



## CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

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### BURNING ISSUE

#### Great pro-choice victory in Texas, United States

*Clinics in Texas will remain open after high court rejects sham laws attacking constitutional right to legal abortion*

In a [historic ruling](#) on June 27<sup>th</sup>, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a Texas law designed to shut down most of the state's abortion clinics with medically unnecessary restrictions. The decision reaffirms a woman's constitutional right to access safe, legal abortion. This landmark ruling in *Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt* ensures that existing clinics can remain open and will enable more clinics to open their doors in Texas, where the 2013 law had forced more than half of the 40-plus clinics operating before its enactment to close.

This decisive rejection of deceptive clinic shutdown laws marks the most significant abortion-related ruling from the Court in more than two decades, and will have a significant national impact in states where similar laws threaten to shutter abortion clinics with medically unnecessary red tape.

Said Nancy Northup, President and CEO of the Center for Reproductive Rights: "Today women across the nation have had their constitutional rights vindicated. The Supreme Court sent a loud and clear message that politicians cannot use deceptive means to shut down abortion clinics. The Texas clinics we've fought beside for the last three years will remain open, with the possibility more could open their doors in underserved areas. Without question, today's ruling is a game changer in what has been an unrelenting assault on women's rights across the country. This tremendous victory renews the promise of Roe v. Wade for the next generation. We will not stop fighting until access is restored for all women in the US."

ASTRA Network congratulates the Center for Reproductive Rights and all advocates and organizations involved in the works towards this achievement. It may set an example for all women's rights advocates worldwide.

Source: [Center for Reproductive Rights](#)

## REGIONAL UPDATES

### Women's Dignity March in Poland

On Saturday, June 18th, the Women's Dignity March ([Facebook event](#)) took place in Warsaw. The protest, with theme of *Women's rights are human rights* was organized by a "group of ordinary Polish women" who in a spontaneous reaction to the proposal to introduce a total ban on abortion on April 1st, 2016 decided to organise a protest. The group does not have politicians standing behind them and they are not members of feminist organisations. "We work in the film industry, in the corpo-world or are selfemployed. We decided we can use our energy and potential to organize a march. On 18th of June, in Warsaw we will march with the slogan "Women's rights are human rights" to show that we will allow our rights be violated. This is the first step in a long struggle that awaits us."

What does the Women Dignity March wish to achieve?

RESPECT for our dignity and bodily integrity

RIGHT to privacy, health and life protection

PUNISHMENT for perpetrators of physical and psychological domestic violence

RESTORATION of FULL REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

EFFECTIVE ENFORCEMENT of ALIMONY PAYMENTS

JUST PUNISHMENTS for rapists

SEXUALITY EDUCATION for us and our children

ACCESS to the newest medical discoveries

The right to safe interruption of pregnancy under applicable law

We demand EQUALITY and respect for women's DIGNITY!

See message from the organizers with background information [HERE](#).

Several thousand people attended the protest and supported the organizers, among them were numerous NGOs, politicians and other groups. Solidarity was also shown by the international community via social media, especially using hashtags #SolidarityWithPolishWomen, #DignityMarch and #MarszGodnosci.

Source: [Women's Dignity March](#)

### **Nils Muižnieks, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights: Erosion of rule of law threatens human rights protection in Poland**

“Recent far-reaching changes to Poland’s legal and institutional framework threaten human rights and undermine the rule of law, on which the protection of human rights ultimately depends. Lawmakers and the Government should urgently change course”, said Nils Muižnieks, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, during a press conference in Warsaw on June 15<sup>th</sup> in which he presented a report based on his visit to the country carried out last February.

The Commissioner calls for more efforts in advancing gender equality, including adequate financial and human resources to institutions dealing with discrimination on the grounds of sex and long-term measures to fight against gender-based stereotypes, particularly in education, employment and the media. Welcoming the many measures taken by the authorities to combat domestic violence, including the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence in 2015, the Commissioner recommends stepping up implementation efforts. In particular, he calls for additional measures to eradicate gender bias among medical staff, police, prosecutors and judges who deal with women victims of domestic violence and gender-based violence; strengthen the protection of women, including by improving restraining orders and the so-called “Blue Cards” procedure; and increase the effectiveness of public-run shelters for victims of domestic violence and the funding of those run by NGOs.

Commissioner Muižnieks further urges the Polish authorities to ensure that mandatory, comprehensive sexuality education that is age-appropriate, evidence-based, and non-judgmental be taught in all schools in Poland. He also recommends that the Polish authorities remove the persistent barriers in access to contraception for all women throughout the country. Lastly, he calls upon the Polish authorities to remove all the barriers which still hamper women’s access to safe and legal abortion as provided by Polish legislation. “A first step is to fully implement the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights which condemned Poland three times over the last nine years for hindering access to abortion and, in two of these cases, also for failing to treat humanely the women concerned”. The Polish authorities are also encouraged to further decriminalise abortion within

reasonable gestational limits so as to avoid the chilling effect on doctors willing to perform this medical procedure.

The Commissioner is also particularly concerned by the prolonged paralysis of the Constitutional Tribunal, the new law on surveillance activities. Moreover, addressing a broader reform of public service media which is currently underway, the Commissioner urged the Polish authorities to introduce safeguards to guarantee the independence of public service media from political influence.

[Read the Commissioner for Human Rights report on his visit to Poland from 09 to 12 February](#)

[Read the comments of the Polish authorities on the report](#)

[Read the report on Poland in a nutshell](#)

Source: [Council of Europe](#)

### **Our health. Our rights. Our lives! – Feminist Action in Croatia**

A group of feminist associations and initiatives marked the International Day of Action for Women's Health with a guerrilla action to highlight the fact that women's reproductive health is much more than the right to abortion. The nighttime action was conducted in several larger cities all over Croatia. We decorated the statues of women in Split, Poreč, Rijeka, Opatija and Zagreb with sashes that had "Our health. Our rights. Our lives!" written on them. At the moment, with their existence, they are sending a message that is true today and will be true forever, no matter how much conservative parties try to negate it.

In light of the growing movement looking to ban abortion, all under the guise of caring for women's health and demographics we find that it is extremely important to show the public that the discourse about women's reproductive health does not refer only and exclusively to the termination of pregnancy. Reproductive rights include the right to artificial insemination and the right to a dignified delivery, however those categories are not in the job description of the "pro-life advocates". The same goes for the shameful conditions of maternity wards. On the other hand, Croatia has never regulated the option of homebirth for women who wish to have one, despite the requests of women.

The right to an abortion is a woman's human right and it must remain legal and safe. We should keep in mind all the aspects of women's health, including pregnancy prevention and availability (or lack thereof) of free hormonal contraception, discriminatory laws which regulate the right to sterilization as a method of permanent contraception, pregnancy itself, delivery and post-partum period. We also find that it is extremely important to speak about violence and discrimination during birth which isn't recorded in medical documents and women don't report it out of fear and shame.

The health of trans\* people and lesbians isn't recognized in the system and what they experience is continued discrimination during exercising their right to healthcare. When speaking of women's health, one must consider all women, not just the ones "fit" to continue the Croatian line.

Furthermore, sex and health education in schools is not integrated as a life-skill training based on science and facts, but its implementation is rather subjected to personal interpretations of the

teacher, leaving plenty of space for manipulation and indoctrination. Such state is being prolonged indefinitely with this government's treatment of the new curricular reform and their attempts to implicate politics and impose particular ideological stances, which is also something we use this action to condemn.

To conclude, we would like to remind you of the recommendations of the Anti-Discriminatory Board, with which they ask Croatia to regulate their Appeal of Conscience for their doctors in a way that exercising it would not interfere with a woman's access to pregnancy termination and the care that follows after it, to ensure autonomy and the making of an informed decision for pregnant women during birth, but also to introduce homebirths for women who want them. In these same recommendations it was suggested that Croatia undertakes measures to allow lesbian and bisexual women, as well as trans\* people full use of their basic human rights.

Feminists point out the fact that sexual and reproductive rights are a string of very important human rights which are being institutionally broken and the governing structures are not doing anything to change this situation. All decisions regarding reproductive health are made by the woman, our society should respect it, our state has to guarantee it and religion should not interfere with it.

Source: [Znaj Znanje](#)

### **Hungary: Gender discrimination concealed under conservative family values**

On May 27th The United Nations Working Group on discrimination against women called on the Government of Hungary "not to disguise gender discrimination under an ideology of conservative family values," and urged it to address the issue of discrimination against women and their empowerment as a stand-alone goal.

"There can be no success in empowering Hungary's women in the political or the economic spheres without addressing the discriminatory stereotyping, the sexist rhetoric against women, LGBTI and minority people, and the disproportionate burdening of women with almost sole responsibility for unpaid care work," said the expert group's Chairperson, Frances Raday, at the end of an official visit to the country. "Elimination of discrimination against women in all spheres of life must be addressed as a key priority by the Government, through education of its children to gender equality and human rights, through its national human rights institution, the courts and the media," Ms. Raday said. She also urged the Hungarian authorities to ensure the viability of NGOs dealing with women's transformative human rights.

The human rights expert noted that the 2011 Fundamental Law guarantees women's right to equality with men in Hungary and protection of the family as essential to national survival. While recognizing the family as the basic unit of society entitled to protection, she cautioned that "a conservative form of family, should not be put in an uneven balance with women's political, economic and social rights and with their empowerment." The expert emphasised that "the implementation of women's human rights and the empowerment of women, in all spheres of life, is essential for the welfare of families."

Ms. Raday stressed that the implementation of the anti-discrimination provisions in the law has been insufficient to eliminate gender discrimination in practice. Hungary, she noted, ranks 44 on the UN

Human Development Index, out of 188 countries, but it lags behind on the Gender Gap Index, ranking 99 out of 145 countries.

The Working Group's Chairperson also warned that there has been a shift to conservative family values in education. The new school books contain numerous gender stereotypes, depicting women almost exclusively as wives and mothers and, in some cases, demeaning mothers as less intelligent than fathers. The expert recognised that the Government has introduced measures to ease the integration of work and family. However, together with its recognition of the economic need for women to go out and work, it has based its policy "on the idealisation of women's role as stay at home mothers of ideally three children." She explained, "This creates an irreconcilable dilemma for women."

Ms. Raday called for further investment in the education of Roma girls, who are subject to intense multiple discrimination in every aspect of their lives, and for special measures to integrate them into regular jobs, noting professional and entrepreneurship success of Roma women who were given an opportunity. The expert also called for measures to be promptly adopted to respond to the urgent needs and preserve the rights of migrant women and girls at the Hungarian borders.

During the official visit, which took place from 17 to 27 May, the Chairperson of the Working Group visited Budapest, Eger, Bicske and Pécs, where she met with Government officials at national and local levels, female Members of the Parliament from the governing and opposition parties, representatives of civil society organizations and of the UN system, as well as academic experts and individual women. The conclusions and recommendations of this visit will be developed in a report that will be presented to the Human Rights Council in June 2017.

Read the Working Group's full end-of-mission statement [here](#).

Source: [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights](#)

### **Russia Leads Effort To Strip Gay Decriminalization From UN Measure**

Russia led an effort at the United Nations to strip language from an AIDS resolution that would have called for the decriminalization of homosexuality and drug use. Russia was joined by Iran, Poland, and several Gulf states in blocking the decriminalization language from being included in a resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly on June 8 that called for ending the AIDS pandemic by 2030. An earlier draft resolution had called for treating homosexuality and drug use as "human rights issues." Instead, it now stresses the need to help intravenous drug users, gay men, and transgender people who are at high risk of contracting HIV. Russian health official Dilyara Raviyeva-Borovik said that while more must be done to end HIV/AIDS, governments have a "sovereign right" to decide their own public health strategy. Diplomats said Russia had sought other changes in the resolution, but they were rejected over fears that they would allow Iran, Russia, and other countries that have anti-LGBT legislation to deny antiretroviral treatment to gay men. Diplomats said Russia has also balked at treatments such as providing needles to drug addicts, even though most HIV infections in Russia are linked to drug injections.

Source: [Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty](#)

## **Sexual and reproductive health and rights program in Armenia**

In the Women's Resource Centre, there is a sexual and reproductive health and rights programme which is aimed at giving the correct information to young women, and protect their reproductive and sexual rights, to protect them from incorrect information and myths. As part of the project, the following events are held:

- My body, my right sexual health training courses for young women. The training consists of eight meetings, during which participants discuss various themes of women's sexuality. It is appropriate to recall that the purpose of the sexual health course 'my body - my right' is to raise awareness on sexuality and by challenging stereotypes, to raise self-esteem of women. The courses consist of eight meetings once per week, with the duration of two hours.
- In the WRCA there are trainings for pregnant women and mothers-to-be. The training consists of six meeting, during which phases of pregnancy, prenatal nutrition physical exercises, giving birth, postnatal issues and breastfeeding are addressed.
- In our Facebook page, called 'my body – my right' 15 articles were published for the period from November to June concerning different topics on sexuality /anatomy and physiology of genitals, hygiene, menstrual period, sexually transmitted diseases, contraceptives, masturbation, sexual relations, cervical and breast cancer and other topics/ as well as 11 online surveys were conducted which made it possible to find out the degree of awareness on different topics of sexuality and at the end of the survey accurate answers with explanations were given. The surveys were aimed at knowledge assessment on sexually transmitted diseases, contraceptives, sexual relations, body functions and menstruation period. Several examples of survey /is it permitted to have sexual relations during the menstruation, is homosexuality a disease or not, is it possible to become pregnant at the time of the first sexual relations and others/
- The Women's Resource Centre provides online and in-person counselling about any issues concerning sexuality.
- The Women's Resource Centre also has a mother's club, where mothers can gather and talk about any topic concerning motherhood and they can share their experiences.

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

## **Safe Abortion Project in Armenia**

In order to improve women's reproductive and sexual health and rights in Armenia, Women's Rights Center continues coordinating the implementation of clinical research study "A randomized controlled trial to compare sublingual and buccal misoprostol regimens after mifepristone for termination of pregnancy 13-21 weeks LMP" at the Republican Institute of Reproductive Health, Perinatology, Obstetrics and Gynecology. The aim of this research study is investigation on medical abortion with the use of mifepristone and misoprostol, its acceptability and feasibility for women in Armenia.

The Clinical Standard on Organization and Delivery of Medical Aid in Medical Abortion in the 1st and 2nd trimester was elaborated and published. The aim of this Clinical Guideline is to assist doctors in using evidence-based practice when providing comprehensive medical aid in terminating unwanted pregnancy.

Within the framework of the project the following activities are planned to be held: dissemination meeting for the 2nd trimester medical abortion sublingual vs. buccal miso study and new 1st trimester medical abortion study using semi-quantitative pregnancy test for simplified follow up.

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

### **Round table on "2011-2015 Strategic action plan to combat gender-based violence" in Armenia**

On June 17-18 "Society Without Violence" NGO has organized a round table discussion on implementation, challenges and perspectives of the "2011-2015 Strategic action plan to combat gender-based violence". The participants were representatives of the Ministry of Education, National Institute of Education, related departments of regional state authorities and international organizations, as well as CSO representatives concerned with women issues, independent researchers and teachers. The round table provided a floor for the State representatives and the civil society to discuss the importance of gender education in terms of decreasing gender based violence. The dialogue was very tense, as the State representatives opposed to using the term "gender" or holding classes promoting gender equality as schools. After raising a number of gender issues and presenting the findings of the research on the gender based stereotypes of adolescents, as well as bringing strong arguments, the Ministry of Education suggested to come up with recommendations and write the Ministry for consideration.

Source: [Society Without Violence](#)

### **Combatting homophobia and discrimination against the LGBTI community in Armenia**

Society Without Violence NGO is working on a long-term strategy to combat homophobia and discrimination against the LGBTI community in all levels of society, which was discovered to be the cause of the violations of the human rights, including sexual and reproductive health rights, of LGBTI persons. The Strategy will target educational institutions, the health care system, and relevant government ministries to increase and improve their capacities to respect, protect, and fulfil SRHR of LGBTI people, and insure that health services are available, accessible, acceptable and of highest quality possible. To prepare a robust and an effective strategy, SWV has conducted two Stakeholder meetings with relevant CSOs and LGBTI community representatives. During the meeting the participants stated that their main concerns related to sexual and reproductive health rights were lack of confidentiality for HIV/AIDS status, lack of appropriate medical services for and unprotected sphere of the sex work of transgender people, and low awareness/knowledge of human. The final outcome document will ensure these issues are addressed with the possible effective mechanisms.

Source: [Society Without Violence](#)



## **WHO validates elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis in Armenia**

During a ceremony in New York City, elimination validation certificates were presented to the minister of health of the three European countries (Armenia, Belarus and the Republic of Moldova), who were attending the United Nations General Assembly High-level Meeting on Ending AIDS. "To ensure children are born healthy is to give them the best possible start in life. It is immensely encouraging to see countries succeed in eliminating mother-to-child transmission of these two diseases," said WHO Director-General Dr. Margaret Chan. "This is a tremendous achievement – a clear signal to other countries that elimination is possible and that the world is on the way to an AIDS-free generation." Ending the epidemics of AIDS by 2030 is a key target of the Sustainable Development Goal on health and well-being.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has been working in Armenia, Belarus and the Republic of Moldova since 2010 with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis.

Source: [UNFPA](#)

## **New Regional Director for UNFPA Eastern Europe and Central Asia**

Alanna Armitage has been appointed as the new Director of UNFPA's Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia and assumed her new function. "This is an exciting moment to take the helm of UNFPA in Eastern Europe and Central Asia," said Ms. Armitage. "The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development gives UNFPA an unprecedented opportunity to help improve women's and young people's lives in this region," Ms Armitage said. "The challenge is clear: we need to address the region's unique population dynamics, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health, and harness the potential of young people".

Ms. Armitage has worked to promote women's health, development and human rights for the past 25 years. She joined UNFPA in 1992, and has served in Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Latin America where she was UNFPA Representative in Brazil, and Country Director for Argentina and Paraguay. Before her current assignment, Ms. Armitage was Director of UNFPA's Geneva office for seven years. She has worked closely with Government policy makers, parliamentarians, non-governmental organizations and leaders from all sectors to champion the health of women and girls, including in humanitarian and emergency settings. Prior to joining UNFPA, Ms. Armitage worked for the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the United Nations Development Programme. She started her career in the NGO world with community-based organizations promoting women's health and rights.

The new Regional Director is Canadian and holds a BA in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Western Ontario, a Masters in International Development and Cooperation from the University of Ottawa, and a Post Graduate Diploma in Health Systems Management from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. She's completing a PhD in Anthropology and Sociology of Development at the Geneva Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies.

Ms. Armitage took over from Heimo Laakkonen, who retired last month, having headed the Regional Office since March 2014.

UNFPA's Regional Office in Istanbul provides strategic support and technical expertise to partners and country offices in nearly 20 countries across Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Source: [UNFPA EECA](#)

### **Pride Parades in Central and Eastern Europe**

Thousands of people have marched with rainbow flags in support of LGBTI rights through countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

On 22 May, 2016 the first-ever "LGBT March of solidarity" was held in Moldova's capital – Chisinau, where the over 400 people march clashed with homophobic Christian Orthodox groups. Pride event was held also in Zagreb for the 15th time. It was attended by several thousand people who walked together through the city centre. In Poland, where according to human rights experts, LGBTI freedoms are at their lowest point under nationalist Law and Justice government, Thousands of people have marched with rainbow flags through Warsaw in a sign of defiance against a rising tide of extremism on June 11<sup>th</sup>. Kyiv's Gay Rights Rally was held without major incidents on June 12<sup>th</sup> and attended by over thousand people. Ten participants and five policemen were injured at the gay pride rally in 2015 when counterdemonstrators attacked the march, despite the presence of U.S. and European diplomats at the event. At this year's march, participants passed through a metal detector and were checked for dangerous objects.

Sources: [Moldova](#), [Croatia](#), [Ukraine](#), [Poland](#)

## **GLOBAL UPDATES**

### **New members of the CEDAW Committee**

The Nineteenth Meeting of States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was held on 21 June 2016 at United Nations Headquarters in New York. The purpose of the meeting was to elect individuals to fill the eleven positions on the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women which will become vacant on 31 December 2016.

The following candidates were elected. The elected members will begin their term in January 2017 and their mandates will expire in December 2020.

Ms. Dalia Leinarte (Lithuania)  
Ms. Nicole Ameline (France)  
Mr. Gunnar Bergby (Norway)  
Ms. Marion Bethel (Bahamas)  
Ms. Hilary Gbedemah (Ghana)

Ms. Nahla Haidar (Lebanon)  
Ms. Rosario G. Manalo (Philippines)  
Ms. Theodora Nwankwo (Nigeria)  
Ms. Bandana Rana (Nepal)  
Ms. Wenyan Song (China)  
Ms. Aicha Vall Verges (Mauritania)

Source: [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights](#)

### **U.N. Committee Finds Ireland's Abortion Laws Are Cruel, Inhumane and Degrading**

Ireland's abortion laws subjected a woman to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, according to a [landmark decision](#) from the United Nations Human Rights Committee. This ground-breaking ruling marks the first time that, in response to an individual complaint, an international human rights court or committee has recognized that by criminalizing abortion a state has violated a woman's human rights.

The [U.N. committee](#) ruled in favor of Amanda Mellet, who was denied access to an abortion in Ireland in 2011 after learning her pregnancy involved a fatal fetal impairment and found the prospect of continuing her pregnancy unbearable. The committee held that the Irish government must take measures to redress the harm Ms. Mellet suffered and reform its laws to ensure other women do not continue to face similar violations, as well as it instructs the government to guarantee effective, timely and accessible procedures for abortion in Ireland.

In November 2013, the Center for Reproductive Rights filed a complaint on behalf of Amanda Mellet before the United Nations Human Rights Committee, arguing that Ireland's restrictive abortion laws violated her basic human rights by subjecting her to severe mental suffering and anguish. In 2011, [Amanda Mellet](#) learned during the course of her pregnancy that the fetus had a fatal fetal impairment. She knew she could not continue with the pregnancy and asked her doctors for an abortion. However because Ireland outlaws abortion in almost all circumstances, she was forced to travel to the United Kingdom to end the pregnancy.

In its decision, the U.N. Human Rights Committee affirms that outlawing women's access to abortion services can cause severe suffering and undermines their personal integrity and autonomy, which results in acute violations of their human rights.

The U.N. committee unanimously held that prohibiting Ms. Mellet from accessing abortion services in Ireland violated her right to be free from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, as well as her right to privacy. The U.N. committee also determined that Ireland's failure to provide services that Ms. Mellet required constituted discrimination.

Source: [Center for Reproductive Rights](#)

## YOUTH

### **Program on violence in intimate relationships in Croatia**

Almost half of the students participating in a pilot program on violence in intimate partner relationships think that a young man or woman shall have the right to hit their partner. This disturbing information was presented on press conference 'Equality against violence in intimate partner relationships'. The results of the program, which involved 330 students of 12 Croatian schools, were presented at the conference.

It seems that violence is an integral part of the relationship as much as 47 percent of young people think that a young man has the right to hit his girlfriend if she wants to break up with him or if she paid more attention to friends than to him. Also, 49 percent of young people think that a girl has the right to hit her boyfriend if he doesn't listen. About a one-third of young people stated that they know their peer couples, in whose relationships verbal, physical and sexual violence is present.

Natasa Bijelic from the Center for Education, Counseling and Research (CESI) pointed out that they see signs of change in the attitudes of young people as they recognize violent behaviors. However, it was a result of education through a number of programs.

Addressing the youth, gender equality ombudswoman Visnja Ljubcic stressed that partner violence in Croatian legislation is not regulated in the way it should be, and warned that police data in the last year indicated that 64 percent of women were victims of violence. Only 18 percent of citizens believe that women and men are fully equal in our society. 20 percent of men think that they have to have the last word, and it is believed by 80 percent of women living in the rural areas.

Deputy Ombudsman for Children Gabelica Šupljika highlighted that the main problem is a still quite a patriarchal society. On behalf of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Darko Toth pointed out that we can have a course to combat violence among pupils, but if everyday reality shows something else, such courses won't yield results.

The conference was the final activity of the project "Raising awareness on gender equality against violence in partner relationships - GEAR II" which, besides CESI, was carried out by organizations from Greece, Spain, Cyprus, and Romania.

Source: [Libela.org](http://Libela.org)

### **UN Special Rapporteur on Health report on adolescents**

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to health, Dainius Pūras, has presented the report on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health at the UN Human Rights Council.

In the document Rapporteur focuses on adolescents' health, including mental, sexual and reproductive health. He calls the States to 'remove all legal barriers to access health facilities, goods and services that interfere with the rights of adolescents to be heard and to be taken seriously and that, ultimately, limit their right to make autonomous decisions.'

He highlights that healthcare services should ensure respect for adolescents' rights to privacy and confidentiality, address their different cultural needs and expectations, and comply with ethical standards.

Moreover, the report includes recommendation for States to adopt or integrate a comprehensive sexual and reproductive health policy for all adolescents into national strategies and programmes to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services. Pūras recommends to decriminalize abortion, ensure adolescents the access to confidential and non-discriminatory sexual and reproductive health information, services and good and integrate comprehensive sexuality education in the school curriculum. The expert noted that adolescents should be protected from violence and neglect, including in family settings, by the upholding of their right to confidential services and counselling without parental consent. He also recommended to support families to increase the abilities of parents to raise children and adolescents in a competent and confident manner, and reinforce skills to manage situations in a non-violent way.

The report is available [here](#).

Source: [OHCHR](#)

### **Georgian Youth Activists for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights**

Association HERA-XXI supports empowerment of volunteers and leaders on Sexual and Reproductive Rights and strengthens volunteer's movement. The initiative, Cooperation with Georgia Peace Corps volunteers and Association HERA-XXI contributes to achieve of strategic outcome that HERA-XXI leads a social movement of strong volunteer activists. The training on "healthy lifestyle" was held for public school students on 4th June in the framework of "English Access Micro scholarship Program" in Batumi. Adults received information on such important topics as proper, balanced nutrition, hygiene, sports, reproductive health, early marriage, and how to handle with their emotions and problems.

As the result, young people had a good opportunity to get the comprehensive information about Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights issues and express their thoughts and existing needs and demands. Also most of participants registered as the HERA-XXI's youth volunteers and are actively involved in the discussions and efforts moving forward to improve the access to SRHR information.

Source: [Association HERA-XXI](#)

### **Informational Educational Initiative for students at Sukhumi State University in Georgia**

Young people's knowledge on sexual and reproductive health and especially sexual rights is limited by a combination of cultural restrictions and no existence of relevant education on SRHR in Georgia. As the consequences, adolescents and young people are facing the following problems: lack of information and knowledge; low accessibility to competent services and programs; existence of social and psychological barriers. Due to this informal education had been used by Association HERA XXI to improve access to reliable information on reproductive health and rights issues among young

people in Georgia and especially among young Internally Displaced People that are most vulnerable group. Association HERA-XXI is conducting series of informational - educational sessions for the students and adults to provide them with the comprehensive information on reproductive health and rights.

Series of informational educational sessions were held in Sukhumi State University, by HERA-XXI's peer educators and medical doctor reproductologist. More than 200 students already received comprehensive information about sexual rights, modern methods of contraceptives and family planning services in year 2016. As a result, students were equipped with comprehensive knowledge on SRHR and can make free and informed choices regarding their sexuality.

Source: [Association HERA-XXI](#)

### **Awareness Raising training for girls and young women in Armenia**

Society Without Violence carried out a two-day training on gender equality and domestic violence for young women and girls in Vanadzor, Lori region. The training was focused on the following topics: types and cycle of domestic and gender-based violence, gender equality, gender based stereotypes and women's empowerment. The training was held exclusively in an interactive atmosphere, evaluating and taking into account the opinions and ideas of each participant. The workshop included screening of short films, discussions of statistical data, and the results of studies carried out by the UN. Participants highlighted that they did not have the chance to discuss such topics within their families and communities, therefore evaluated the training as very important. It is remarkable to note that they realized that they have enough power to create a society in which they want to live: a society without discrimination, hate, and with equal opportunities and rights for men and women.

Source: [Society Without Violence](#)

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

### **2016 EuroNGOs Conference**

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

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

Source: [EuroNGOs](#)

## PUBLICATIONS

### **“Speak my language”: Abortion Storytelling in Eastern Europe from a Youth Perspective**

This toolkit was developed by and for Young People with inputs from Georgia, Lithuania, Republic of Macedonia, Poland and Romania by [YouAct](#) with great input from [ASTRA Youth](#).

Why abortion stigma? We believe it is imperative to consider abortion stigma as a critical issue for youth. We recognise the importance of considering the most human aspects of abortion. There is much more than just abortion rights, and health factors. Abortion is a social reality, a cultural phenomenon, and a human experience. Abortion stigma is a social and cultural event which can lead to social, medical and legal ramifications. The consequences raised by abortion stigma are placed within a context where social norms, health and social policies, and community practices play strong roles on the development of abortion experiences (For more on abortion stigma, see <http://www.endabortionstigma.org/>).

Why Eastern Europe? Since the collapse of communism, Eastern Europe has witnessed a number of transformations, especially on political and economic levels. Despite progress in the form of economic development and empowerment of civil society as one of the effective mechanisms calling for the accountability of authorities, there are still grey areas to be addressed. The region has to struggle with growing inequalities, social injustice, discrimination, corruption, religious fundamentalism and patriarchal structures. This situation is reflected in a number of fields, including sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Why this toolkit? We believe sharing these experiences can empower youth to create a different human reality by eliminating abortion stigma. Stories have a power of their own – telling and sharing them, can help us develop profoundly, as well as give people the chance to see what abortion stigma can mean to others.

With this toolkit, we aim to provide organisations, professionals, individuals, and especially youth with a framework to develop their own strategies to use storytelling to draw out the voices from our bodies, learn to speak a language through which we can satisfactorily communicate abortion stigma, and provide others with the tools to learn to speak our language.

You can view/download the publication [here](#).

Source: [YouAct](#)

### **Four priorities for the HLPF 2016**

The 2016 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) will be the first since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. Accordingly, much focus will be on discussing plans and strategies for implementation of the 2030 Agenda and approaches for translating the SDGs to national contexts. Check the recommendations of Countdown 2015 Europe, EuroNGOs, ASTRA Network and IPPF European Network for European governments.

You can read the position paper [HERE](#).

## **New issue of AnAlize Journal on Surrogacy**

„A feminist perspective on this practice has to encompass all aspects known today regarding the maternity of surrogate others and the economic systems of the commodification of living world, in which they take part. Since the appearance of the new technologies for human reproduction, feminists have taken position with the aim of, on the one hand, showing the benefit that women could derive from them, insofar as these technologies would allow not going through the experience of pregnancy, perceived by many women and feminists as an obligation or a burden.” Ana-Luana STOICEA-DERAM (coordinator) in the introduction to the new issue of AnAlize Journal - What is Surrogacy for (East-European) Feminism?

Source: [AnAlize Journal](#)

## **Member profile**

### **Association HERA XXI from Tbilisi, Georgia**

Association HERA XXI is local volunteer based non-governmental organization in Tbilisi, which supports volunteer involvement throughout the country and ensures visibility and comprehensive accessibility of Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) information and services that respect sexual rights of every individual and is committed to meet the needs of the marginalized population.

Association HERA XXI has been supporting reproductive health and rights in Georgian population for more than 15 years. Since 1998, the organization works on 5 strategic directions: recognition of women’s right to choose and have access to safe abortion and reduction of in the incidence of unsafe abortion; all people particularly poor, marginalized, socially excluded and underserved have a free choice and access to comprehensive SRHR information and services and their right are fully recognized and fully respected; young people are able to make informed choices in respect to their SRHR and the services available; strong civil society and political commitment to and support for SRHR at the national regional and local levels; the incidence of STIs and HIV is reduced and HIV infected people enjoy equal rights. HERA-XXI works with branches in Samtskhe-Javakheti, Imereti and Samegrelo regions and six associated clinics, focusing on sexual and reproductive health services for vulnerable, marginalized, high risk groups and population under poverty line. Partner clinics of Association HERA XXI adopted modern contraception and safe abortion methods (medical abortion, manual-vacuum aspiration), also cohabitated in training their service providers on pre and post counseling techniques in SRH.

By initiative of Association HERA XXI a number of innovative programs in the field of reproductive health were implemented, such as, founded and developed youth volunteers’ movement, which enabled us to apply modern technologies, information, attitudes, and educational programs among 15-25 age youth groups and different regions all over the country. Furthermore, focus on youth through peer education programs, establishing and developing youth friendly services and intensive information, education, communication (IEC) activities and campaigns. Annually, more than 2000 young people have access to confidential anonymous and free face-face, online and hotline counseling services.



Association HERA-XXI is using of international instruments like covenants and treaties that the country has signed (CEDAW/ICCPR/UPR), for holding governmental bodies accountable. Integrates such instruments in advocacy work through plans and strategies in a systematic way.

The strategic partnership of ASTRA Network and Association HERA-XXI gives opportunity to raise and advocate on SRHR challenges on the international as well as national levels. Also, Association HERA XXI has a great opportunity to collaborate with different international organizations and to exchange the experiences in the field of SRHR sphere. The existing partnership between ASTRA Network and increased visibility of Association HERA-XXI on national and international levels as Member Association of IPPF European Network will affect and improve people's lives.

HERA-XXI believes in stable democratic society where sexual and reproductive rights are guaranteed for everyone and contribution in SRHR movement is recognized and valued.

Website: <http://www.hera-youth.ge/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/AssociationHeraXXI/?fref=ts>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/assosiationhera>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCa52f2BmBjjAgDbvC5N5Ucw>



**Next ASTRA Bulletin will be issues at the end of August/early September.**

**Have a wonderful summer!**

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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