



CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

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BURNING ISSUE

UN Human Rights Committee discusses the draft General Comment on the right to life

During its 114th session in July 2015 the Human Rights Committee (HRC) commenced the process of drafting a General Comment on the right to life and to revise the existing General Comment at Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The General Comment refers to various aspects related to the right to life - from abortion and euthanasia to suicide to capital punishment and genocide. It clarifies how States that have ratified the Covenant are supposed to protect this right. Only two paragraphs – out of 22 pages – pertain to abortion by imposing the duty to provide access to abortion in case of rape, incest and fetal impairment. The document also underlines that “any legal restriction on the ability of women to seek abortion must not, inter alia, jeopardize their life or subject them to physical or mental pain or suffering which violates article 7”. The HRC called for submissions on the views of national human rights institutions, non-governmental organisations,

and academia. The summary of what took place plus the over 100 [submissions they received](#) can be found at this [link](#). During its 115th session, the Committee commenced its first reading of the draft text.

The HRC then completed its review and revision of the draft text at its 120th session in July 2017, published it on its website – [Draft General Comment on Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – Right to life](#) – and invited all interested stakeholders to comment on the new draft by 6 October 2017. This time around, they received some 166 submissions including from some 23 states, most of them in the global north; 7 UN agencies, specialized bodies and experts; 33 academic and other professionals; 3 national human rights and other institutions; and over 100 NGOs. These submissions can be found [here](#).

Of the 71 paragraphs in the July 2017 version of the draft General Comment, only Paragraph 9 is directly about abortion. Yet, a great many submissions from NGOs were anti-abortion and many others from abortion rights advocates, as was the case in the previous round.

The Polish government's statement spends two of its eight pages directly on abortion and more on protecting human life from conception. The [Federation for Women and Family Planning's analysis](#) of their statement is that they intend to reintroduce the death penalty, will seek further criminalization of abortion in cases of fetal impairment and try to make women criminally accountable for abortion.

On November 1st 2017, the Human Rights Committee published an [information report for the media](#) (not an official statement) on its progress in revising the General Comment, which said: "The Human Rights Committee this morning continued the second reading of the draft General Comment No. 36 on article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights on the right to life. The Committee adopted introductory paragraphs 6, 7 and 8 on deprivation of life, States' obligation to refrain from arbitrary deprivation of life, and enforced disappearances. The Committee also began discussion on paragraph 9 on termination of pregnancy..."

On 2nd November, in [another information report for the media](#), the Committee continued its discussion about paragraph 9. "Experts emphasised the need for the decriminalization of abortion because its criminalisation led to unsafe abortions which undermined the right to life of women and girls. The Committee's centre of gravity might have changed with six new members [of 18] who had not taken part in the first reading of the General Comment, as well as in the Committee's case law. The Committee should, therefore, state how far it had gone on the matter of abortion, keeping in mind the consistency with its own case law. Paragraph 9 dealt with a huge health and social policy problem and the Committee should provide a clear guideline for the future, rather than impose rules on States. It would take years and probably decades to achieve decriminalisation of abortion everywhere".

This session seems to have discussed some language issues and definitions; no substantive progress or agreement on content was mentioned. We will continue to track progress on this General Comment and share updates on regular basis

Source and more detailed information: [International Campaign for Women's Right to Safe Abortion](#)

REGIONAL UPDATES

Draft law penalizing abortion in case of foetal impairment submitted to the Polish Parliament

On November, 30 the “Stop Abortion” Civic Committee has tabled 830 000 signatures under the bill that would ban abortion in one of the three cases in which abortion is allowed according to the Bill of 1993. The organisers of the campaign with a strong and active support of the Polish Episcopate and parishes all over the country have been widespreading myths about how and when abortion is performed referring to numbers that deny the reality. They also used false and cruel billboards with dismembered foetuses so as to distort the image of actual abortion procedures. It is worth emphasising that the campaigners were allowed to collect signatures in front of churches after services, while priests and bishops, not mentioning powerful politicians, encouraged citizens to support the initiative. Given the massive mobilization of the Catholic groups, the number of signatures is neither significant nor reflecting public support for even more restrictive law. In the light of the latest polls, Poles are in favour of either liberalization (41%) or the status quo (40%).

At the same time, Poland is witnessing an unprecedented, politicised attempt of using the Constitutional Tribunal to make abortion in this case illegal. Read more about this issue [in this article](#).

Source: [Federation for Women and Family Planning](#)

Draft law on conscience clause for pharmacists in Poland

The Polish Bureau of Research (BAS) has positively evaluated a draft law that would introduce conscience clause for pharmacists and owners of drug stores. According to the law elaborated and delivered by the Federation of Polish Catholic Pharmacists they will have rights 1) to refuse to sell drugs should they be incompatible with their conscience and 2) not to order such drugs. In practice, only procreation-related medicines are in contradiction to conscience clause. Therefore, the law is supposed to restrict the access to contraception, thus breaching women’s reproductive rights.

It is worth mentioning that currently pharmacists do break the law and decline to sell contraception, despite the fact that only doctors, nurses and midwives are entitled to the conscience clause.

The draft law provides one exception – medicaments must be given out when customer’s life or health is threatened. Independent experts, however, argue that the draft law is a legal nonsense and that it does not guarantee that this exception will be followed, e.g. when a medicine is not in stock. There are no provisions that specify whom the customer can turn to make up their prescriptions. In small towns/villages or in conservative regions, where invoking the conscience clause is already common, women willing to obtain contraceptive pills or emergency contraception will be helpless, whereas their health and lives endangered. Moreover, this law hits less well-off persons who will face additional obstacles when searching for available pharmacists.

The Bureau of Research has decided to send a desideratum to the Ministry of Health. However, the Minister has already publicly supported introduction of the conscience clause for pharmacists. Respective interventions undertaken by the Commissioner for Human Rights to protect patient’s rights were also unsuccessful, since his arguments for limiting the conscience clause in pharmacies

were rejected by the Ministry. It is a matter of time when the proposal of the Federation of Polish Catholic Pharmacists will come into force.

Source: [Federation for Women and Family Planning](#)

European Parliament says Poland must respect fundamental rights, including women's rights

The European Parliament is calling on Poland to address the current restrictions to the independence of the judiciary, freedom of assembly, sexual and reproductive rights, and denial of asylum-seekers' access to the Polish territory. The Parliament adopted a resolution that highlights the further deterioration of the situation in Poland since the previous European Parliament resolution on these issues in September last year.

The resolution, which was proposed by GUE/NGL and other parliamentary groups (EPP, S&D, ALDE and the Greens/EFA), passed with the support of a large majority of MEPs. Many of GUE/NGL's amendments on the key issue of further restrictions to sexual and reproductive rights were also adopted as part of the resolution. GUE/NGL Shadow for the resolution, Barbara Spinelli, explains: "The reason why we are adopting a fourth resolution on Poland is not to punish a member state, but to remind us all of the bond that keeps us together, i.e. the legal basis which all the member states have endorsed. I refer to the rule of law in its full extent as a notion encompassing human rights, judicial independence and jurisdictional guarantees, freedom of expression and separation of powers."

"Once elected in this House, we have the obligation to represent all the citizens of the Union without any distinctions based on nationality or constituency, and the primary duty to assure that the bedrocks of citizenship – i.e. human rights and fundamental freedoms – are fully guaranteed.

"By instructing the European Parliament to draft a report that could lead to the triggering of article 7(1), we are asking ourselves to ensure that we live up to our responsibility to the citizens and to commit to continuing the ongoing dialogue with a member state. After all, as the European Parliament, the Treaty has equipped us with this sole tool," clarifies the Italian MEP.

Swedish MEP, Malin Björk, adds: "Today this house is sending a strong message to the Polish government: every time they try to reduce or restrict women's and girls' rights, we are here, standing up to stop them. We are here to echo the voices of the Polish defenders of women's rights and reproductive rights because fundamental rights and democracy are universal human rights."

"Restricting women's right to access the morning-after contraceptive pill or preparing campaigns against women's right to control their own bodies or their right to access safe and legal abortion will be met with huge resistance from the feminists of the European Parliament. We are standing side by side with our Polish sisters!"

Source: [GUE/NGL](#)

[Official press release by the European Parliament](#)

Reproductive Rights are human rights: Findings of the Country Assessment in relation to SRHR and well-being in Georgia and it's policy implications

On November 22, 2017, the Public Defender of Georgia held a presentation of the project “Reproductive Rights are Human Rights” and provided the analysis of the national policy and legislation (desk research) of sexual and reproductive health and well-being in relation to the international obligations undertaken by the country.

This Country Assessment is the first of its kind in Georgia. The objectives are to assess the degree to which human rights in context of sexual and reproductive health and well-being are enshrined in the laws of Georgia how they are realized in practice, through Georgia’s laws and policies and in their implementation; to identify key areas of progress as well as barriers; and make recommendations to the Government of Georgia and other responsible authorities. The assessment focuses on the following issues: access to contraceptive information and services; access to safe abortion services and post-abortion care; maternal health care; prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS; life skills/comprehensive sexuality education; violence against women and girls; reproductive technologies: surrogacy; and select reproductive cancers and breast cancer. It also focused on marginalized groups with a particular focus on subgroups of women and girls, LGBTI, female sex workers; women who use drugs; internally displaced and conflict affected women; ethnic minorities; people with disabilities, and youth and adolescents.

Key human rights considerations such as non-discrimination and equality, participation, budgeting and allocation of resources, data collection, monitoring, accountability, and privacy and confidentiality were also a focus of the Assessment, as was the broader health system relevant for understanding human rights in this context, together with areas of progress and obstacles. In order to assess progress and obstacles, the assessment identified a series of questions and indicators on these sexual and reproductive health and well-being issues. The obtained Information, based almost exclusively on existing data and studies, was analysed with three overarching questions in mind: What is the status of sexual and reproductive health and related rights of the population of Georgia, including marginalized groups? Which key laws, policies and initiatives have been adopted by the Government, and what is their implementation status? What are the main consistencies and discrepancies between legal protections of such health and rights, including domestic and international human rights and the reality? The report includes recommendations based on findings to these questions and are directed to the relevant institutions.

A memorandum of cooperation was also signed between the Public Defender’s Office of Georgia and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Georgia Office at the event. Within the framework of mutual cooperation, national survey will be carried out in 2018 to evaluate the access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as the problems and challenges in terms of the protection and realization of these rights.

Source: <http://www.ombudsman.ge/en/news/presentation-of-project-reproductive-rights-are-human-rights.page>

EuroNGOs conference: final report now published

On September 27-28, the 2017 EuroNGOs Conference took place in Brussels under the theme 'Re:Frame. Promoting SRHR in a time of growing populism'. The final report of the Conference has now been published. You can find it [here](#).

European Parliament

SRHR as Parliament's priorities under the next UN Commission on the Status of Women

On November 7, the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) published its draft report on 'the European Parliament recommendation to the Council on the EU priorities for the 62nd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women'. In this report, parliamentarians 'call on the Member States and regional and local authorities to guarantee universal access to adequate healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health services'. The Committee further 'safeguard[s] the right to a healthcare which takes into account factors which are different to those concerning men and is adapted to the needs of rural women and girls, particularly with regard to sexual and reproductive health and rights'.

Deadline to table amendments to the report is December 15.

To access the draft report click [here](#)

European Parliament reinforces importance of SRHR as women's rights

On November 23, the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) of the European Parliament approved its 'Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2016 and the European Union's policy on the matter'. In this report, AFET 'Condemns the use of sexual violence against women and girls [...]; draws attention to the fact that gender-related crimes and crimes of sexual violence are classified in the Rome Statute as war crimes, crimes against humanity or constitutive acts with respect to genocide or torture; stresses the importance of defending women's rights, including their sexual and reproductive rights, through legislation, education and by supporting CSOs; welcomes the adoption of the EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 which sets out a comprehensive list of measures to improve the situation of women in terms of equal rights and empowerment; emphasises the importance of ensuring its effective implementation...'

The report will be voted in plenary on December 13.

To access the AFET report click [here](#)

Challenges to women's human rights in the EU

Women and girls in the European Union experience persistent gender discrimination and gender-based violence, as evidence collected by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)

confirms. This severely limits the ability of women and girls to enjoy their rights and to participate on an equal footing in society. The FRA contribution to the third Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights ‘Women’s rights in turbulent times’ looks at core human rights commitments. It balances these against selected evidence on gender discrimination, sexist hate speech and gender-based violence against women and girls in the EU.

Recent revelations on the global extent to which women and girls experience sexual harassment stress the urgent need to tackle socially, culturally and structurally entrenched gender inequalities. This paper underlines the need for EU institutions and Member States to stand firm in their commitment to safeguard the dignity of all women and girls in the EU. It therefore highlights concrete areas of intervention where the EU and its Member States could work actively to turn this commitment into a reality.

Access the paper [here](#)

Source: <http://fra.europa.eu/en>

GLOBAL UPDATES

Synthesis Reports on 2017 on Voluntary National Reviews on SDG implementation are now available

The VNRs were held during the High Level Political Forum in mid 2017, several countries of ASTRA participated in the Voluntary National Reviews on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Synthesis Report of the country reviews is available at <http://bit.ly/2jAfk6l>. Among the countries under review were: Azerbaijan, Belarus, Czech Republic, Slovenia and Tajikistan.

Expert Group Meeting for 2018 VNR Countries will take place on 5-6 December 2017, Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland – for more information contact [DESA](#).

Source: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org>

YOUTH

The European Youth Parliament convenes in Georgia

The 86th International Session of the European Youth Parliament took place in Tbilisi, Georgia on 11-19 November 2017. It brought together approximately three hundred young participants, divided into 15 committees from all over Europe for a nine-day event, with the sessions taking place in various venues across the Georgian capital. The young participants (target group 16- to 19-year-olds, but ranging from 16 to 30 years of age) were to discuss, debate and find solutions to current problems and questions our European continent is facing. Fifteen committees gathered at the session to produce resolutions that will represent the youth’s valuable input to the public discourse.

A representative of ASTRA Youth from Georgia's Real People Real Vision was invited to provide expert knowledge and give useful input to the work of the Committee for Women's Rights and Gender Equality – FEMM. The committee discussed strategies that the European Union institutions and member countries should pursue to ensure that reproductive and sexual rights of both women and men across Europe are upheld and protected, including the freedom of choice, and universal access to comprehensive sexual education and reproductive health care.

The discussion topics included but were not limited to:

- Access to abortion - limitations and restrictions including mandatory waiting periods, parental consent, conscientious objection etc.
- Effective prevention - ensuring the youth is adequately informed and equipped with a broad range of affordable contraceptives
- CSE - ways to educate young men and women more effectively on sexually transmitted infections (STIs), sexual health, and sexual wellbeing
- Surrogacy - commercial use, mobility, feminist perspectives
- IVF - limitations set by multiple EU member states for non-married couples and single parents
- Transgender sterilization - reproductive rights safeguarded when it comes to sex assignment procedures
- Paternity rights – the right for men to legally opt-out of paternal rights and obligations, and under what limitations

Read more [here](#)

Source: [Real People Real Vision](#)

The Ponton Group with the 2017 With and For Girls Award

The Ponton Group of Sex Educators from Poland is among twenty girl-led and girl-focused organizations recognized by the With and For Girls Collective 2017 for their work to improve the lives of girls all over the world. The award winners work on a variety of thematic issues and have demonstrated strengths in engaging girls in governance, programme design and decision-making to ensure that their work really is girl-led. Winners of the With and For Girls Awards receive flexible funding of up to US\$50,000 and capacity building support. They will also join an existing network of inspiring past award winners, funders, organizations and individuals from the girls' and women's rights sector. Read more [here](#).

Source: [The Ponton Group of Sex Educators](#)

Ponton's Youth Discussion Club

The Ponton Group of Sex Educators has launched the second edition of its Youth Discussion Club. The Discussion Club operates in a form of a series of meetings designed for students of the last grades of primary, secondary, and upper secondary schools, where in a friendly and safe atmosphere one can

broaden their knowledge and talk about the most pressing issues. The two-hour meetings are led by experienced Ponton Group educators.

On the occasion of the European HIV Testing Week, Ponton invited teens to a meeting dedicated to the prevention of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Young people had a chance to find out what HIV is, what is the difference between HIV and AIDS, how to protect yourself against it, what is HIV testing and when should it be done, and what other infections can be infectious.

Source: [The Ponton Group of Sex Educators](#)

The European Week of HIV Testing in Warsaw

The European Testing Week allows Europeans to show that testing is important regardless of country or region. Every year, more and more organizations join in to prove how important it is to diagnose an infection early on.

This year, together with the Foundation for Social Education, the Ponton Group of Sex Educators encouraged students to test. On November 22 between 9am and 5pm one could take free and anonymous HIV, HCV and syphilis tests. The event took place on the main campus of the University of Warsaw.

The tests were performed in a specially adapted camper. The entire procedure takes approximately 15 minutes, the test was preceded by a short interview with a counselor that was followed by a finger puncture. The test result was ready after around 10 minutes. In addition, students could talk to experts about the prevention of infectious diseases and the harmful effects of psychoactive substances.

Source: [The Ponton Group of Sex Educators](#)

The launch of forparents.ge – a sexuality education website and mobile app for Georgian parents

On 9 and 10 November, the Association HERA XXI conducted informative meetings in Akhaltsikhe and Kutaisi that were attended by more than a hundred parents. During the discussions parents shared their experiences with each other.

As a result, a new online platform forparents.ge has been developed in order to help parents share knowledge on SRHR as well as healthy lifestyle with their children, by taking the adolescents' age-appropriate psychological and cultural aspects into consideration.

Source: [HERA XXI](#)

Educational meeting with the “Girls Club” in Georgia

On 15 November, HERA XXI, invited by the Mediation House, conducted a meeting with the members of the “Girls Club”. The aim of the meeting was to inform and raise awareness among 14-18-year-old girls about reproductive health and healthy lifestyle as well as to help them develop skills that will enable them in the formation of strong personalities.

During the meetings the girls received information about the HERA XXI association, its services and volunteer opportunities. Special attention was paid to youth friendly services and free consultation of a doctor specializing in reproduction, who doctor talked about puberty and sexual health related issues. The meeting was interactive as girls had an opportunity to ask the doctor written anonymous questions.

The Mediation House on the basis of LEPL Center for Crime Prevention under the Ministry of Justice of Georgia has been conducting the “Girls Club” since 2015 and has actively collaborated with HERA XXI.

Source: [HERA XXI](#)

Report about the SECS video: A tale of two young birds in (Pigeon) Romania

Astra Youth member from Romania Society for Education in Contraception and Sexuality (SECS) has developed an educational video to draw attention to the need for sexuality education in schools and the negative impact of the lack of such classes.

They used a story featuring pigeons that metaphorically represent young people’s status when they make bad decisions regarding sex. Two pigeons meet and fall in love, but their romantic love story turns into an egg, as neither their parents nor the school prepared them for such an event. As a result, their dreams stop short right there. The two pigeons take the egg to their parents, as they cannot afford to take care of it. Love fades, problems arise, the young pigeons grow mature instantly, and their parents are forced to help out. The story is, unfortunately, very common in Romania and other ASTRA member countries where sexuality education is not part of the school curriculum.

Here are some significant figures: in 2015 there were more than 18,000 teen moms aged 10 to 19, and over 600 of them were under 14. That makes Romania the country with the highest number of adolescent mothers. In addition, SECS draws attention to the fact that STIs are not treated responsibly. For instance, the number of young adults aged 15 to 24 diagnosed with HIV is one of the highest in Europe.

A tale of two young birds in (Pigeon) Romania!: [English version](#), [Romanian version](#)

The video developed in Romania by the IPPF-EN Romanian member SECS, is part of the [#idecide](#) Campaign.

“Let’s talk about sex’, documentary on teenage mothers in Romania

ASTRA Advisory Board member Daniela Draghici contributed her long-standing expertise to the documentary on teen moms in Romania, titled "Let`s Talk about Sex", premiered on the German-French educational and cultural TV channel Arte Regards on November 15. The documentary, which also features Gabriel Brumariu, Astra Youth member on behalf of the Society for Education in Contraception and Sexuality (SECS), is dubbed in German & French and will be accessible until December 15.

Link to [French](#) and [German](#) version.

In France as in Germany, sexuality education has long been a necessary part of the school curriculum. This is not the case in Romania, where many schools ignore this type of class. The consequences are hardly surprising: along with Bulgaria, Romania has the highest rate of teenage mothers in the whole of the European Union. In 2015, 18,000 Romanian girls under the age of 20 completed a pregnancy. Fighting ignorance about sexuality and informing about its consequences is the goal of Daniela Draghici and Alexandra Miroslav, Youth for Youth Fundation, the main characters featured in the documentary. The two women aspire not only to make this subject obligatory at school, but also to educate all of their fellow citizens about sex.

PUBLICATIONS

The Future of the European Union - Feminist Perspectives from East-Central Europe

New publication from the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Budapest and Eszter Kovats: *The Future of the European Union - Feminist Perspectives from East-Central Europe* is an interesting compilation of Central and Eastern European voices on the most pressing issues today in relation to gender, EU, reproductive rights, economy and most at risk groups. The selections of articles include Andrea Peto, “From women through gender to unconscious bias: changing terminology about gender equality in the EU”, Elena Zacharenko “Reproductive rights as a social justice issue in the EU”, Emília Barna, Gergely Csányi, Agi Gagyi and Gerócs Tamás “East-Central European feminist activism in the context of uneven development in the EU, and ways to move forward” and more.

Access the publication in pdf [here](#).

“Funding Civil Society: How adaptable international donors can support organisations under increasing restriction”.

Adaptable work methods are key in ensuring civil society’s access to foreign funding in increasingly restrictive environments, according to a new report by Human Rights House Foundation (HRHF). More and more countries are adopting restrictive and stigmatising laws and practices that hinder foreign funding for civil society, especially human rights organisations and defenders.

“These restrictive mechanisms have proven effective because foreign funding is often the only financial support available to human rights organisations. This restriction impedes on the organisations’ autonomy, sustainability and ability to work. The consequence of this is critical voices are suppressed, and GONGOs, those supportive of the government, take over space for civil society.” commented Maria Dahle, Director at HRHF.

The report “[Funding Civil Society - How adaptable international donors can support organisations under increasing restriction](#)” addresses these trends. It aims to provide international donors with the means to review their working methods. It also empowers non-governmental organisation (NGOs) with guidance on how to strengthen partnerships with international donors. The report is available in both [English](#) and [Russian](#).

The report provides practical solutions to counter restrictions, outlining four key principles and corresponding recommendations for international donors to strengthen and continue their support for human rights NGOs. The four key principles are sustainability, flexibility, coordination, and independence.

Source: [Human Rights House Foundation](#)

Roma Women in Slovakia experience discrimination and receive poor reproductive health care

Roma women living in Slovakia report facing discrimination, segregation and abuse when obtaining reproductive health services, according to a new report from the Center for Reproductive Rights and Slovak organization Center for Civil and Human Rights (Poradňa).

The report [Vakeras Zorales – Speaking Out: Roma Women’s Experiences in Reproductive Health Care in Slovakia](#) documents personal stories of 38 Roma women from marginalized communities who reported suffering discrimination and abuse in reproductive and maternal health care facilities in eastern Slovakia. The report also recommends action steps that the Slovak authorities should take to respect the human rights of Roma women.

Recommendations in the report include establishing effective measures to address systemic and intersectional discrimination in reproductive health care, including implementing, and investing adequate resources in, appropriate programs to improve Roma women’s access to good quality reproductive health care services.

An estimated 400,000 Roma live in Slovakia, comprising 7.45 percent of the country’s population. The Roma community in Slovakia has faced long-term and systemic discrimination and racism. Despite some progress Roma remain one of the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups in the country, experiencing extreme forms of social exclusion and deprivation.

Vakeras Zorales – Speaking Out is a joint publication of the Center for Reproductive Rights and Poradňa. The report is based on interviews from October 24-27, 2016 conducted by the Center and Poradňa. During the interviews, testimonies were collected from 38 Roma women living in four marginalized Roma communities in the districts of Spišská Nová Ves, Gelnica, and Prešov in eastern

Slovakia. The women were interviewed about their experiences in reproductive health care settings over the past five years.

Source: [Center for Reproductive Rights](#)

Mandatory Waiting Periods and Biased Abortion Counseling in Central and Eastern Europe

Article by Leah Hoctor and Adriana Lamačková of the Centre for Reproductive Rights has been published in the Ethical and Legal Issues section of the International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics. The article addresses the recent retrogressive introduction of mandatory waiting periods and biased counseling and information requirements prior to abortion in Central and Eastern Europe.

A number of Central and Eastern European countries have recently enacted retrogressive laws and policies introducing new pre-conditions that women must fulfill before they can obtain legal abortion services. Mandatory waiting periods and biased counseling and information requirements are particularly common examples of these new prerequisites. This article considers these requirements in light of international human rights standards and public health guidelines, and outlines the manner in which, by imposing regressive barriers on women's access to legal abortion services, these new laws and policies undermine women's health and well-being, fail to respect women's human rights, and reinforce harmful gender stereotypes and abortion stigma.

The published article [is online in PDF at Wiley Library](#).

Full text, as submitted [is online at SSRN](#).

UPCOMING EVENTS

The 62nd Session of Commission on the Status of Women

The 62nd Session of Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 62) will be held from 12 to 23 March 2018 at the UN headquarters in New York. This year's priority theme is "Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls" and the review theme is "Participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women". The official [registration](#) for CSW62 for ECOSOC-accredited NGOs is open through 27 January 2018.

The NGO Committee on the Status of Women organizes the NGO CSW Forum that includes an NGO CSW Forum Consultation Day, Reception, Conversation Circles and NGO CSW Forum Parallel Events during CSW 62. The [registration process](#) to attend the forum is open from 15 November to 7 March 2018.

The [registration for hosting parallel events](#) is open from 15 November to 15 December 2017.

The official website of CSW 62 can be found here: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw62-2018>

51st Session of the UN Commission on Population and Development

The 51st Session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD) will take place from 9 to 13 April 2018 at the UN Headquarters in New York. The theme of the session is "Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration." [Registration](#) for the CDP is open from 1 November 2017 to 16 March 2018.

More information can be found on the CPD website [here](#)

JOB OPPORTUNITY

Reproductive Health Matters (RHM) is looking for a Director and Editor-in-Chief to lead the organisation and international peer-reviewed journal. Deadline: 8 January 2018.

For more information please visit: <http://www.rhmatters.org/jobs-internships>

MEMBER OF THE MONTH

Albanian Center for Population and Development

The Albanian Center for Population and Development (ACPD) from Tirana is a non for profit association founded in 1993 and managed by volunteers who work for the improvement of the wellbeing and health of all the population in Albania, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized groups, through advocacy for the improvement of legislation and policies in the field of reproductive health and rights. ACPD, besides being an ASTRA member, is also an accredited member of the International Planned Parenthood Federation. It is also member of the Reproductive Health Coalition in Albania, the Coalition for the promotion of participation of women and girls in politics and decision making. ACPD is also an implementing partner of UNFPA.

ACPD has established its branches in some districts of Albania - such as "PO Center" in Tirana, "AULONA Center" in Vlora and "TROKITJA Center" in Shkodra.

ACPD mission is to respond to the changing sexual and reproductive health needs of the population, to protect/defend human rights, including Sexual and Reproductive Rights and to provide information and services, specifically to the vulnerable groups, youth and women.

In the framework of many of the ACPD's projects the main activities in the last two years are advocacy activities (i.e. drafting and advocating for the approval of the guideline and Protocols on Family Planning, youth friendly services (approved by the Ministry of Health); training courses (ACPD staff have acquired the expertise to conduct training courses or to facilitate them, trainings for young people and women have frequently been organized in leadership skills, human rights, health); services (ACPD has established two clinics that provide services to vulnerable groups. Women and young people living in rural areas and Roma community are provided services through mobile clinics in areas where access to health care is limited or even inexistent); and awareness raising through

numerous campaigns on the World AIDS Day, and The World Contraception DAY, 16 Days of Activism, 28th September Global Day for Safe and Legal Abortion etc.

Being an ASTRA Member is a great benefit for ACPD. “It is a great opportunity for our organization to get updated information on the situation in the region, where NGOs have to address a lot of common issues. ASTRA enables us as NGOs to share experience and it also contributes to our capacity building” said Lida Grabova, Executive Director.

Webiste: <http://acpd.org.al>

Social media: [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#)



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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