



CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

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BURNING ISSUE

Right to health in Croatia: UN expert to make first visit

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to health, Dainius Pūras, will visit Croatia from 28 November to 6 December 2016 to assess the realization of the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health in the country.

“This is my first visit to a European country and I look forward to learning how the most recent Member State of the European Union has advanced in the implementation of the right to health for all,” Mr. Pūras said. During his visit, the Special Rapporteur will examine, in a spirit of cooperation and dialogue, elements of the right to health, including availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality of health services, goods and facilities.

“I will be particularly interested in addressing specific issues such as financing of the national healthcare system, access to primary healthcare, mental health, and sexual and reproductive health

rights,” Mr. Pūras said. He will further look into the situation of key populations and groups, including people on the move, children, persons with disabilities, and older persons.

At the end of the mission, the UN Special Rapporteur will share his preliminary conclusions at a press conference on 6 December at 12:00, at the UNICEF conference room, Radnička cesta 4, Zagreb. Access to the press conference is strictly limited to journalists.

Mr. Pūras will present a comprehensive report on his mission to Croatia to the UN Human Rights Council in June 2017.

Source: [UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner](#)

REGIONAL UPDATES

UN Committee Review Unmasks Serious Violations of Women’s Rights in Armenia

The Armenian government ratified the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993 and is periodically reviewed by the CEDAW Committee to make sure their policies and programs are in line with the convention, which sets legally binding obligations for States parties and international standards for gender equality.

A coalition of women’s organizations worked together to produce an Armenian shadow report alongside several oral statement for the CEDAW Committee in Geneva.

Source: [Armenian Weekly](#)

Joint statement on the planned restrictions on the availability of emergency contraception in Poland

ASTRA together with ASTRA Youth, as part of coalition of civil society organizations working on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights – You Act, CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality and the European Consortium for Emergency Contraception, sent a letter to the representatives of the European Commission, to voice our concern on the current developments in Poland with regards to women and girls’ reproductive health and rights.

The Polish Minister of Health recently announced the plan to restrict access to emergency contraception which became freely available in pharmacies as a result of the C(2015)51 ruling from the European Commission last year. This step greatly contributed to the advancement of women’s and girls’ reproductive health and rights in Poland and across the European Union. The planned restrictions would greatly impede the lives of women and girls and contribute to the sales of this product from unsafe sources and also cause a rise in the number of unplanned pregnancies and abortions.

ASTRA Network, ASTRA Youth, CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, European Consortium on Emergency Contraception and YouAct call on the European Commission to encourage the EU Member States to

follow the recommendations of the European Medicines Agency in regards to emergency contraception in order to secure women's and girls' reproductive rights and improve access to reproductive health services and supplies.

The joint statement is available [HERE](#).

25th Anniversary of the Federation for Women and Family Planning hosting ASTRA Secretariat

On 19th of November Federa held its 25 Year Anniversary Ceremony. It was an occasion to, both, sum up 25 years of fight for women's rights in Poland and work on strategies for the future.

Anniversary began with performative reading based on everyday work in Federa. After artistic part of a gala, Agnieszka Graff, translator, activist and publicist opened a floor for a debate dedicated to 25 years of defending reproductive rights in Poland. Invited guests, experienced leaders of non-governmental organizations, as well as young fighters for women's rights, discussed such issues as historical points of view on feminist movement in Poland, importance of grass root initiatives, anti choice strategies of ruling party and need of education.

The culmination point of the gala was award ceremony during which 27 awards were given. By giving Federa 2016 Award, Federation honoured organization, non formal groups and media teams for their contribution to the fight for reproductive rights in Poland.

Source: www.federa.org.pl

Moldovian Government encouraged to hasten up signing of Istanbul Convention

The common dialog platform of women MPs of Moldova and the National Coalition "Life without Violence in the Family" undertook a public commitment to demand that the Government hasten up the signing and ratification by Moldova of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). Deputy Speaker of Parliament Liliana Palihovich said the paradigm of actions in the area of protection of victims of violence will change when this document is ratified. "The Republic of Moldova hasn't signed the Istanbul Convention because the costs were assessed as rather large. The signing and ratification of this convention means observance of its provisions and their implementation as a member state of the Council of Europe. This will mean large costs and investments for prevention and education services, in policies to develop assistance services for persons who sustained different forms of violence, etc. The phenomenon is so harsh that we are simply obliged to sign and implements document," stated Liliana Palihovich.

Source: IPN.md, Parliament.md

National Human Rights Plan in Moldova as a result of the UPR process

The Republic of Moldova will have a new National Human Rights Plan (NHRP) to implement the recommendations addressed to the country by the UN Human Rights Council under the Universal

Periodic Review (UPR) 2016. This commitment was assumed by the authorities, civil society and development partners during an international conference held in Chisinau on 22 - 23 November 2016. "We are confident that after hearing the experiences of other countries we will have a better implementation of the UPR recommendations in Moldova. The government has already initiated such actions and a Working Group for drafting a new National Human Rights Plan was established, involving the central public authorities, local public authorities represented by the delegate from the Congress of Local Authorities, civil society and international organizations, to whom we extend our gratitude for the support offered" said Eduard Serbenco, Deputy Minister of Justice of the Republic of Moldova.

Hulan Tsedev, Head of the Europe and Central Asia Section of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), reiterated the UN support for continuing this process. „The UN stands by the Government of the Republic of Moldova, national human rights institutions and civil society to establish an effective framework for protection of human rights, which could become a model for other countries in the region and globally” she said.

The Republic of Moldova will also develop a national mechanism for monitoring the implementation of UPR recommendations. As part of the UPR 2016 process held in Geneva on 4 November 2016, the Republic of Moldova received 209 recommendations to improve the situation related to human rights, out of which 175 were accepted, 31 are still under examination (until March 2017) and 3 were not accepted.

Most recommendations relate to combating discrimination, including hate crimes and prejudice (29); protection of women's rights (26); protection of minority rights (14), torture and ill-treatment (11), combating trafficking in human beings (10), the rights of people with disabilities (10), strengthening national institutions for human rights (9), protection of children rights (9).

Source : [UNDP in Moldova](#)

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](#)

GLOBAL UPDATES

Fundamentalism and populism pose deepening threat to women defending human rights, UN experts warn on the International Women Human Rights Defenders Day, November 29th

Women who step up to defend human rights are facing worsening obstacles amid a global trend of fundamentalism and populism, a group of United Nations rights experts has warned. In a statement to mark International Women Human Rights Defenders Day on 29 November, the experts said women working for rights and equality faced unique and growing challenges driven by deep-rooted discrimination. Some were being killed for their courageous stand; others faced violence, harassment, social stigma and sometimes imprisonment.

“In the face of rising populism and fundamentalisms and deplorable setbacks on the women’s human rights agenda, we need more than ever to unite our forces to preserve the democratic space in which women human rights defenders represent an essential counter-power and a colossal force of action,” the experts said in a joint statement.

Authoritarian rule and uncontrolled greed were fuelling discrimination, intensifying the obstacles, they added. States should take urgent action to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and to ensure they were protected for their participation in political or public life.

The experts highlighted a host of specific challenges faced by women rights defenders – including misogynistic attitudes, threats of sexual assault, travel bans, lack of protection and access to justice, imprisonment, killings, laws which violate their rights, gender-based defamation questioning their “femininity” or sexuality, and gender stereotyping which questions their engagement in public life instead of sticking to their caretaker role in the family.

They urge all States to ratify and fully implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the milestone 2013 UN General Assembly resolution on protecting women human rights defenders", which requires Member States to take concrete measures to end gender discrimination.

Source and full text of statement: [UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner](#)

France moves to ban misleading anti-abortion websites

The French National Assembly has approved a plan to outlaw abortion information websites that masquerade as neutral, official services with freephone helpline numbers but promote anti-abortion propaganda and pressure women not to terminate pregnancies. The women’s minister, Laurence Rossignol, told parliament that the government was not seeking to clamp down on anti-abortion opinion in general, but on sites that she said deliberately hid their true nature and tried to manipulate women with an “insidious” pressure. The law will now need to pass through the French senate.

Source: [The Guardian](#)

UN human rights body slams Canada for failure to ensure access to abortion and affordable contraception

On Friday November 18, the UN body responsible for assessing Canada's progress on upholding women human rights (CEDAW) released its Concluding Observations to Canada. Central to Canada's review was the issue of the accessibility, affordability, acceptability and quality of sexual and reproductive health services. The UN Committee expressed grave concern regarding continued disparities in access to abortion in Canada. Only 1-in-6 hospitals provide abortion services with most service points (hospitals and clinics) located in large urban areas. In addressing the many barriers to access abortion, the UN Committee called on Canada to ensure the exercise of conscientious objection does not impede women's access to the service. The UN Committee also urged Canada to ensure contraceptives are affordable, accessible and available to all women and girls. The UN Committee further called on Canada to establish national guidelines or standards to harmonize sexuality education curricula among provinces/territories and to hold provinces/territories accountable for implementing such guidelines or standards. Finally, on the issue of sex work, the UN Committee called on Canada to "decriminalize women engaged in prostitution." While this is a step forward, the recommendation fails to recognize that decriminalization requires the removal of all specific laws related to sex work, including those that criminalize clients and third parties.

Source: [Action Canda for Sexual Health & Rights](#)

Fourth Meeting of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on the Sustainable Development Goal Indicators

The fourth meeting of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on the Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) convened from 15-18 November 2016, at the headquarters of the UN Economic Commission for Europe, in Geneva, Switzerland. The first two days of the meeting were a Members Meeting, open only to IAEG governments. The second two days were a Plenary Session, with participation from representatives of 46 countries, 34 international organizations, and 41 NGOs.

The Plenary Session, which took place from 17-18 November, served to engage a wider set of actors in the issues discussed during the Members Meeting on 15-16 November. For each agenda item during the Plenary Session, the UN Statistical Division, which is the IAEG Secretariat, provided a briefing on the Members' discussions earlier in the week. Interactive discussions followed, with participation from UN agencies and other UN system representatives, NGOs and other civil society members, and government representatives from IAEG members and non-members. Key issues discussed included: advancing the indicators that still require conceptual clarification; selecting custodial agencies to manage data collection on each indicator; the respective roles of national governments and UN agencies in processing data for the yearly global SDG report, and the communication between them; and how the indicators can be refined with minor changes, as well as a proposed process for more comprehensive reviews of the indicator framework. Following IAEG-SDGs 4, the Group will submit a report to the UN Statistical Commission in early December 2016, ahead of the 48th UNSC session, which is scheduled to take place in March 2017.

Source: [IISD Reporting Services](#)

YOUTH

Youth in Power: Developing a Youth Strategy for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for Europe and Central Asia

New youth-led initiative “Youth in Power: Developing a Youth Strategy for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for Europe and Central Asia” is led by YouAct, in partnership with ASTRA Youth, Y-PEER and YSAFE, with support of Council of Europe European Youth Foundation, UNFPA EECARO and IPPF EN.

The initiative’s overall aim is to develop an up-to-date strategy based on the input, experience, needs and ideas of young people, which will serve as an advocacy and awareness raising tool on SRHR of young people from Council of Europe and Central Asia countries on the national, regional and international level.

As a first step the organizations were gathering inputs via an online survey that collects youth views on the current gaps and challenges regarding the realization of SRHR and their feedback on recommendations, measures and actions that need to be taken by youth-led networks and policy and decision-makers. The survey was open to young people aged 15-30 years old from Council of Europe and Central Asia countries and was available in 9 languages: English, Azerbaijani, Armenian, Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, Greek, Lithuanian and Georgian.

As second step youth advocates involved in this project are meeting in Kiev on Decemer 3-6 to develop a future Youth Strategy for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for Europe and Central Asia.

Source: [You Act](#)

“Turn me on” – Hungarian sexuality education project by PATENT Association

The main objective of the project is to reach out to Hungarian youth, educate them in SRHR and Gender and Sexual Equality and mobilize them in awareness-raising and activism in these areas. The long-term goal of the project is to establish a sustainable and comprehensive social network and a popular platform for discussing gender and sexuality, which can become the cradle and the motor of a young SRHR movement in Hungary, and through which the movement will be able to organize and coordinate itself.

Participants will be trained and encouraged to take action in response to the strengthening anti-SRHR and anti-SE campaigns by international and local conservative religious and right-wing movements. After the training, recruited young volunteers will launch and run a blog and connected social media forums, targeting the wider age group of 13-19. Through online engagement, they will conduct an innovative form of peer education.

The project aims to counteract the general context of backlash against ideas of gender equality and LGB rights, policies aiming for gender and sexual equality never gained sufficient traction in Hungarian politics, and in the past years there are increasingly clear messages from the political

arena for maintaining traditional gender norms and roles and traditional, religious Christian conceptions of the family. This agenda is also manifest in general policy-making directions, from educational policy (such as introducing the so-called “Family Life Education” into the curriculum) to national cultural and media initiatives (such as introducing the National Marriage Week) and family, social and labour policies incentivising traditional family models and refusing to implement gender-mainstreaming.

Source: [PATENT](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Pro-choice advocacy in Macedonia – event to promote the Declaration to Change the Law on Termination of Pregnancy

Having in mind the limitations imposed by the legal framework and risks faced by women in exercising their constitutionally guaranteed rights to make decisions concerning child conception, on the eve of the parliamentary elections on 11 December, HERA together with the other members of Platform for Gender Equality has asked all parties to pledge their commitment to the adoption of a new Law on Termination of Pregnancy and ensuring true protection of the health of women and their reproductive rights.

To mark this occasion, on December 2nd, the Platform for Gender Equality is hosting public event organized with the purpose of presenting the Declaration to Change the Law on Termination of Pregnancy and the political parties that have signed the Declaration. The event will gather representatives of political parties and civic organizations with the aim of initiating discussion concerning the future steps of the parties to ensure effective protection of the reproductive rights of women in Macedonia.

Source: [H.E.R.A.](#)

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

New Website Tool Presents Breaking News on Abortion Rights

People looking for current and past news about abortion rights now have an easy-to-use tool. A new interactive website is available, which posts breaking news on abortion rights from around the world. As well as news, the website also posts opinion, commentary, videos, podcasts, film and book reviews, and other media about abortion.

Please check out the new website here: <http://www.abortion-news.info>

“Readers looking for up-to-date information about what’s happening on the abortion issue in countries around the world should find this site a useful resource, said Dr. Christian Fiala, the website’s team lead and a gynecologist who provides abortions. Dr. Fiala explained that everything posted is automatically added to the website’s Archives. “The website is entirely searchable using keywords, and categories such as date, topic, country, and region.”

In addition, readers can subscribe to a news feed, as well as submit news links to be posted.

“A key advantage is that we don’t post anti-choice news or links to other inaccurate pieces that are biased against abortion,” said Joyce Arthur, the website moderator and an abortion rights activist in Canada. “Readers can be assured that they are getting mainstream news from respected sources, as well as informed views from those who support women’s fundamental right to self-determination, including the right to abortion.”

The website is operated by the Initiative for Reproductive Health Information (IRHI) / Initiative zur Information über Reproduktive Gesundheit.

Contact:

Website moderator Joyce Arthur: joycearthur@shaw.ca or +1 604-351-0867 (Vancouver Canada)

Team lead Dr. Christian Fiala: mail@abortion-news.info (Vienna Austria)

Source: <http://www.abortion-news.info>

[CONCORD: Sustainable Development – The stakes could not be higher](#). This collaborative report analyzes the EU's implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD) by looking into five facets of the EU policies, highlighting good practices, alarming cases and recommendations. Chapters cover a call for an overarching EU strategy, the shift to PCSD, sustainable food consumption and production, migration, and measuring progress.

Source: [CONCORD](#)

Sterilisation & Its Consequences for Romani Women in the Czech Republic (1966-2016): Coercive & Cruel

This report by the European Roma Rights Centre presents accounts of Czech Romani women of their treatment by medical personnel and social workers. The report reveals how Romani women were subjected to sterilisation without prior information that such an operation would be performed on them; in some instances the women claim that their consent forms and other medical documentation were manipulated and their signatures forged. The procedure was often performed at the same time as caesarean sections or women were presented with consent forms when in great pain or distress during labour or delivery. In other instances Romani women were coerced into accepting sterilisation by misinformation about the nature of this procedure as well as through threats of the institutionalisation of their children and withdrawal of their social benefits. For some Romani women, sterilisation was falsely justified by their doctors as a life-saving intervention.

[Access the report here.](#)

Source: <http://www.wunrn.com>

Ethical and safety recommendations for intervention research on violence against women

Building on lessons from the WHO publication: *Putting women first: ethical and safety recommendations for research on domestic violence against women*

As the evidence base on the magnitude, context and consequences of violence against women (VAW) has grown, research efforts and attention have begun to focus on decreasing the knowledge gap on effective responses through intervention research. Demonstrating this focus, in November 2012 the WHO Department of Reproductive Health and Research convened a group of experts to discuss health sector-based research to respond to violence against women. This global network of researchers, scientists and practitioners was brought together to enhance existing research efforts

and to advocate for greater funding for research on interventions to address VAW and policies and programmes related to it.

With the increased interest in and attention of the global community of researchers, practitioners and policy-makers regarding rigorous intervention research for preventing and responding to VAW, a discussion of the ethical considerations specific to this type of research is warranted.

[Access the report here.](#)

Source: [WHO](#)

MEMBER OF THE MONTH

Women's Rights Center from Yerevan, Armenia

Women's Rights Center (WRC) is a non-governmental, non-profit, non partisan organization operating in Armenia. On the basis of Women's Club, which operated since 1987, "Hayouhi" (Armenian woman) Women's Association was founded and registered at the Ministry of Justice in January 1991. It was the first registered non-governmental organization in the country. In 1997 "Hayouhi" reconsidered its mission and goals, was renamed into Women's Rights Center and was reregistered at the Ministry of Justice in November 1997. WRC has worked out a long-term strategy "Breaking the Silence about Violence against Women", which has been realized step by step since 1997 till present. Its realization promotes achievement of our goals and implementation of all activities of the organization in 2 areas: domestic violence against women and their children and women's sexual and reproductive health and rights.

In the area of domestic violence WRC initiated the Draft Law on Domestic Violence still in 2007 and till now permanently advocates and lobbies for its adoption together with other organizations; we also operate the National Hot Line for women victims of domestic violence and their children, Network of 8 Crises Centers (one in Yerevan and 7 in the regional centers of Armenia) and the Emergency Shelter, organize actions, trainings and events for raising awareness on the issue. In the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights WRC has implemented different activities, such as organization of seminars for youths/teenagers on SRHR at schools and colleges in Yerevan, Vanadzor and close villages, publication of the Manual for trainings on RH/RR and organization of seminars for journalists of TV channels, radio, newspapers, sociological survey among 118 teenagers and youth on RH/RR in Yerevan, Vanadzor and close villages, organization of the Round table on reproductive health and rights in Yerevan, as well as participation as a host organization in the project "The Prime II Gender Initiative" focused on raising awareness among health-sector professionals of violence against women as a public health problem. Our organization was the first in the country to introduce medical abortion with the use of mifepristone and misoprostol as an alternative way for terminating unwanted pregnancies. We organized trainings with the obstetrician-gynecologists in Yerevan, Gyumri and Vanadzor on medical abortion, raised awareness through publications on the issue and its dissemination, monitoring and evaluation research studies implemented in 5 hospitals in Yerevan, Gyumri and Vanadzor. Our organization also coordinated elaboration and publication of the Clinical Guideline on the organization of medical abortion.

Women's Rights Center is honored to be the part of ASTRA Network and participate in all the ongoing activities. ASTRA is one of the leading advocates for sexual and reproductive health and rights in the Central and Eastern Europe contributing a lot to the development and progress of women and girls' human rights within the member countries and Armenia as well.

Webiste: <http://www.wrcorg.am>

[Link to Facebook](#)

[Link to Twitter](#)



The Women's Rights Center team

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

Prepared by Marta Szostak

Supported by the [Sigrid Rausing Trust](#)

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