



CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

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BURNING ISSUE

United Nation's Committee Against Torture issues a new report on abortion and sterilization of women with disabilities in Poland

The UN's Committee Against Torture is a body that monitors implementation of the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT). In June, CAT published the seventh periodic review of the Convention's implementation in Poland. Due to the review of Poland's compliance with the Convention against Torture one of our member

organisations, Federation for Women and Family Planning, along with Women Enabled International, Magdalena Szarota (Lancaster University and Association of Disabled Women. ONE.pl) and independent researchers Agnieszka Król and Agnieszka Wołowicz presented the Committee with an alternative report that has been quoted in the final document. Federation for Women and Family Planning writes on its website:

“The Committee in its last concluding observations expressed concerns about restrictions in Poland on access to abortion, especially for victims of rape, due to the refusal of some physicians and clinics to perform legal operations on the basis of conscientious objection. The Committee noticed that these restrictions lead women to resort to clandestine, often unsafe abortions with all the health risks they entail. The Committee recommended that the State party should ensure that women, especially victims of rape, who voluntarily decide to terminate their pregnancy have access to safe, legal abortions. In accordance with the 2012 World Health Organization technical and policy guidance on safe abortion, the State party should ensure that the exercise of conscientious objection does not prevent individuals from accessing services to which they are legally entitled. The State party should also implement a legal and/or policy framework that enables women to access abortion where the medical procedure is permitted under the law.

In the list of issues, the Committee asked Poland to provide information about measures taken to ensure that women, especially victims of rape, who voluntarily decide to terminate their pregnancy have access to safe, legal abortions.

This Supplemental Information is aimed at proving that no above mentioned measures have been taken or introduced by Polish authorities in order to ensure women effective access to abortion when they want and need such a medical procedure. The submission also shows that, at the same time, women with disabilities in Poland experience forced or coerced sterilization.”

CAT’s full report can be accessed [here](#).

The supplemental information provided by NGO’s and experts is also available [online](#).

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

REGIONAL UPDATES

Viktor Orbán's xenophobic and racist statement during III Budapest Demographic Summit

The III Budapest Demographic Summit took place in Budapest, Hungary in the beginning of September. The event that lasted two days was attended by several politicians, as well as activists and demographic experts. Czech Prime Minister, Andrej Babiš, and Serbia's president, Aleksandar Vučić could be found on the guest list, among others.

One of the Summit's main areas of focus was the so-called "replacement theory" – a right-wing theory that if Europe fails in attempts to rise continental birthrate, European population will be replaced with "non-natives". That narrative was rightfully named a rhetoric of fear and a "procreate or face extinction" approach. Viktor Orbán, Hungary's Prime Minister, gave a speech during the Summit:

"If Europe is not going to be populated by Europeans in the future and we take this as given, then we are speaking about an exchange of populations, to replace the population of Europeans with others. (...) There are political forces in Europe who want a replacement of population for ideological or other reasons."

Main patron of the event, Katalin Novák explained to the Guardian that "the Hungarian government doubled family spending between 2010 and 2019, with the goal of achieving "a lasting turn in demographic processes by 2030". Fertility rates have gone up from 1.2 to 1.5 children per woman, according to government figures."

Details about the Summit can be found on the event's [official website](#).

Source: [The Guardian](#)

Slovakian attempts to ban abortion

On 22nd of September over 50 000 Slovaks participated in a "National March for Life" held by the Catholic Church and one of the biggest far-right parties in Bratislava. The march was yet another Slovakian anti-choice initiative in the past few years. The most recent march was accompanied by a two-day programme, which on Sunday also featured a holy mass held in the Incheba Expo Arena in Bratislava.

Abortion is currently legal in Slovakia up to the 12th week of pregnancy. Protesters argued that law allows for "killing of unborn children". As Marek Michalčík, one of the organisers, told a popular

Slovakian newspaper SME Daily: "We want freedom for unborn children to be able to be born and live free human lives,".

Main postulates of the march included a ban of abortion in the country in order to “protect life from conception until natural death” and introduction of a legally guaranteed protection of a “unique status of the marriage of man and woman as an irreplaceable bond”.

Slovakian situation affects also Polish women, as the country is one of the most popular destinations for Poles seeking abortion abroad.

A more thorough description of the situation is available [here](#).

FROM ASTRA MEMBERS

A new joint UPR stakeholder report developed by the Women’s Resource Center and Sexual Rights Initiative

The report focuses on issues related to sexual and reproductive health including the prevalence of gender stereotypes and lack of comprehensive sexuality education which serve to limit access to abortion and other reproductive health needs of various groups of women in Armenia including women with disabilities, lesbian, bisexual, and trans* women, rural girls who are married as children, and women with HIV. The Universal Periodic Review of the Republic of Armenia will be during 35th Session on January 2020.

The full report is available [here](#).

The Module for gynecologists and obstetricians developed by the Women’s Resource Center Armenia has been accredited by the Ministry of Healthcare of Armenia

The Training Module on rights-based and non-discriminative approach on providing reproductive health services was developed by the “Advocates for Reproductive Health and Rights” network initiated by the Women’s Resource Center. The members of the network are human rights defenders and organizations working on different aspects of women’s rights. The Module for gynecologists and obstetricians has been accredited by the Ministry of Healthcare of Armenia. The realization of the reproductive rights of different groups of women and non-discriminatory approach by health care providers’ training course will be conducted for reproductive health service providers by the Women’s Resource Center. The aim of the training is to develop sensitive approach towards different groups of women who apply to reproductive health specialists.

In Armenia, marginalized groups of women face discrimination and biased attitude by healthcare providers. This training course will help to develop more sensitive approach towards different groups of women in Armenia.

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

Georgian SRHR coalition developing parallel report for Beijing+25

With the initiative of Association HERA XXI, the Coalition for Reproductive Health and Right was established in 2014, uniting 15 civil society organizations working on Women's Rights issues.

In 1995 Georgia has joined the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action. In 2019, the Government of Georgia presented national-level overview of issues related to gender equality and progress made in order to empower women. In the same year, Association HERA XXI and the coalition for Reproductive Health and Rights prepared a parallel report for the Beijing Platform. The Report reflects progress made in recent years in order to achieve gender equality. At the same time it highlights still existing obstacles faced by women, including nonexistence of age-specific and gender-sensitive sexual education, lack of competent information about sexual and reproductive health and rights, obstacles to access to modern methods of contraception, family planning and reproductive health services and barriers of health services, such as financial and geographical difficulties, stigma, legal barriers, the quality of the services and etc.

In September 2019, Association HERA XXI took part in the sub-regional consultation held in the framework of Beijing +25. The event brought together more than 100 representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), women's organizations and activists from Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Romania. The participants discussed common goals, achievements, and what remains to be done to ensure the full and equal participation of women in all spheres of life, including ensuring women's sexual and reproductive rights.

Participation in such processes represents a significant opportunity to highlight the importance of age-specific, gender-sensitive information and education about sexual and reproductive health and rights and the access to high-quality reproductive health services as a foundation principles for gender equality.

Source: [HERA XXI](#)

Reviewing and Revising National Abortion Protocols in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

The project “Bringing the WHO recommendations on safe abortion closer to women, in countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, by supporting the development of national clinical guidelines and protocols on unwanted pregnancy,” coordinated by the Reproductive Health Training Center (RHTC) in Moldova and supported by the Safe Abortion Action Fund, is making notable progress toward improving the quality of abortion services in the region.

Just under a year ago, a group of sexual and reproductive health experts from 12 Eastern European and Central Asian countries together launched the Regional Reproductive Health and Rights Coalition. As part of the aforementioned project, 6 Coalition member countries committed themselves to conducting a thorough review of existing national abortion protocols, including monitoring and evaluation plans, and revising their contents to be better aligned with the latest WHO recommendations.

During this time, RHTC has been in continuous contact with respective country coordinators, providing assistance and guidance when necessary. The ground that country coordinators and their teams have made has been tremendous. Five countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan) have already carried out detailed situational analyses evaluating access to and quality of abortion services and comparing their national protocols to international guidelines. The full analyses can be found on the Coalition’s [website](#) - they are currently only available in Russian, though the RHTC team is working to disseminate English translations in the near future.

Furthermore, one of the countries, Uzbekistan, has already applied the results of its situational analysis to revise its national abortion protocol. Having received additional input from RHTC, the team from Uzbekistan is currently adapting the protocol as necessary and will soon be prepared to present it for approval by the Ministry of Health. Likewise, other participating countries are now following suit, collectively working to assure that their protocols are in congruence with WHO recommendations.

In the coming months, country coordinators and their teams will continue their collaborative efforts to achieve project objectives and advance women’s fundamental right to safe abortion.

Source: [Reproductive Health Training Center](#)

International Safe Abortion Day 2019 in Poland

This year's 28 September theme is "Abortion is Healthcare" with the tagline "My Right to Decide!" and hashtag #MyAbortionMyHealth. In The Federation we have always seen abortion as a matter of health, self-determination, freedom and democracy. Therefore, our input to the celebration of September, 28 is the photo contest and exhibition entitled "Abortion. Poland. 21st century".

We have decided to organise the photo competition in order to use art as means of reflection on the situation of women in Poland. Our goal was to have members of the wider public – artists, activists, observers and others – use photography as a tool for diagnosing and showing us the whole spectrum of social phenomena, paradoxes, manipulations and outright lies that surround abortion in Poland today. Three years after the massive mobilization of the #BlackProtest and #WomensStrike, we are seeking to encourage women and their supporters to show us how they go around the restrictive laws. We know that this is exactly what happens and it is estimated that around 130k Polish women terminate their pregnancies annually.

We wanted to see how something as normal as abortion became so emotionally charged – because in order to normalize abortion and re-start the conversation and public debate around it we need to underline this hypocrisy and yawning gap between the public discourse, the law, and the reality of life that's made of choices, including the one on terminating one's pregnancy.

The photography was chosen so as to allow the public to represent both individual and social consequences of living in the country where abortion is illegal apart from 3 exceptions, but even then hardly accessible.

On 27th of September we will hold a vernissage and award authors of the best photographs chosen by the jury. We will also present the photo album which combines most moving photographs with text that shed more light on abortion realities in Poland. The exhibition will be open for public up to October, 5.

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

NO GAPS Innovative Database of good practices on socio-labor intervention with young women, asylum seekers and refugees

The No Gaps Project aims to create an integral and replicable methodology of intervention at European level for professionals working with young migrant women, asylum-seekers and refugees. The activities focus on increasing the capacities of professionals, working with vulnerable groups of

women, to better understand their needs, facilitate their participation in society and increase their prospects for finding a decent employment. The access to professional training is a key to guarantee a successful integration.

The innovative No Gaps Database (<https://nogaps.eu/database.php>) is especially designed to reflect the latest developments in the professional work with women asylum seekers and migrants. It aims at providing a comprehensive list of good practices, programs, policies, methodologies, pedagogical approaches and resources in:

- Social work intervention with women asylum seekers.
- Recognition of previous competences.
- Detection of needs and individualized itineraries.
- Promotion of social inclusion through volunteering and participation.

Professionals can find inspiration by identifying new approaches that have positive impact in the lives of women! One can access the database on the No Gaps website (<https://nogaps.eu>) which is available in five European languages – English, German, Spanish, Greek and Bulgarian.

The project "No Gaps - Transnational methodology for socio-labor intervention with young women asylum seekers and refugees" (2018-2-ESO2-KA205-011654) is co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European union. The duration of the project is 24 months /01.09.2018 - 31.08.2020/.

The partnership consortium consists of five EU organizations – Guarani NGO (ES), Solidaridad sin Fronteras (ES), KEK IEKEP (GR), BEST Institut für berufsbezogene Weiterbildung und Personaltraining GmbH (AT), Gender Alternatives Foundation (BG).

Source: [Gender Alternatives Foundation](#)

RESOURCES

New study available online – “Exploring stigma and social norms in women’s abortion experiences and their expectations of care”

Abstract: Abortion is a common and essential component of sexual and reproductive health care, yet social norms and stigma influence women’s decision-making and create barriers to safe abortion care. This qualitative study in Kenya and India explores abortion-related fears, expectations and perceptions of stigma among women who have obtained abortion services. In

2017, we conducted 34 semi-structured interviews and 2 focus groups with women who had obtained abortion services in Maharashtra state in India and Thika and Eldoret in Kenya. Thematic analysis was informed by the individual-level abortion stigma framework and theory of normative conduct. We aimed to learn about the diversity of women's experiences, analysing pooled data from the two countries. Most participants reported that before seeking abortion they had little prior knowledge about the service, expected to be judged during care, and feared the service would be ineffective or have negative health consequences. Many reported that community members disapprove of abortion and that a woman's age or marital status could exacerbate judgement. Some reported limiting disclosure of their abortion to avoid judgement. Negative stories, the secrecy around abortion, perceived stigma, social norms, and fear of sanctions all contributed to women's fears and low expectations. These findings elucidate the relationship between social norms and stigma and how expectations and concerns affect women's experiences seeking care. The results have implications for practice, with potential to inform improvements to services and help organisations address stigma as a barrier to care. This may be particularly relevant for younger or unmarried women.

Source: [Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting in Geneva, Switzerland - 29-30 X

The Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting provides a forum for UNECE member States to review progress and identify challenges in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The meeting will be held on 29-30 October 2019 in the Palais des Nations, Geneva, and is jointly organized by UNECE and the UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia.

The regional review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly is in the context of preparations for the global Beijing +25 review in 2020. The review will also include an assessment of current challenges that affect the implementation of the Platform for Action and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and its contribution towards the full realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Source: [UNECE](#)

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 - Novgorod 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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