



CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

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BURNING ISSUE

The battle on abortion is far from over in Poland. Today the Polish Parliament adopted new project entitled “For Life” (“Za Życiem”) targeting so called “difficult pregnancies”.

In the project the government offers 4000 PLN (1000 EUR) for carrying to term a pregnancy with a permanently damaged or terminally ill foetus and ensures access to hospices and medical care. It also guarantees psychological counselling and introduces a new role of an “assistant of the family” who will be responsible for coordination of available support.

The new project consists mostly of solutions already existing in the areas of healthcare and social policies. The project is proclaimed as a support programme for “difficult pregnancies” and was first announced after dismissal of the “Stop Abortion” citizen’s bill (which aimed to ban abortion in all cases and criminalize women) on October 6th.

The “For Life” project was proposed by Beata Szydło, Polish Prime Minister, on Monday, October 31st and adopted within a few days without any consultations with the non-governmental sector or

experts. Szydło claims that a wider support programme aiming to help families and children with disabilities will be developed by the end of this year.

Giving a price tag on the unbelievable, unimaginable suffering of Polish women and children may be a start of limiting access to abortion in case of foetal damage, one of the three cases by which abortion is currently legal in Poland (the other two are when a woman's life is in danger and when a pregnancy is a result of rape or incest). Catholic Church and many of the Law and Justice ruling party have been supportive of this notion on numerous occasions.

Polish women went on strike and stopped – for now – proceedings on the anti-abortion bill

Sending to further proceedings an anti-women bill and rejecting a progressive civic bill on reproductive rights triggered hundreds of Polish women to go to the streets and protest in a largest ever women's social movement in Poland.

Major mobilization among Polish women and civil society organizations resulted in a “black protest” (#czarnyprotest). Launched on the day of the reading of both bills in September it became a leading theme of Polish women's fight for abortion rights which resulted in a dismissal of the bill on October 5th by the Commission for Justice and Human Rights. During its session it recommended the Parliament to reject the “Stop Abortion bill”. On Thursday morning the process ended with the dismissal of this bill with a majority of 352 votes. 58 MPs were in favour of further proceedings, 18 abstained from vote. Beata Szydło, Polish Prime Minister, announced a future programme – the „For Life” bill - that will support all women experiencing so called "difficult pregnancies". She also announced the creation of a programme of support for families raising children with disabilities and start of a national campaign in support of “pro-life” values. The leader of the ruling Law and Justice party, Jarosław Kaczyński said in a radio interview: "Our goal is to make sure that even pregnancies that are very difficult, where the child will inevitably die or when the child is strongly deformed, that they are carried through till the end. So that the child can be given a name, be baptized and buried."

The culmination of women's solidarity and mobilization was October 3rd when women went on a strike – did not go to work, schools, took a day off and went to protest in the streets in Warsaw and other cities in Poland. In total 100 000 people protested against the total abortion ban in 143 locations in the country. This mass mobilization caught great interest in international media and was widely captured via social media with #czarnyprotest, #strajkkobiet, #solidaritywithpolishwomen ([Reuters](#), [Buzzfeed](#), [Independent](#)). Supporters of Polish women protested in cities across Europe – i.e. in Paris, Oslo, Berlin. On Wednesday, October 5th, the European Parliament held a debate on the situation in Poland, initiated by ALDE Group – Liberals and Democrats and Socialists and Democrats Group in the European Parliament.

“This victory on abortion has empowered Polish women – we'll never be the same” said Krystyna Kacpura, Executive Director of the Federation for Women and Family Planning to [the Guardian](#). Years of pro-choice advocacy, public mobilization, grassroots work, women's solidarity and working across movements and various groups has given fruits which can make a change.

This is a won battle - so far. We are certain that the anti-choice groups and the Catholic Church will not step down this easily and other anti-choice attempts limiting women's rights (but not criminalizing them) will reappear, most likely targeting pregnancies involving damage of the foetus.

The Catholic Church already announced that they do not approve of criminalizing women and put a green light for further attempts to ban abortion in case of fetal damage. This may be another battle we will have to face, together with attempts to restrict access to emergency contraception.

Source: ASTRA Network, Federation for Women and Family Planning

REGIONAL UPDATES

ASTRA Network Annual Meeting

On October 24-25 ASTRA held its annual meeting in Warsaw, Poland. 23 ASTRA representatives discussed the current threats to reproductive rights in Central and Eastern Europe and ways of moving forward and addressing these developments. As Monday 24th was the day of another series of protests as part of the “Polish Women’s Strike” in Warsaw and across the country ASTRA members participated in a demonstration in Warsaw city center.

Source: [ASTRA Network](#)

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 was 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. Panels with high-level speakers, global development experts and SRHR advocates as well as interactive discussions and workshops engaged the audience in Paris on October 4-5. The "Strong Start - Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in the 2030 Agenda" was hosted by Le Planning Familial.

One of the results from the conference is a solidarity statement with Polish women in regards to the current debate on abortion available [here](#).

Source: [EuroNGOs](#)

European youth advocates urge MEPs to do more to combat anti-abortion legislation throughout Europe

Coalition of CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, You Act, ASTRA Youth and ASTRA Network welcomed the decision by the Polish parliament to dismiss the “Stop Abortion” bill, but stressed that the European Parliament needs to do more to monitor legislative developments and increasing restrictions to sexual and reproductive rights and services across Europe. During their meetings with Members of the European Parliament on 11th and 12th October the youth advocates discussed and

shared their concerns and suggestions for what the European Parliament could do to safeguard young people's and women's rights. Read the full press release [here](#).

The European Economic and Social Committee adopted an opinion on Europe's role in the implementation of the SDGs

"The 2030 Agenda - a European Union committed to sustainable development globally" was adopted in mid-October in plenary session of the European Economic and Social Committee. It had been requested by the European Commission as a contribution to the ongoing preparation of the Commission initiative 'Next steps for a sustainable European future'. The opinion reflects the outcome of two big conferences at the EESC with representatives from civil society. The opinion calls upon the EU institutions and the Member States to urgently agree on the way forward 'at the highest political level, through an interinstitutional agreement between the Commission, the Council and the Parliament', in order to establish a robust basis for further political action. The Committee has also proposed to set up a European Sustainable Development Civil Society Forum in order to give civil society a strong role in the implementation and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Access the document and additional information [here](#).

Source: [EuroNGOs](#)

Second Capacity Building Training on Anti-discrimination and SOGI issues in Armenia

Society Without Violence NGO (SWV), within the context of "Solidarity Network for LGBTI in Armenia and Georgia" project, conducted a second successful 3 day capacity building training for CSOs, to improve their knowledge about sexuality, SOGI, and anti-discrimination. The theme of Sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) was also thoroughly discussed; how LGBTI people face discrimination while trying to access health services for SRHR, how LGBTI people living with HIV face double discrimination, etc., and equip them with new skills for effective advocacy, meet like-minded colleagues, build networks and acquire skills on including LGBTI issues in the organization's agenda. The training took place on October 13-15, with a group of 10 participants from CSOs from different regions. This training followed a similar training conducted in September

The end of training survey and the discussion that followed proved the vast improvement in the knowledge of the participants about the issues and problems faced by LGBTI people. Some participants from these trainings were selected to participate on a capacity building tour in Georgia, on October 25-28, with the project partners, to create a platform for experience sharing and building networks.

Source: [Society Without Violence](#)

National Day to Combat Domestic Violence in Armenia

On the 1st of October, SWV, together with the Coalition to Stop Violence against Women, marked the National Day to Combat Domestic Violence. The aim of the National Day is to raise awareness about domestic violence, including spouse sexual violence, support the victims, and lobby for a domestic violence law.

Source: [Society Without Violence](#)

GLOBAL UPDATES

Another male successor as UN Secretary General, and Wonder Woman as consolation price

After months of speculation and different voting rounds, on the 5th of October it was finally decided who will take over the seat of Ban ki Moon as United Nations Secretary General. The UN Security council agreed that former Portuguese Prime Minister and chief of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) António Guterres will be leading the UN over the coming years.

The decision didn't come as a huge surprise as he was the clear frontrunner in the race. While he is seen as a capable and talented candidate and is praised for the structural reform process overseen at the UNHCR, his appointment is also viewed as a huge missed opportunity for the United Nations to appoint a first female Secretary General. [Campaigns](#) by women's rights movements and even [Ban ki Moon himself arguing](#) it is high time for female leadership couldn't turn the tide.

A few days after the announcement of Guterres' selection, the news came out that the UN plans to make the cartoon character Wonder Woman an honorary ambassador for the empowerment of women. After the selection of a male candidate for the world's top diplomat position, this appointment is [perceived as a 'consolation price'](#) by a lot of women's rights activists.

Soon after the news broke out, a lot of criticism was shared from various corners about the selection of what is seen as an overtly sexualized and Western cartoon character. Many questioned why the UN didn't choose a living feminist and a recognised champion for gender equality. Amongst the numerous articles and blogs, the [Women's International League for Peace & Freedom](#) raises the lack of intercultural awareness, [United Nations representative of the International Federation of Business and Professional Women](#) calls it an insult to women at the UN, and the [Campaign to Elect a Women UN Secretary General](#) asked for an urgent public enquiry into the process of the selection. Even UN staff expressed their disappointment with the decision, and some of them [protested in the UN chamber](#) at the launch event. A [petition](#) has been launched by concerned United Nations staff members to reverse the decision, which in a few days already gathered over 25,000 supporters.

It is clear that a development framework as the SDGs that prioritises gender equality cannot go hand-in-hand with a United Nations that does not put this meaningfully into action. It is still to be seen how the UN will respond to the civil society and UN's staff outcry about the decision, and if Ban ki Moon can still reconsider the decision in his last months in office. That could be a WONDERful departure from his UN career.

Source: [EuroNGOs](#)

Morning-after pill to be sold over the counter in Malta

The morning-after pill will be made available over-the-counter in Malta and will not require a doctor's prescription. "We looked at all the recommendations made by the parliamentary committee but have decided that to ensure that there is efficacy, the contraceptive will be made available over-the-counter," said Prof. Serracino Inglott, Medicines Authority Chief. The committee based this position on information supplied by the Medical Council. He insisted that the efficacy of the contraceptive – which has to be taken within a few hours in order to be effective – was not taken into consideration when this suggestion was made.

Source: [Times of Malta](#)

YOUTH

Youth Discussion Club for Polish youth

PONTON Sex Educators Group, ASTRA Youth member, organized the first edition of the Youth Discussion Club on October 22nd. It is a cycle of meetings designed for students of middle schools and high schools, where in a friendly and safe atmosphere they can expand their knowledge and talk about bothering topics. The two-hour meetings was moderated by experienced Ponton's educators.

The first meeting focused on a topic that always emerges during workshops, during the helpline conversations, and on the online forum - contraception. The event was a great opportunity to organize knowledge, weigh the pros and cons of each of the available methods, and to dispel any doubts or heard myths.

Subsequent meetings dates: 13.11 - Associations and relationships; 10.12 - intimate health.

[Facebook event](#)

Source: [PONTON Sex Educators Group](#)

"Ponton's" position on the restriction of the availability of emergency contraception ellaOne

PONTON Sex Educators Group negatively assesses the proposed changes in the availability of emergency contraception, ellaOne in Poland. Read the full statement [here](#).

Ponton for Al Jazeera English

Finka from Polish [ASTRA Youth](#) member - [Grupa Edukatorów Seksualnych "Ponton"](#) was live at [Al Jazeera English](#) and talked about the current debates on abortion rights, protests and international community support including the Joint Statement and Call to Action initiated by YouAct, ASTRA Network, ASTRA Youth and CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality and endorsed by over 50 organizations! We're very glad we mobilized and got media attention.

See interview [here](#).

UPCOMING EVENTS

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

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

Themes:

Priority theme: Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work

Review theme: Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls (agreed conclusions of the fifty-eighth session)

Emerging issue/Focus area: The empowerment of indigenous women

Source: [UN Women](#)

50th session of the UN Commission on Population and Development

NGOs in Consultative Status with ECOSOC are invited to pre-register for the 50th session of the Commission on Population and Development. It will take place at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 3 to 7 April 2017. The priority theme of the Session is "Changing population age structures and sustainable development." Online pre-registration will run from November 2016 to March 2017. Due to space constraints, a maximum of 5 representatives of each organization is permitted to attend.

NGOs may also submit statements to be circulated as official documents for consideration of the Commission. Written statements may be submitted between 1 November and 1 December 2016. Only the first twenty statements received by 1 December 2016 will be processed by the UN Secretariat and published as formal documents that will be posted on the Session's website.

Please visit the website of the Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs for more information on NGO participation in the Session of the Commission [here](#).

Source: [UNFPA](#)

PUBLICATIONS

The UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner and the Inter-Parliamentary Union have recently released a Handbook for Parliamentarians on Human Rights available [here](#).

Report of the Women Deliver conference which took place in Copenhagen in May 2016 is now made available [online](#)

MEMBER OF THE MONTH

Sarajevo Open Centre from Bosnia and Herzegovina

Sarajevo Open Centre (SOC) was established in 2007, registered as an association of citizens on the state level and has grown to become a respected nongovernmental organization in BiH.

Our Mission:

Sarajevo Open Centre (SOC) advocates the full respect of human rights and social inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans* and intersex (LGBTI) people and women.

Sarajevo Open Centre is an independent feminist civil society organization that strives to empower lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans* and intersex (LGBTI) people and women through community empowerment and activist movement building. SOC also promotes the human rights of LGBTI people and women publically and advocates on national, European and international level for improved legislation and policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. By working on European integration issues, SOC is improving human rights in general and encouraging further the development of civil society.

From 2007-2011 we worked on different projects related to political science research and political education, literature, film and art promotion, and interreligious education without having clear programmes, an office or employed staff. In 2011, we opened our first office and our first three-team members worked full-time in Sarajevo Open Centre. The team has grown from three (May 2011) to eleven (October 2016) full time employees and three vounteers.

SOC has its focus on two programes: LGBTI rights and Women's rights. In 2011, when our professionalization phase started, LGBT rights and LGBT people have been invisible and deemed irrelevant for BiH authorities and public. Although our work has been dominantly activity and outputoriented, in a span of five years we managed to give the voice for the LGBTI community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the last five years we did also manage to build up a visible and relevant women's rights programme. Although women constitute more than half of the BiH population, women's rights are still treated as a minority group issue. Women face discrimination and violence in their family surroundings, they are exposed to discriminatory treatment in labour relations and have a limited access to political life and decision-making processes. SOC have been working on several activities related to women's rights issues in BiH. In the last five years we managed to put some of the nondiscused topics related to women's rights issues in public discourse.

Read about the biggest achievements and main project of SOC [HERE](#).

What it means to us to be an ASTRA Network member?

Being a member of ASTRA Network means the opportunity to have all the relevant information regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights. Experiences from other ASTRA members and their countries are giving us the opportunity to figure out the problematic issues in our country as well as to figure out the solution for them. All these experiences and amazing people who are giving their best in order to end the violation of basic women's rights, such as the right to decide about her body, are giving us the strength to fight even harder in ending violations of women's rights in BiH.

Being a member of ASTRA Network means to learn more about solidarity and the importance of joint actions. In the end being a member of ASTRA Network means that we are not alone in our fight to live in society without discrimination, prejudices and human rights violations, we have our friends who will raise their voice and who will fight with us.

More about Sarajevo Open Centre you can find in [2015: Annual Report of the Sarajevo Open Centre](#) as well as on our web site www.soc.ba, our Facebook account: [Sarajevski Otvoreni Centar](#) and our Twitter account: [Sarajevo Open Centre](#).

For more information you can always contact us on our e-mail: office@soc.ba



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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