



CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

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BURNING ISSUE

Lithuanian Minister of Health did not show support to women's reproductive rights

At the beginning of 2019, Lithuanian Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists asked the State Commission on Drugs and Medicine Reimbursement to provide reimbursement for hormonal contraception (hormonal IUD) for girls and young women of 15-20 years old. The proposal was based on intent to help young women avoid unwanted pregnancies, eliminate price barriers for accessing modern contraceptives and ultimately ensure access to contraception to all those in need, especially the young and vulnerable. This April, after the decision of the Commission, the Minister of Health signed a decree providing reimbursement of hormonal IUD's for young women.

However, May brought a lot of pressure from those opposing the new decree (namely religious NGOs, several parliamentarians and doctors raising concerns regarding the “dangers” of introduced solution) and the Minister decided to withhold the project until further clarification on possible dangers of hormonal contraception.

A group of progressive parliamentarians organized a press conference and wrote an appeal to the Minister of Health. Additionally, numerous appeals of women’s rights NGOs were sent to the Prime Minister, the Speaker of Parliament and to Lithuanian President. Unfortunately, the Minister of Health is yet to decide on further steps, leaving hundreds of young women unsure of their situation. Many believe that the outcry around reimbursement is related to the coming parliamentary elections in October 2020 and the Minister is stalling in order to gain support from the more conservative part of Lithuanian society.

International Planned Parenthood – European Network has issued [a press release](#) on the matter.

Source: [Family Planning and Sexual Health Association](#)

REGIONAL UPDATES

Sexuality education under attack in Romania

Less than two months after Romania’s president promulgated a law stipulating that sexuality education would become compulsory in schools at least once per semester, several parliamentarians joined forces against it and introduced an amendment, whereby parents’ written agreement is required and the terminology used would be changed from “sexuality” to “sanitary” education.

Mention should be made that the amendment was introduced stealthily, as the Law 45/2020 had already been promulgated by the president on April 3, so the parliamentarians, who are members of the Ecumenical Praying Group in the Romanian Parliament, found an unorthodox manner to counteract it, via a draft law to modify Law 272/2004 regarding the protection and promotion of children’s rights. In essence, the newly voted amendment explicitly reduces school students’ access to comprehensive reproductive and sexuality education, as it currently exists as part of the optional health education module that has reached merely 6-7% of the school population.

As a result, pro-choice NGOs kick started an advocacy action by sending a thoroughly-documented letter to the Chamber of Deputies, requesting the rejection of the mentioned amendments and proposed joint working groups to identify adequate measures apt to increase the access of Romanian citizens of all ages to quality healthy lifestyles education and services.

At the same time, the NGO advocacy group sent a well-documented policy paper to the President of Romania, specifying that the adoption of the amendment under debate is an infringement of the governmental obligation to protect and support children's right to health and education, as well as their economic and social rights.

The media has covered this topic extensively, with interviews carried out with some of the most vocal members of the NGO pro-choice group.

To be continued.

A synopsis by Daniela Draghici, ASTRA Advisory Board member

Russian Children's Rights Commissioner suggests funding cuts for abortion clinics

During her annual performance report, Russia's Children's Rights Commissioner, Anna Kuznetsova, proposed reducing funding for abortion clinics.

According to Kuznetsova, the amount of funding allocated to abortion clinics should be in inverse proportion to the number of abortions. "A clinic should be interested in saving the child, and not in providing services for the artificial termination of pregnancy," she said.

Kuznetsova also suggested limiting the sale of medical abortion drugs at pharmacies.

The commissioner's report has already been sent to the [Kremlin](#).

Source: Deti.gov.ru

New National Youth Policy concept for 2020-2030 in Georgia

In May, Georgian National Youth Policy concept for 2020 – 2030 was launched by the initiative of Sports and Youth Issues Committee of Parliament with the active collaboration of State Youth Policy Monitoring and Development Working Group.

The Concept was developed based on various surveys, consultative meetings with about 300 young people (19-29 years old) in 12 self-governing units of Georgia, moreover e-poll for up to 1,400 adolescents (14-18 years old), the results of surveys are represented in the concept. In addition, the document reflects the point of views of the LEPL "Youth Agency", the civil sector and other stakeholders.

Youth volunteers and activists of HERA-XXI were involved in the process from the very beginning. They actively advocated SRHR issues inclusion in the concept.

The Document will be submitted to the Parliament for approval in June. After Parliament approval of the concept, the importance and legitimacy of the youth policy will be increased in Georgia.

Source: [HERA XXI](#)

FROM ASTRA MEMBERS

Armenia's National Assembly ratified the Lanzarote Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse

On 11 May, Armenia's National Assembly ratified the Lanzarote Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse despite protests by conservative groups including the country's opposition party. The Armenian Apostolic Church had also raised concerns over the convention.

The morning of the parliamentary hearing, members an ultra-conservative group that has been one of the main organizers of a petition demanding the parliament not ratify the Istanbul Convention on Violence Against Women held a small [protest](#) near the side entrance of the parliament building. One of the main contentions they had with the convention was the phrase 'sexual orientation' in the non-discrimination clause which states in the Convention. Another main contention raised by the protesters concerned Article 6 of the convention which states that children, 'during primary and

secondary education, receive information on the risks of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, as well as on the means to protect themselves, adapted to their evolving capacity'. They stated that students of primary and secondary school age were too young to be informed of such topics.

The Women's Resource Center Armenia continued its awareness raising activities through social media informing the society on the importance of talking with children about sexuality and protection of sexual abuse and as a result the organization developed a short video on these topics. The video in Armenian is available [online](#).

ICCPR review of Armenia by the Human Rights Committee

The Women's Resource Center Armenia presented the submission in advance of the 129th session of the Human Rights Committee, taking place between 29 June - 24 July 2020, for consideration of the List of Issues on Armenia's third periodic report for review. Among the issues related to the women's rights, SRHR situation was raised in the report. The submission is available [online](#).

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

Anti-choice group from Moldova sends letter to government authorities calling for creation of crisis pregnancy centers

Throughout its over 20 years of experience, the Reproductive Health Training Center (RHTC) in the Republic of Moldova has grown accustomed to the occasional anti-choice message directed toward its activities and initiatives to promote and protect sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Since launching the pilot project, "Medical abortion via telemedicine for women and adolescents in rural Moldova: breaking barriers with technology," supported by the OPTions Initiative, these attacks have intensified. Not only has the RHTC team had to filter negative, anti-choice commentary on its social media accounts more frequently, but it has also recently had to respond to a letter addressed to the Moldovan Prime Minister presenting misleading and nonfactual information in support of policies that would facilitate the creation of crisis pregnancy centers across the country.

The letter was written by the president of [Moldova for Life](#), the same organization that has organized the annual "March for Life" since its inception in 2015. In the letter, a number of statistics are listed off from a [publication](#) produced by the US-based anti-choice organization, The Elliot Institute, headed by one of the leading advocates of the anti-choice movement, [David Reardon](#). In addition,

the situation in Moldova is misconstrued in a way to make it appear as though people seeking abortion are misguided by medical personnel and are not made aware of all existing options at their disposal. The basis for these claims is entirely fabricated in an effort to support the already highly uninformed and uneducated argument presented.

RHTC has submitted a well-reasoned, evidence-based response to the Secretary General of the Moldovan government. Our team has also translated and shared the letter with local and international health and human rights organizations, including WHO Moldova, Promo-LEX, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Open Society Foundations.

Source: [Reproductive Health Training Center](#)

RESOURCES

YouAct publishes a position paper on abortion

YouAct, a youth-led organization focused on sexual and reproductive health and rights, has published a paper on abortion at the end of May.

The paper is a first of a series of position papers covering YouAct's core areas of interest.

As YouAct's website states:

We hope that it will be a useful piece of document to ground advocacy work in, not just for our organisation but for others as well. The positions reflect the membership of YouAct and was approved at our latest annual general meeting.

The paper was uploaded at youact.org.

Georgian report covers domestic violence in times of COVID-19

Georgian Fund "Sukhumi" has published its new monitoring Report - „Impact of COVID-19 on Domestic Violence, Situation of Women Victims and the Access to the Support Services“. The Report reflects the major problems and challenges faced by women and girls living within Fund Sukhumi's eleven target municipalities in the context of COVID-19 pandemic.

Results of the monitoring have clearly proved that pandemic has significantly aggravated women's situations. It has not only worsen the already dire condition of women victims of domestic violence but also has revealed the potential abusers. The situation of women who had been able to escape from the abusers and leave the violent environment in the past, has been also considerably deteriorated due to COVID-19.

The existing challenges require timely response and proactive actions by the government, especially in the regions, with active cooperation and involvement of the relevant civil society organizations. The report provides specific recommendations on appropriate response to mitigate the negative effects.

Report was published in two languages - Georgian and [English](#).

Source: fsokhumi.ge

UPCOMING EVENTS

Due to global epidemic of COVID-19, all upcoming events requiring physical interactions have been cancelled or indefinitely postponed. Other events are mostly organised online, usually as webinars.

10 June 2020

CREA COVID Talks: No Return to Status Quo: Imagining Feminist Futures

CREA, a feminist human rights organisation, will be hosting a webinar on feminism after COVID-19. The invitation states:

We invite you to join us for the second of CREA's COVID Talks - 'No Return to Status Quo: Imagining Feminist Futures' on Wednesday, 10 June 2020 at 10 PM IST / 09.30 AM PDT / 06.30 AM HST / 12.30 PM EDT for one and a half hours. In this discussion, we will be joined by an inter-generational panel of feminists from diverse contexts and movements as we invoke our histories, observe the lessons of the present moment, and imagine the future.

Sign up through [this online form](#).

26 June 2020

MEP's for sexual and reproductive rights: "Women's rights, gender equality and SRHR at risk – coordinated counter-revolutionary attempts in Poland, at EU level and beyond"

Join the webinar to listen about how fundamentalists operate in Central Eastern Europe.

In recent years, a small but vocal group of actors pushes back against women's rights, gender equality, LGBTQI+ rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). This pushback is often orchestrated by European and global networks who manage to infiltrate institutions and governments.

The MEPs for SRR webinar will raise awareness and provide background information on how organisations and networks like TFP or Agenda Europe, and its partners operate in Poland, at EU level, at the Council of Europe, in other EU member states and beyond and how they obstruct the realization of people's rights and countries' development incl. democracy. Our guest from Poland – the Federation for Women and Family Planning (Federa) will present their latest report on the Polish ultra-conservative Christian-Catholic legal think tank and political organisation Ordo Iuris and the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (EPF) will present their new report on Tradition, Family and Property (TFP) – the network behind Ordo Iuris.

Link to the registration is yet to be shared, but make sure to save the date!

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; Ponton Group of Sex Educators; 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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