



## **CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights**

**No 02 (199) 2021**

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### **BURNING ISSUE**

#### **Over 80% of Polish women aged under 40 oppose new abortion restrictions, finds poll**

Among women in Poland aged 18 to 40, only 2% say they support the recent near-total ban on abortion, while 7% want a complete ban, according to a new poll. By contrast, the largest proportion (44%) want abortion to be available on demand.

Meanwhile, after much pressure to take a stance on this issue, Poland's main opposition party, the centrist Civic Platform (PO), has issued a new position on abortion. It favours not just returning to the previous status quo, but liberalising access to terminations.

In the new [Kantar poll for Polityka](#) – the first to look specifically at the women most directly affected by the abortion law – a plurality of 44% expressed the view that abortion should be available on demand up to the 12th week of pregnancy.

A further 38% said that they support the status quo prior to the recent change, when pregnancies could be terminated in three cases: if they threatened the mother's life or health, if they resulted from rape or incest, or if the foetus suffered from severe defects.

Only 2% said that they support the [current situation](#), introduced by a Constitutional Tribunal [ruling](#) that banned the last of those three options (which made up almost all legal terminations in Poland). A further 7% want a complete ban on abortion and 9% did not express a position. (...)

Polling has [consistently shown](#) that, among the Polish population as a whole, a large majority oppose the anti-abortion ruling and support the mass protests that have emerged in opposition to it. However, most favour a return to the previous status quo rather than a liberalisation of access to abortion.

The new Kantar poll of women finds that the youngest respondents (aged 18 to 24) were the most strongly in favour liberalisation, with 57% supporting abortion on demand and 29% favouring a return to the previous status quo.

Likewise, 60% women in urban areas want abortion to be available on demand while 35% support a return to the status quo. In more rural areas, which are generally more conservative, the figures are 37% and 39% respectively. (...)

Source: [Notes from Poland](#)

## REGIONAL UPDATES

### **The European Commission and UN Women boost their partnership to address the rise in violence against women amid the pandemic in the Western Balkans**

The European Commission and UN Women, joined by over 60 representatives from governments and civil society organizations, launched a new component within the EU-funded UN Women regional programme "[Ending violence against women in the Western Balkans and Turkey: Implementing Norms, Changing Minds](#)," to accelerate and strengthen the response to the surge in violence against women and girls amidst the pandemic in the Western Balkans.

*“The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated gender inequalities. Domestic violence has increased due to the strict confinement measures. This why we have more than doubled our contribution to this programme, bringing it to €6,25 million. This EU funding is helping many women and girls in the Western Balkans and Turkey to access services such as shelters, legal aid and psychological counselling. Enhanced dialogue and cooperation between governments and civil society organizations is key to address the root causes of violence against women,”* said Genoveva Ruiz Calavera, Director for Western Balkans, Directorate General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations. (...)

The programme is also expected to address the economic vulnerabilities of women survivors and their societal reintegration. Additionally, more efforts will be dedicated to working with perpetrators of domestic violence to increase women’s and children’s safety and well-being by interrupting and preventing perpetrators’ violent behaviour. Improving the collection and analysis of data on femicides will be a key component of the programme to identify gaps in the intervention, criminal justice and criminal procedures systems. (...)

Jasna Zečević, Director of the Association Vive žene from Bosnia and Herzegovina, said: “Although COVID-19 has absolutely made it difficult for all of us, especially the work of safe houses, the time of the pandemic has also shown that solidarity and commitment can help us overcome crisis situations. In this sense, the significance and impact of the support of the international community is immeasurable.”

Source: [UN Women \(Europe and Central Asia\)](#)

### **NGO points to high number of teenage pregnancies in Romania**

Close to a quarter (23%) of the teenage mothers in the European Union come from Romania, according to Eurostat data from 2018 quoted by the NGO Salvati Copiii Romania.

Out of the 199,720 births in 2019, 749 involved mothers younger than 15 and 17,933 mothers aged between 15 and 19, the NGO said, quoting data from the National Statistics Institute (INS). (...) Less than 2% of the teenage mothers said they interacted with the public social services, according to a 2020 inquiry of the NGO.

“We express our concern regarding the high number of pregnancies among girls younger than 15 and 19,” Gabriela Alexandrescu, executive president of Salvați Copiii Romania, said, quoted by [Agerpres](#). (...)

“The high distance to medical practices, the lack of resources to pay for the transportation, and the lack of information on the medical services required during pregnancy prevent many teenage mothers in underprivileged rural areas to see a doctor; many times they wait until things get worse or resort to self-medication during pregnancy. These mothers need additional support, so neither they nor the newborns are in risk situations,” Alexandrescu said. (...)

Source: [Romania Insider](#)

### **Ion Jitari: ‘We have invested enough in school fences. It’s time to invest in education for gender equality’**

(...) Ion Jitari is the mentor of one of the four Fathers’ Clubs newly opened in Moldovan Falesti district. He gathers fathers and fathers-to-be in the Falestii Noi village and together they try to find answers to each other’s questions about the role of men and women in family and society, raising and educating children, and sharing household chores.

*‘While previously we were getting involved in infrastructure development projects for educational institutions, we now realize that we have invested enough in school fences and it’s time we invested in people, so that we will have a generation brought up in the spirit of gender equality’,* said Ion Jitari when asked about his motivation to get involved in challenging gender stereotypes and promoting gender equality in his community.

*‘Not many young men attended the first discussion at the club. Only a few joined. However, more of them came to the next meeting. But I think that the fact that men with different views met in the same room and shared vies, made the skeptics go home with a seed of change,’* he added. (...)

Ion believes that Fathers’ Clubs, like the one he mentors, should be replicated all over the country as an important step towards uprooting the gender stereotypes that delay the development of the entire society.

Source: [UNFPA Moldova](#)

## FROM ASTRA MEMBERS

### **Geo-Targeting and Search Optimization Tactics Now Being Used By Anti-Choice Group in Moldova**

Last spring, shortly after the launch of medical abortion (MA) via telemedicine in Moldova, a local anti-abortion organization wrote a letter to the prime minister requesting the creation of a network of “crisis pregnancy centers” across the country, as popularized by the anti-choice movement in the United States. The Ministry of Health shared the letter with the Reproductive Health Training Center (RHTC), the coordinating organization of the MA via telemedicine service, and RHTC responded by submitting a well-reasoned, evidence-based letter to the Secretary General of the Moldovan government and sharing it with local and international health and human rights organizations. Since then, local anti-abortion activists have been relatively silent.

Nevertheless, RHTC recently came across a suspicious site claiming to offer support to women seeking abortion services. Whereas the RHTC website usually appeared first in Google when searching “avort” (abortion in Romanian), it was quite a surprise to now find a new site, [www.avort.info](http://www.avort.info), at the top of the search results. Having some familiarity with the many tactics that anti-abortion centers use in the United States to lure women in, RHTC decided to have one of its female staff members call and pretend to be seeking abortion services. For the next two weeks, she was repeatedly contacted, pressured to keep “her pregnancy,” promised monthly financial support for raising “the child,” and asked to have an ultrasound to confirm that “the pregnancy” was still viable.

The RHTC team immediately regrouped and discussed how to react. First, the team wrote an article and posted it to their website and Facebook page, cautioning pregnant people to beware of fake clinics, without directly mentioning the site address or the organization that is likely behind them. The article can be found on the RHTC website in Romanian and Russian [here](#). Then, RHTC discussed with a local human rights lawyer, who provided useful suggestions regarding what can be done more directly in order to stop the flow of misinformation and manipulation of pregnant people’s right to make informed decisions about their reproductive health. A more concrete strategy is being developed and should be put into motion soon.

Source: [Reproductive Health Training Center](#)

### **Sarajevo Open Center targets sexual violence in 8 March campaign**

Sarajevo Open Centre is preparing a video campaign on sexual harassment and sexual violence for this year's celebrations of International Women's Day. Since January, there have been testimonials of women and men [on social media](#) about sexual violence experiences, therefore we decided to devote our 8 March campaign this year to this very important topic. The stream of public statements was started by a Serbian actress' testimonial of being raped and continuously sexually harassed by her acting teacher.

Based on what came out as an issue from reading those statements, our video campaign will focus on advice to parents (and families in general) on how to create a safe and supporting environment for their children who experience sexual violence, but are afraid to report it or even talk to anyone. We are planning on including psychologist's advice for parents on how to approach their children in such situations, how to talk to them on those issues, what kind of behaviour to focus their attention on. The campaign will air in the week from 8 March to 12 March 2021.

Source: [Sarajevo Open Center](#)

### **PaRiter conducted research on menstrual poverty in Croatia - here are the devastating results and recommendations on how to improve the situation**

PaRiter, a feminist organization from Rijeka, Croatia, conducted a national online survey on menstrual poverty - the first of its kind in Croatia and one of few within the European Union. The research on menstrual poverty and stigma aimed at gathering information on the use, consumption, and availability of menstrual products, the conditions of maintaining menstrual hygiene, and the shame associated with menstruation. Data were collected through an online questionnaire from mid-September to early October 2020. The survey was open to persons older than 16 who have had menstruation within the previous year, regardless of their gender. More than 6,000 people filled in the questionnaire. The statements in the questionnaire written in the female gender, as well as those in the survey report, are gender-neutral and more than 6000 people participated. The research points out several key issues faced by people who menstruate: 1. Menstrual shame and embarrassment; 2. Being judged and not understood by society; 3. Inability to maintain adequate menstrual hygiene; 4. Not being familiar with various types of menstrual supplies; 5. Lack of availability of menstrual products and pain relievers during menstruation; 6. Missing work, school or university classes due to menstrual pain, lack of menstrual products or inadequate hygienic conditions. Kindly find the full research report [here](#).

Results of the research are accompanied by recommendations, written by Doc. dr. sc. Ana Marija Sikirić Simčić (Faculty of economy, University of Rijeka), an expert in gender-sensitive

budgeting. Considering the fact that menstrual health is key to reaching gender equality and promoting the health of people who menstruate, further recommendations will be given on how to alleviate these problems, improve menstrual health and decrease menstrual poverty in Croatia, as well as negative environmental impacts of menstrual products. These recommendations have several goals: 1. Increasing the level of health education on the topic of menstruation for people who menstruate but also for the people who do not menstruate; 2. Providing basic hygienic conditions and availability of menstrual products in workplaces, schools, and universities; 3. Encouraging reusable menstrual products for the purpose of decreasing negative environmental impacts of single-use products; 4. Lessening the financial burden of menstrual products on the household budget. Please find the recommendations [here](#).

Source: [PaRiter](#)

### **B.a.B.e. addresses digital violence against women in a new campaign**

SURF&SOUND is new project carried out by B.a.B.e. aimed at combating violence against women, which persists in digital spaces. The main objective of the project is to actively raise awareness about online violence against women and form mechanisms of its prevention and suppression.

Integrated mechanisms of prevention and combating online violence will consist of an online platform with information, advice and tools for self-protection and reporting, as well as multiple forms of psychological and legal support for victims. Awareness-raising activities will take place as part of a national campaign to inform the general population about the issue and victims' rights and to promote reporting, as well as to offer policy solutions.

The target groups are women (potential) victims of cyber violence, experts involved in combating violence and victim support, online media professionals and the general population.

In Croatia there are no exact statistical reports regarding the extent of online gender based violence, however its presence and great impact are not disputable, especially among the younger population of women brought up in the society in which internet and social media are of prevalent relevance in everyday life. This has also been confirmed by specific cases we encounter in our legal and psychological counselling intended to provide expert assistance to women victims of domestic violence and other forms of abuse, where there is a noticeable trend of increasing complaints about violence experienced by women in the virtual world. The Internet has become a battlefield for dissatisfied partners after emotional relationships are ended, when victims are no longer in close

physical surrounding of the perpetrator and thus direct physical or verbal violence is replaced by online violence.

We expect that our efforts will lead to increased understanding of the phenomenon of online violence against women among relevant stakeholders and the general public, increased reporting of online violence against women and developed integrated model for providing victim support and reducing/eliminating violence against women on the Internet.

Source: [B.a.B.e.](#)

### **Women's Resource Center on the success of Armenian Sexual Health Week**

From February 8 to 14, the world celebrated "Sexual health" week. This year's theme was youth-friendly care with the slogan "[Youth-Friendly Care: It's your right!](#)" We joined the celebration raising awareness on issues young women, girls, and nonbinary people face with medical service providers. [Our 2020 storybook](#) highlights the issues women face when it comes to medical care- from it being inaccessible to women in villages to being discriminatory towards LBT women and nonbinary people. Our campaign also highlighted how disabled people often find medical facilities inaccessible and how HIV-positive people are discriminated against by medical professionals. We stressed the need for training programs for medical professionals, especially OBGYN-s to combat the above-mentioned issues. Our program manager also gave an [interview](#) to "Women's Voice Armenia" Radio talking about the work we do with training medical professionals as well as our awareness-raising campaigns both offline and online.

### **March 8 celebration: "Women in Crisis" human library**

On the occasion of Women's Rights Day, March 8, the Women's Resource Center will implement the "Women in Crisis" human library, which aims to make the impact of the crisis situation of the last year (war and COVID-19) on women visible.

During the human library people will have the opportunity to hear the story of 6 women with the following experiences:

- Documentalist-Journalist covering the war
- Medical worker working with covid cases



- A social worker who has work with domestic violence cases during the pandemic
- The victim of domestic violence
- A woman who implemented educational and humanitarian assistance programs for the people of Artsakh during the war
- A gynecologist who implemented support programs for pregnant women in Artsakh during the war and post-war period.

Taking into account that anti-gender and anti-feminist movement is very active in Armenia during these days, we decided to keep the event close: only our beneficiaries, members and allies will be able to participate.

Source to both previous entries: [Women's Resource Center](#)

### **Hungarian PATENT celebrates International Women's Day**

For International Women's Day, PATENT (alongside other Hungarian women's rights organisations) launched a campaign called WHAT ARE YOU (NOT) GOING TO DO ON WOMEN'S DAY? Our main goal is to invite all people to rebel on March 8th. The call encourages participants to show their unwillingness to conform to traditional gender-based expectations on this day or in general.

By using hashtags like #microrebellion #womensday2021 #donttellingmewhattodo #genderroles we hope to have a collection of social media posts proving that Hungarian women are done with restrictive gender roles and discrimination.

Source: [PATENT](#)

### **"BEE" international gender equality programme launched**

"Boosting Gender Equality in Education" is the title of a recently launched transnational project on the topic of gender equality education in early childhood, funded by the European Union under the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Program, involving NGO partners from Italy, Romania, Lithuania and Cyprus.

The project will offer kindergartens and primary schools training opportunities for educators, administrative staff and decision-makers in addressing gender stereotypes in various educational

contexts. The trained staff will also participate in designing and testing educational toolkits adapted to their national contexts.

The project supports the implementation of the EU Strategy for Gender Equality for the timeframe 2020- 2025 and emphasises early childhood interventions for the prevention of violence against women and girls. The project is led by COSPE in Italy and includes the following partners: Association for Liberty and Equality of Gender - A.L.E.G. (Romania), Women's Information Center (Lithuania), Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies (Cyprus), and Casa delle Done in Pisa (Italy). Project timeframe: 2021-2022.

Source: [A.L.E.G.](#)

## RESOURCES

### **A new paper overviewing different policy responses to SRHR during COVID-19**

*During COVID-19, abortions were banned in six countries and suspended in one. Surgical abortion was less available due to COVID-19 in 12 countries/regions and services were not available or delayed for women with COVID-19 symptoms in eleven. No country expanded its gestational limit for abortion. Changes during COVID-19, mostly designed to reduce in-person consultations, occurred in 13 countries/regions. Altogether eight countries/regions provided home medical abortion with mifepristone and misoprostol beyond 9weeks (from 9 weeks+6 days to 11 weeks+6 days) and 13 countries/regions up to 9weeks (in some instances only misoprostol could be taken at home). Only six countries/regions offered abortion by telemedicine.*

*The lack of a unified policy response to COVID-19 restrictions has widened inequities in abortion access in Europe, but some innovations including telemedicine deployed during the outbreak could serve as a catalyst to ensure continuity and equity of abortion care.*

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

### **Gestational age limits for abortion and cross-border reproductive care in Europe: a mixed-methods study**

*Little is known about the experiences of women who travel within Europe for abortion care from countries with relatively liberal laws. This paper aims to assess the primary reasons for travel among*

*a sample of women who travelled from European countries with relatively liberal abortion laws to obtain abortion care mainly in the UK and the Netherlands.*

*Study participants overwhelmingly reported travelling for abortion because they had exceeded GA limits in their country of residence. Participants also reported numerous delays and barriers to receiving care.*

*Our findings highlight the need for policies that support access to abortion throughout pregnancy and illustrate that early access to it is necessary but not sufficient to meet people's reproductive health needs.*

Read the paper [here](#).

## UPCOMING EVENTS

*Due to global epidemic of COVID-19, all upcoming events requiring physical interactions have been cancelled or indefinitely postponed. Other events are mostly organised online, usually as webinars.*

### **46th regular session of the Human Rights Council - 22 February-23 March 2021**

United Nations Human Rights Council is in session until 23<sup>rd</sup> March. When it comes to CEE region, the session's agenda includes consideration of High Commissioners report on human rights violations in Belarus and Ukraine, Bulgarian and Croatian UPRs, and a discussion on Sustainable Development Goals. Specific list of topics is available [online](#), alongside the [agenda](#), and the proceedings are being [transmitted](#).

### **UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development – 10-16 March 2021**

The 2021 UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development will uncover concrete policy actions to accelerate SDG progress and spur the efforts to build back better. The Regional Forum will offer seven days of SDG action with 12 virtual peer learning [round tables](#) taking place from 10-16 March 2021, followed by the Forum's hybrid plenary [sessions](#) on 17-18 March 2021. The 2021 Regional Forum will also give space to a range of discussions in [20+ side events](#) and various [pre-meetings](#).

Learn more about the upcoming event [here](#).

Source: [UNECE](#)

### **65th CSW – 15-26 March 2021**

The sixty-fifth session of the [Commission on the Status of Women](#) will take place from 15 to 26 March 2021. In light of the evolving COVID-19 situation, and taking into account the latest guidance from the United Nations Secretary-General and the World Health Organization (WHO), CSW65 will take place in a hybrid format with mostly virtual meetings.

Representatives of [Member States](#), UN entities, and [ECOSOC-accredited non-governmental organizations \(NGOs\)](#) from all regions of the world are invited to attend the session.

This year's priority theme is women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

Learn more on CSW's official [website](#).

### **Generation Equality Forum in Mexico**

The Generation Equality Forum will kick off in Mexico City 29-31 March 2021, hosted by the Government of Mexico. Registration is now open at [this link](#), and an FAQ about the event is available [here](#).

With civil society at its core, the Generation Equality Forum Mexico Forum will reinforce the power and voice of feminist movements and youth and the commitment and action of different stakeholders, including high level representatives from Member States, the private sector and international organizations.

By analyzing progress and gaps since the 1995 Beijing Women's conference, including the heightened urgency posed by the COVID crisis, the event will make the case for strengthened intergenerational and transformative feminist leadership and accelerated action on gender. (...)

The event will include a series of dialogues that will address the structural and systemic obstacles that prevent full gender equality and the human rights of women and girls. It presents a historic opportunity to promote the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, is aligned with the feminist foreign policy promoted by the Government of Mexico.

Source: [Generation Equality Forum](#)

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; BOCS Foundation; 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; Ponton Group of Sex Educators; 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; Romania – SEXUL vs BARZA/SEX vs THE STORK; 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

Prepared by Antonina Lewandowska

**ASTRA Secretariat**

Federation for Women and Family Planning  
Nowolipie 13/15, 00-150 Warsaw, Poland  
ph/fax +48 22 635 93 95, [federa@astra.org.pl](mailto:federa@astra.org.pl)  
[www.astra.org.pl](http://www.astra.org.pl)

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