



## CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

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### BURNING ISSUE

#### Reproductive Rights violations in Croatia spark protests

*A Croatian parliamentarian told the story of her miscarriage, after which she was tied up in hospital and had curettage performed on her without anaesthesia. Organisations started collecting stories from other women who were mistreated at Croatian hospitals and the event sparked protest and debated across the country.*

MP Ivana Nincevic Lesandric's personal story of having an abortion after miscarriage in a Croatian hospital, which she shared in parliament has revived a public debate on the state of women's health care. Nincevic Lesandric, from the centre-right MOST [Bridge] party, explained the "extremely painful" procedure she underwent in which doctors tied her hands and legs before performing a curettage to remove tissues from inside the uterus – without anesthesia. She described the conditions as from the "15th century". "This was the 30 most painful minutes of my life," Nincevic Lesandric added, claiming that many Croatian women have experienced this.

"I sincerely regret that the loss of a child occurred (..) it does not work like that in Croatian hospitals" said Minister of Health, Milan Kujundzic, who has retained his position after a no-confidence vote failed to unseat him.

In only three days the organisation [Parents in Action - RODA](#), which advocates for dignified pregnancy, parenthood and childhood, collected and sent the minister 400 testimonies from women who had similar experiences. The slogan of the movement to stop violence against women in hospitals is **#BreakTheSilence / #PrekinimoŠutnju**

On Friday, October 19th at 9am, in front of the Croatian Parliament, activists from RODA and other organizations dedicated to women's health and women's rights read over twenty testimonials of women from all parts of Croatia. The testimonials spoke about the humiliation, pain, callousness and inadequate medical procedures they endured, endangering their mental and physical health and permanently deepening their distrust to the health system. The testimonials were also read in various cities across the country on October 19-20 as an additional warning to decision-makers that the time has finally come for the systematic protection of women from the reproductive violence they have endured in the public health system for years. Even though women's experiences are once again in the media and public spotlight, there can be no change without political action.

[RODA association calls for the urgent adoption of a Woman's Health Action Plan](#) which will include enforcement monitoring measures and adequate budget funds so that the power of these women's words can finally be channeled into actions, and so that women across the country are protected from humiliation, discrimination and reproductive violence. Women have the constitutional and legal right to quality healthcare services within the public health system – based on the principles of humanity, availability and patient co-decision making – which they pay for through health insurance and taxes. "Because of the experiences and trauma of all of us, thousands and thousands of women, we are calling for the adoption of this Action Plan right away, and by December 10th, 2018, the International Day of Human Rights. This Action Plan does not require any exceptional actions, only the systematic application of existing legal provisions, with strong and independent quality control measures, as well as measures for the prevention and sanctioning of abuse in healthcare. This is the only way that Croatia can in practice, and not merely declaratively, be ranked alongside the European countries with which it frequently likes to compare itself with in terms of the quality of healthcare provided," said Branka Mrzić Jagatić from the RODA association. A letter of support for the protest action "Stop the Silence!" was sent by the renowned gynecologist Dr. Jasenka Grujić Koračin, emphasizing that: "These latest events, that make me so sad and embarrassed, ashamed, are proof that in Croatia, declarations of human rights and women's right and only formally respected. The stigmatization and insults that women who are determined to defend their autonomy and privacy endure has spread to other areas, and to nearly all gynecological-obstetric activities. The state of medicine is a copy of the state of Croatian society that has become intolerant to others and to those who are different, and to women, which discriminates against women in relation to their reproductive function, and in that way is typical of clerical-conservative societies. This is not about the individual excesses of individuals without manners, this is about a real discriminatory and misogynistic process that we must resist together."

Watch the film on the situation in Croatia on [You Tube](#) and click [here](#) and [here](#) for media releases.

Source: [Parents in Action - RODA](#)

## REGIONAL UPDATES

### Participation of ASTRA Network in the UNECE regional ICPD+25 conference in Geneva

The 25th anniversary of the ground-breaking International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Geneva in the beginning of October 2018, assessed progress and identified gaps in the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action in the UNECE region. It focused on key actions for implementation and address the wider policy concerns related to: Population dynamics and sustainable development; Families, sexual and reproductive health over the life course; and Inequalities, social inclusion and rights.

Representatives of ASTRA Network participated in the CSO consultation held on September 30th and presented the [civil society statement](#) at the Conference to the UN and wider audience.

One of the main messages concerned the retrogressive policies and practices, legislation and practices related to sexual and reproductive health and rights, especially laws and policies that restrict access to abortion, emergency contraception, comprehensive sexuality education, as well as the failure to criminalize sexual and gender-based violence and restrict access to assisted reproductive technologies that represent human rights violations, particularly for women and girls, and the ability of other marginalized groups to make free and informed decisions related to their bodies. Another highlight of the statement was full support of the youth statement, and reference to Member States to ensure the inclusion of comprehensive sexuality education in schools as still a main gap to further increase the knowledge and skills of young people related to their sexuality as well as improve gender equality aspects.

Participants welcomed the report “[Fulfilling the Potential of Present and Future Generations](#),” which gives an overview of major trends in the region, and they expressed support for a new regional [Monitoring Framework](#) designed to track progress in implementing the ICPD Programme of Action and the SDGs (read [more](#)).

Organized jointly by UNECE and UNFPA, the Conference further aimed to strengthen the linkages between ICPD and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and reaffirm commitment to implementing the ICPD Programme of Action in the region. A report covering trends and developments since the last review in 2014 informed discussions at the Conference. The report and the Conference outcome, in the form of a Rapporteurs’ summary, will feed into the global review to take place at the 52nd Session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD) in 2019.

All conference materials can be found [here](#).

Read more in UNFPA’s press release [here](#)

## **My body, my rights! Manifesto of 343 European women for sexual and reproductive rights for all women in Europe**

343 women from 28 countries throughout Europe decided to stand up together for women's rights in the European Union and throughout the world. Feminist activists, politicians, or simple citizens, they launch today a common Manifesto -paying tribute to the Manifesto 343 which was released in France in 1971. With this call, they refuse to give up while confronting regressive policies in the continent, they refuse inequalities between European women, they claim for enlarging the right to safe and legal abortion in the EU.

The right to a safe and legal abortion has been hardly obtained in many European countries, and some women still do not have the choice over their own bodies. The rise of nationalisms and conservatism in the European Union put this right under threat, and some back moves are occurring from the East to the West, from the North to the South. This is unacceptable. Because this right is neither a whim, nor an option, but a necessity for a Europe of liberties, equality and democracy.

The right to a safe and legal abortion should be universal. It should be available for any woman. If the European Union pretends to be defending human rights, it should be willing enough to enforce this right throughout the EU and to promote it throughout the world.

We know that in some countries, taking a stand and defending this right is difficult, that sometimes even liberty of expression is threatened. This is why we wrote this Manifesto paying tribute to the first 343 Manifesto sent out at a time when defending this right was almost impossible.

This is why we stand together, and we say it out loud: for each one of us in the EU, and for all the women in the planet, we stand and will keep on standing up for our rights!

Read the full text of the manifesto [HERE](#)

The call is open for signatures: [343manifesto.eu](http://343manifesto.eu)

## **Number of abortions among minors in Azerbaijan triples in just one year**

Approximately 1,605 women in Azerbaijan aged 15–19 years had an abortion in 2017. Forty-six of these [were minors](#), while only 19 underage abortions were recorded the previous year. Azerbaijan also leads the region in terms of births by women under the age of 19. Experts attribute the surge in early pregnancies and abortions to children and adolescents learning about sex on the internet. However, neither parents nor teachers talk to children about sex as the topic is taboo in Azerbaijan, and premarital sex is frowned upon and considered sinful.

“Education and discussions should replace patriarchal traditions, but instead we have abortions and adolescent violence here. Teenagers have already realised and decided for themselves that they want to make love and live freely, yet nobody has explained to them how to do it responsibly, without harming themselves or others,” [says](#) sociologist Sanubar Heydarova.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education has decided to introduce the topic of [Sex Education](#) in schools. There has been much talk about the issue, but nothing has come of it until now. The ministry

promises the subject will be introduced this academic school year and that textbooks are ready. The new subject will be taught starting in grade six, and will aim to prevent adolescent pregnancy, abortions and sexually transmitted diseases.

The public seems largely divided on the matter:

“I think this is redundant. There’s no reason to pollute the minds of young children in elementary school or direct their thoughts toward the wrong topics. They already know everything very well at the ages of 12-15, or will soon find out anyways.”

“I hope these lessons won’t be taught by gym teachers or representatives of the Muslim Board of the Caucasus, otherwise the country will turn into one big den of vice.”

“I teach fifth grade. I tell students that a family should be built on love and respect, but when they hear the word ‘love’ they laugh.”

Source: <https://jam-news.net/?p=128141>

## **From ASTRA Members**

### **Efforts to influence gender inequality in Kazakhstan**

More than 2 million people live in the South Kazakhstan Region, where the practice of local traditions and customs – including such customs that violate women's rights – and where gender inequality is still common. Quite often women and girls from vulnerable populations have no access to education, lack knowledge on gender equality and, consequently, their rights are often violated. Despite the implemented gender policy in Kazakhstan, women are still discriminated against in the work place, they are forced into marriage and the rates of domestic violence are very high.

To combat gender inequality and discrimination against women, the NGO Legal Center for Women’s Initiatives “Sana Sezim” is carrying out the project “Raise the level of knowledge of vulnerable groups about gender equality through legal service and education” since September 2018, financed by the United States Embassy in Kazakhstan.

The objective of the project is to support 500 women and girls in improving and applying their knowledge of gender equality, including SRHR, and on organizational and legal mechanisms. Another objective is to educate 350 women, men, girls and boys about gender sensitivity and ethics of non-violence. To achieve the objectives, the NGO “Sana Sezim” is conducting following activities: provide legal assistance to vulnerable groups in the South Kazakhstan Oblast in Human Rights violations and crisis situations; train students through seminars about equal rights and opportunities of gender, sensitivity, ethics and non-violence; distribution of booklets about law on gender equality and existing legal and institutional assistance instruments.

This project aims to improve the situation of SRHR, gender equality among vulnerable groups, address it as a problem of equality between men and women and influence the status of women in the South Kazakhstan Region. It will also help women and girls from vulnerable population groups to overcome internal and external challenges, teach them how to effectively defend their rights, and

change their perceptions on gender equality. In Kazakhstan, gender equality is envisaged in national legislation and guaranteed in the Constitution. In practice however, women are lagging significantly behind men in their ability to realize and exercise their rights. The awareness on SRHR, gender equality and existing legal mechanisms in this field is low among citizens in the South Kazakhstan Oblast.

Source: [Sana Sezim](#)

### **HIT Project – Hate Interrupter Teams will engage youth to counteract hate speech towards migrants and minorities through participatory and creative campaigning**

Gender Alternatives Foundation is part of a new international project – HIT (Hate Interrupter Teams). The project aims at working with young people to build awareness of digital hate crime and provide strategies for support of people subject to hate speech. The initiative is funded by EU Justice and Fundamental Rights programme until September 2020.

The project will develop a new model of European youth empowerment to tackle racism, xenophobia, and discrimination aimed at migrants and minorities. It will engage young people from 14 to 19 years old to counteract hate speech or behavior towards migrants (HSBM) in their communities, at school or among their peers. Young members of the Hate Interrupter Teams will be trained through participatory and inclusive arts-based practices, facilitated by young mentors, workers, and practitioners.

The project started on the 1st October 2018, its duration is 24 months and it brings together nine (9) European partners from different countries: HFC Hope For Children CRC Policy Center (Cyprus – Leading Partner), Rinova Limited (UK), Collage Arts (UK), Associazione Culturale Mulab (Italy), Associacio Per A La Creacio I Estudis De Projectes Socials C.E.P.S. (Spain), “The Smile of the Child” (Greece), Frederick University (Cyprus), Metropolisnet-European Metropolis Employment Network Ewiv (Germany) and Gender Alternatives Foundation (Bulgaria).

Source: [Gender Alternatives Foundation](#)

## **GLOBAL UPDATES**

### **The Human Rights Defenders World Summit 2018**

The Human Rights Defenders World Summit was held on October 29th to 31st in Paris. The conference celebrated the progress made in protecting human rights defenders (HRDs) since the signing of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders on 9 December 1998. It was also an opportunity for HRDs to collectively reflect on and address the current and future challenges facing them. Following three days of discussion between human rights defenders, institutions and civil society members, States were called on to reaffirm their commitment to better protecting human rights defenders by adopting an action plan aimed at guaranteeing a favourable working environment for HRD in the years to come.

The Human Rights Defenders World Summit paid homage to the courage of HRDs who work tirelessly every day for human rights, justice, freedom and equality. It was also be an opportunity to present a unified voice and demand that States, economic actors (companies, international financial institutions) and other stakeholders to take their responsibility to promote and protect HRDs seriously by ensuring a safe environment for their work.

View the press pack [here](#)

Learn more here: <https://hrdworldsummit.org>

## RESOURCES

### **The power to choose the number, timing and spacing of children can bolster economic and social development, new UNFPA report shows**

The global trend towards smaller families is a reflection of people making reproductive choices to have as few or as many children as they want, when they want. When people lack choice, it can have a long-term impact on fertility rates, often making them higher or lower than what most people desire, according to The State of World Population 2018, published on October 17th by UNFPA, the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency.

Family size is closely linked with reproductive rights, which, in turn, are tied to many other rights, including the right to adequate health, education, and jobs. Where people can exercise their rights, they tend to thrive. Where these rights are stifled, people often fail to achieve their full potential, impeding economic and social progress, according to the new report, entitled, “The Power of Choice: Reproductive Rights and the Demographic Transition.”

“Choice can change the world,” UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Natalia Kanem writes in the report’s foreword. “It can rapidly improve the well-being of women and girls, transform families, and accelerate global development.”

When a woman has the power and means to prevent or delay a pregnancy, for example, she has more control over her health and can enter or stay in the paid labour force and realize her full economic potential.

The report found that no country can claim that all of its citizens enjoy reproductive rights at all times. Most couples cannot have the number of children they want because they either lack economic and social support to achieve their preferred family size, or the means to control their fertility. The unmet need for modern contraception prevents hundreds of millions of women from choosing smaller families.

Since the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, reproductive health and rights have substantially improved around the world. People have more information about their reproductive rights and choices, and a greater capacity to claim their rights. “The historic transition to lower fertility,” says the report, “has emerged through people claiming their right to make choices about their reproductive lives, and to have as few, or as many, children as they want, when they want.”

The report classifies all countries in the world by the current dynamics of their populations' fertility. It makes specific recommendations for policies and programmes that would help each country increase reproductive choices.

To make freedom of choice a reality, says the report, countries can prioritize universal access to quality reproductive health care, including modern contraceptives; ensure better education, including age-appropriate sexuality education; advocate for a change in men's attitudes to be supportive of the rights and aspirations of women and girls; and make it easier for couples to have more children, if they want them, by enabling greater work-life balance through measures such as affordable child care.

"The way forward is the full realization of reproductive rights, for every individual and couple, no matter where or how they live, or how much they earn," says the Dr. Kanem. "This includes dismantling all the barriers—whether economic, social or institutional—that inhibit free and informed choice."

You can access the report at <https://www.unfpa.org/swop>

### **Handbook for the Preparation of 2019 Voluntary National Reviews**

The 2019 Edition of the Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), prepared by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) is now [available](#). This is a handbook for country preparation and presentation of voluntary national reviews (VNRs). It should be read in conjunction with the Secretary General's proposal for voluntary common reporting guidelines for voluntary national reviews at the High-level Political Forum (HLPF). The Secretary General's guidelines are attached in the handbook as annex 2. This handbook supplements the Secretary-General's guidelines in that it provides basic, practical information on the steps that countries may take when preparing voluntary national reviews.

The meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2019 convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, will be held from Tuesday, 9 July, to Thursday, 18 July 2019; including the three-day ministerial meeting of the forum from Tuesday, 16 July, to Thursday, 18 July 2019. The theme will be " Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality". The set of goals to be reviewed in depth is the following:

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all;

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all;

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries;

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts;

Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels;



Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

The following countries from Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia have volunteered for the [2019 Voluntary National Reviews](#): Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Croatia, Kazakhstan, Serbia, Turkmenistan.

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

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### **16 days of Activism: Stop Violence against SRHR defenders!**

Join activists from across the world from November 25th to December 10th during the #16Days of Activism and share your stories as #SRHRheroes, speak out for the recognition of SRHR defenders as Women Human Rights Defenders and demand their protection!

On the occasion of the 16 Days of Activism Campaign, in solidarity with women's rights movements worldwide, and highlighting the courageous actions by activists around the globe working to protect and advance our sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), the Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR) calls for an end to the violence directed at SRHR defenders, as well as their recognition and protection as Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs).

As has been noted by UN Special Procedures as well as regional and Human Rights bodies, States must provide security for WHRDs as well as an enabling environment for them to do their work, as part of State responsibilities to respect, protect, and fulfill human rights. WHRDs who work on sexual and reproductive rights issues have been recognized at particular risk of grave consequences because of their work, as they are often perceived to be "challenging accepted socio-cultural norms, traditions, perceptions and stereotypes about femininity, [...] and the role and status of women in society." Not only are the advocacy efforts of SRHR activists often shunned, ignored or feared by broader society, but they often find their own lives and well-being at risk.

With this in mind, WGNRR calls on governments, international organizations, partners, and human rights advocates to recognize SRHR activists as WHRDs, particularly those who advocate for safe and legal abortion, LGBTQI rights, human rights in childbirth, sex workers' rights, and/or youth SRHR; and to end the violence they experience because of who they are and the work that they do. When governments permit attacks on WHRDs, including SRHR defenders, they impede human rights and perpetuate gender-based violence.

For this year's 16 Days of Activism, we:

- Demand that governments and Human Rights bodies:
- Pay particular attention to cases of WHRDs who have been threatened because of the nature of their work, and protect them from State and non-State actors that can violate their health, wellbeing and rights.

- Create and implement policies and mechanisms that will protect SRHR defenders' human rights, among them the rights to defend human rights; to liberty, freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association; and to freedom from violence and discrimination.
- Encourage international organizations to:
- Prioritize the recognition of SRHR Defenders as WHRDs in your work, and urge governments to take all necessary steps to create appropriate protection mechanisms and eradicate this form of violence.
- Within the framework of your mandates, develop standards for the protection of SRHR advocates, to be taken into account by States in the development of inclusive protection policies.

Finally, we are calling on all our members, partners, and allies to:

- HIGHLIGHT the courageous actions of our colleagues and friends– defenders of sexual and reproductive rights, particularly those who have lost their lives for this cause, and those who have been victims of repression, extremism, intolerance, attacks, threats or intimidation.
- SHARE your stories and experiences on social media using the hashtags #SRHRvoices #SRHRheroes and help us make visible the often silent struggles SRHR defenders have to endure every day as Women's Human Rights Defenders. Your story can help raise awareness about the violence that SRHR activists face on a daily basis and be a source of strength for thousands of SRHR defenders!

Give your story a voice and let your voice be heard #SRHRvoices #SRHRHeroes #SayNoToViolence

Source: [www.wgnrr.org](http://www.wgnrr.org)

### **“Act on Hope. How the European SRHR community can help unlock rights and care for all” – 2018 EuroNGOs Conference in Belgium**

The 2018 EuroNGOs Conference titled “Act on Hope. How the European SRHR community can help unlock rights and care for all” will take place in Gent (Belgium) on 6-7 November 2018. During this year's conference, we would like to examine how reproductive and sexual justice is linked with understanding and overcoming other forms of structural oppressions that pose a threat to democracy as well as prevent the meaningful exercise of political, social, cultural and economic rights of women and marginalized groups, in particular. A two-day dialogue will allow participants to identify the ways in which the SRHR community can work together within human rights groups and other actors with linking interests such as LGBT, Disability or Migration movements as well as it will help set up a 2019 SRHR agenda for Europe in which the partnership, it's members and allies can implement and act on.

You can read more about the conference's theme and objectives [here](#).

Source: <https://eurongos.events.idloom.com/2018conf>

## **UN Commission on the Status of Women 2019 deadlines**

The 2019 CSW will take place from 11<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2019 with the priority theme of *Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls*. Full information about NGO participation can be found [here](#).

- CSW63 registration for NGOs in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) will be open online via the United Nations Indico registration system from 9 October 2018 to 27 January 2019.
- Sign up for NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC to express interest in delivering an oral statement during the general discussion will be open online from 24 January to 18 February 2019. The link to the sign-up form will be posted [here](#) on 24 January 2019.
- Sign up for NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC wishing to express interest in intervening from the floor during an interactive panel will be open online from 24 January until 18 February 2019. The link to the sign-up form will be posted [here](#) on 24 January 2019.

## **Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice and Mama Cash launches the State of Funding for LBQ Movements global survey**

There is very little information available on the funding priorities, needs, and challenges of LBQ groups and the regions of Central Asia and Eastern Europe have always been underfunded and invisible when it comes to both women's and LGBTQI funding. The participation in this survey will help make the case for more and better resourcing for LBQ communities in this region and beyond.

Responses are due November 16!

Take the survey here - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/8ZH58SZ>

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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