human rights.

REGIONAL UPDATES

Women's Rights Activists Attacked Then Detained in Kyrgyzstan

A group of about 50 women's rights activists were detained by the police during an International Women's Day's march in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan.

The activists had been attacked by a group of aggressive masked men that escaped after the arrival of the police. The charges they are facing are currently unclear – local organisations are monitoring the situation.

Source: [New York Times](#)

Armenian activists turn art into protest

An interesting article on usage of art in the Armenian women's rights movement was recently published online. The piece focuses on specific activists who. The text is accompanied by amazing visuals, so make sure to go through *Armenian activists turn art into protest* thoroughly and do not be afraid to get inspired!

Read more: [Chai Khana](#)

Effigy of gay couple set on fire in Croatia

"The Croatian President, government ministers, LGBT rights groups and the Ombudsperson on Monday all condemned the burning of an effigy of a kissing same-sex couple and their child at a Dalmatian carnival, calling it a hateful act. The image was torched at a traditional carnival in the small town of Imotski in the Dalmatian Hinterland.

President Zoran Milanovic condemned the act on Facebook as "inhumane and totally unacceptable". Education Minister Blazenka Divjak and Economy Minister Darko Horvat also condemned it."

Source: [Balkan Insight](#)

FROM ASTRA MEMBERS

Polish anti-LGBT zones growing in power

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](#)

A meeting on transgender medical rights held in Bosnia and Herzegovina

In order to present to the doctors of relevant medical fields of the leading medical institution in Republika Srpska, the topic of medical gender reassignment in B&H, human rights and needs of transgender persons, as well as recent activities of Sarajevo Open Centre regarding this issue, publishing the [manual](#) and [education meetings](#) for specialists of specific medical fields that have previously taken place, our coordinator Delila Hasanbegović organised a meeting with representatives of the University Clinical Centre of Republika Srpska.

During the meeting they talked about the need to raise awareness on trans identities, problems, needs and human rights of trans persons in BH healthcare system, from aspects of different medical fields, about the current situation in UCC RS when it comes to trans specific services, about the ways to improve the existing gender reassignment services.

More info about the meeting available [online](#).

Source: [Sarajevo Open Center](#)

Sexual Health Awareness Week focuses on safety and pleasure in Armenia

February 13-20 was Sexual Health Awareness Week and this year's slogan was respect, pleasure and safety in sexual relationships. On this occasion, thematic articles were posted [online](#) within the framework of the Women's Resource Center's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Program, addressing the importance of respect, consent and safe sex in sexual relationships, as well as the right to pleasure of women during sexual intercourse. We also conducted a training on healthy relationships where the trainer discussed what are the main principles of healthy relationships, what are the signs of unhealthy relationships as well as presented the importance of healthy sexual relationships.

Regular two-day training sessions for health professionals were completed, during which ten therapists and obstetricians-gynecologists were trained on various articles on women's reproductive rights, on a number of important issues of abortion, as well as on the specific needs of different groups of women reproductive health.

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

Georgian National Study on the Youth Policy Implementation At The Local Level

The study, commissioned by the Fridrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) in close collaboration with the Committee on Sports and Youth Affairs of the Parliament of Georgia, aimed to identify whether youth policy is inclusive and participatory and how the youth policy is implemented in the municipalities. In order to have analytical insights on management and the implementation of the youth policy by local self-governments in the Imereti Region and Tbilisi, the study focused on the process and challenges of policy planning and implementation in the aforementioned municipalities.

Based on the study results, representatives of local self-government authorities are less aware of youth needs.. The study showed youngsters are not informed about activities planned by the local self-government bodies and there are lack of community spaces for youth. As youth policy covers SRHR needs of youngsters with certain objectives the main findings of the study is crucial in developing g strategies and action plans independently for each municipality considering their peculiarities for youth policy implementation.

Georgian Youth Capability Statement

Association HERA XXI as a member of the National Youth Policy Monitoring and Development Working Group has contributed consultancy regarding evaluation of national youth policy and development of recommendations. Youth groups of HERA XXI in 4 regions of Georgia ensures integration of developed recommendations at local levels through advocating to integrate of SRHR issues into the local municipality programming. For effective positioning with decision makers, youth groups of HERA XXI developed a capability [statement](#). The aim of the statement is to clarify importance of SRHR for youth, how existing youth policy outlines their needs, introduce youth interventions of association related to SRHR issue and makes it visible for decision makers.

Source: [HERA XXI](#) (two previous notes)

Our Romanian Board Member involved in the works to combat GBV

ASTRA Advisory Board member Daniela Draghici has been participating in 5 meetings of the Working Group on the national strategy to prevent and combat sexual violence, Synergy 2020-2030, called by the National Agency for Equal Opportunities. It is an innovative and integrated strategy that includes multidisciplinary intervention, non-stereotypes, working guides and tools, information and training, education at all levels. Other bodies that take part in these meetings are: ministries of health and

education, national agency for children's protection, national agency against trafficking, general inspectorate for immigration, national institute of magistrates, and NGOs. During the working sessions, the group discussed aspects related to the legal and procedural framework related to sexual violence and potential legislative proposals. The working group also analyzed the action plan for the implementation of the strategy, drafted on the basis of the contributions of the partner institutions and organizations. The following meetings will analyze the measures set by the plan, along with the implementation terms, financial resources, indicators and risks.

A debate on surrogative motherhood held by Romanian NGO

Members of the Society for Feminist Analyses AnA organized a very interesting presentation by our colleague from France, who works for the Institute of Research and Training for Social Action of Essonne, on the alarming topic of surrogacy from an ethical feminist standpoint, followed by a just as interesting debate, considering women's right to reproductive health and their own decision regarding their bodies. The debate was organized in a university, which gave many students the opportunity to attend the highly interesting discussions on a sensitive topic that had not been touched upon before. In short, surrogate motherhood, also known as gestational surrogacy (GS), has been used for more than thirty years now, and in the last ten years it has grown and has become a global practice. It consists in bearing a child conceived by a person or a couple in vitro or through artificial insemination, and in separating from that child at birth in favour of the parents who had ordered them (also called intended parents). This practice is known as Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART), in keeping with the terminology of The World Health Organization.

Source: [Society for Feminist Analyses AnA](#) (two previous notes)

RESOURCES

New report on the situation of girls by UNICEF

From UNICEF's website:

The report, *A New Era for Girls: Taking stock on 25 years of progress*, is issued in the context of the [Generation Equality](#) campaign and to mark the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – the historic blueprint for advancing women's and girls' rights.

“It is vital that we hold governments to account on their commitment to the historic Beijing Declaration, and this report offers a wholistic picture of what the world looks like for girls 25 years on,” said Plan International Chief Executive Officer Anne-Birgitte Albrechtsen. “Adolescent girls, in particular, suffer heightened discrimination as a result of their age and gender and yet continue to be side-lined in their communities and in decision-making spaces, largely invisible in government policy. Empowering adolescent girls yields a triple societal benefit – for girls today, the adults they become, and the next generation of children. If we fail to grasp this and to end the discrimination girls continue to face the world over, we will stand little chance of achieving the gender equality ambitions set out in Agenda 2030.”

Source: [UNICEF](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Due to global epidemic of Covid-19, all the upcoming events have been cancelled or indefinitely postponed. Amongst others, the 64th Commission on the Status of Women was voted to be postponed with a specific date yet to be announced.

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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