



## CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

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### BURNING ISSUE

#### **European Court of Human Rights to consider Polish Women's complaints on the abortion ban**

In April 2021 we started the [Women's Collective Complaint campaign](#). Its aim was to encourage Polish women to send applications to the European Court of Human Rights in connection with the [decision](#) of the so-called Constitutional Tribunal that banned abortion due to severe fetal defects.

The European Court of Human Rights has just announced that it will deal with the merits of some of the complaints that it has received. This means that the ECHR sees the possibility of at least a POTENTIAL VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS in a situation where women of reproductive age in Poland are afraid to get pregnant because of the restrictive abortion law.

ECHR will consider three groups of four cases each, that is a total of 12 complaints against Poland. These are not the only applications that have been lodged as part of the campaign, because the European Court of Human Right has chosen the stories that most appealed to it. Perhaps there will be more communications, but these 12 cases are also a success!

An excerpt from one of the stories:

*I'm 27 years old and I'm getting married soon. Recently, the doctors have discovered that my partner had chromosomal complications. My chances of a healthy pregnancy are less than 50%, there is a high risk of chromosomal abnormalities in the fetus and that it will die shortly after birth. I would like to be able to make the decision to terminate such pregnancy. Without it, I am afraid to even try to fight for the longed-for motherhood.*

*The complainants are now going to have to exchange letters with the Polish government, in which our Legal Team will gladly help for free. All persons who have received a letter from the ECHR are asked to come forward to the Federation – says Kamila Ferenc, a lawyer and deputy director for program affairs of the Federation for Women and Family Planning.*

*We are now waiting for the government's position on this matter. We also encourage anti-discrimination organizations and those defending women's rights to submit applications to the ECHR to be able to state their positions as "friends of the court" (amicus curiae) – says Agata Bzdyń, a legal counselor and member of the Federation's Legal Team, as well as a co-author of a complaint template in the Women's Collective Complaint campaign.*

Monika Gąsiorowska, attorney-at-law and member of the Legal Team since its beginning, has also participated in the works on the complaint templates.

LINKS TO THE COMMUNICATED CASES:

- 1) [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{%22documentcollectionid%22:\[%22COMMUNICATEDCASES%22\],%22itemid%22:\[%22001-211179%22\]}](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{%22documentcollectionid%22:[%22COMMUNICATEDCASES%22],%22itemid%22:[%22001-211179%22]})
- 2) [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{%22documentcollectionid%22:\[%22COMMUNICATEDCASES%22\],%22itemid%22:\[%22001-211177%22\]}](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{%22documentcollectionid%22:[%22COMMUNICATEDCASES%22],%22itemid%22:[%22001-211177%22]})
- 3) [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{%22documentcollectionid%22:\[%22COMMUNICATEDCASES%22\],%22itemid%22:\[%22001-211176%22\]}](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{%22documentcollectionid%22:[%22COMMUNICATEDCASES%22],%22itemid%22:[%22001-211176%22]})

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

## REGIONAL UPDATES

### European Parliament declares abortion access a human right

The European Parliament on Thursday easily passed a divisive resolution that proclaimed the safe access to abortion is a human right — an effort to confront countries such as Poland and Malta, where women’s rights are being restricted.

The resolution urges EU countries to recognize that any interference with access to contraception, fertility treatment, maternity care and abortion “constitute breaches of human rights.” It implores countries to “condemn any attempt to limit access” to these services.

The measure passed with 378 MEPs voting in favor and 255 voting against.

The text — drafted by Predrag Fred Matić, a Croatian Socialist MEP — is also critical of the so-called “conscience clause,” which allows doctors to deny abortion access if they don’t believe in it. Withholding abortions “on grounds of religion or conscience,” the text says, “endangers women’s lives and rights.”

The measure — which the Parliament’s Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality overwhelmingly backed in May — primarily targets countries such as Poland and Malta, which ban or [restrict access to abortion](#). It also chides governments that limited or revoked reproductive services during the coronavirus pandemic.

“This vote marks a new era in the European Union and the first real resistance to a regressive agenda that has trampled on women’s rights in Europe for years,” Matić said in a statement.

Though the resolution is non-binding and its main message consensus-based, the text [drew intense criticism](#) from a group of conservative MEPs, buttressed by pro-life organizations waging a fierce anti-abortion campaign.

The center-right European People’s Party and the European Conservative and Reformists even offered two alternative texts to Matić’s text. Both options said abortion and reproductive services should be left to individual countries, not the EU.

The outrage over the Matić resolution went beyond the European Parliament. In Poland, Ordo Iuris, a fundamentalist organization, put out a petition called [“Stop the Matić report.”](#)

On Thursday, a vast majority of MEPs from the EPP group, including its leader Manfred Weber, voted against the text, according to a voting list released by the Parliament.

“Abortion is not a human right,” Rosa Estaràs Ferragut, a Spanish MEP from the EPP said during the plenary debate prior to the vote. “It could be a legal right, that’s accepted in some member states, but it’s not a human right.”

She added: “You can’t ideologize a human right, this is not democracy and this is not what I want to see in Europe.”

Source: [Politico](#)

### **Georgia: Tbilisi Pride cancelled amid violent protests**

LGBT activists in Georgia have cancelled a gay rights event after their office was stormed by far-right protesters. Journalists and activists were also attacked ahead of the planned march in the capital Tbilisi, local reports say.

"We cannot risk human lives and take to the streets, which are full of violent attackers," Tbilisi Pride announced.

The attacks have been condemned by a number of embassies, who have called for authorities to stop the violence.

Activists had organised five days of Pride events, but in a statement on Monday, Tbilisi Pride said local authorities had "not only failed to secure safety of the queer community and our supporters, but actively hampered us from exercising the right of assembly" ahead of the planned march.

At least 20 journalists were reportedly injured in the violence, while an LGBT rainbow flag was burned in the street.

[In a joint statement issued on Monday](#), the US, UK, the EU and a number of other diplomatic missions called on Georgian authorities "to act swiftly to protect those exercising their constitutional rights to freedom of expression and assembly, to protect journalists exercising freedom of the press, and to publicly condemn violence".

Georgia's interior ministry had previously called on the organisers to cancel the Pride march due to safety concerns, while Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili described the event as "unacceptable for a large segment of the Georgian society".

However, another activist group said the government had failed to offer security to activists and journalists and was "responsible for today's violence".

The Georgian Orthodox Church, which strongly opposes LGBT activists, had also called for a public prayer meeting against the Pride event.

While discrimination against sexual orientation is illegal in Georgia, the country - which lies between Eastern Europe and Western Asia - remains very conservative.

In 2019, far-right protesters joined [demonstrations against the premiere of Georgia's first LGBTQ film](#) in Tbilisi.

Source: [BBC](#)

### **UN's Working Group on discrimination against women and girls after publishes a report after a visit to Romania**

A report from the United Nation's Working Group on discrimination against women and girls was presented during 47<sup>th</sup> Human Rights Council session (21 June – 7 July).

*The Working Group on discrimination against women and girls conducted a visit to Romania from 24 February to 6 March 2020. In the present report, the Working Group assesses the situation regarding the human rights of women in the country, noting achievements and challenges. It examines the country's legal, institutional and policy framework for promoting gender equality and the participation and empowerment of women in family, economic, social, political and public life, paying particular attention to women who experience intersecting forms of discrimination. The Working Group also makes recommendations for further progress in eliminating discrimination and promoting equality.*

The recommendations include ratification of remaining key human rights treaties, ensuring the implementation of the law, strengthening the institutional architecture for equality and more.

Read the report [here](#).

## **FROM ASTRA MEMBERS**

### **Women's Resource Center's CEDAW input**

Women's Resource Center has submitted written information for the adoption of the list of issues by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Several important issues were

covered in [the document](#), including: gender stereotypes, right to education, political participation, gender pay gap, labor rights including protection of sexual harassment at the workplace, SRHR, the situation of women human rights defenders.

Following the submission, advocacy team members participated in an informal private meeting of the 81<sup>st</sup> pre-sessional working group of the UN CEDAW with NGOs and addressed SRHR issues during the oral statement.

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

### **HERA XXI's Social Media as a Channel of Youth Mobilization and Information**

[HERA XXI's Alumni Network](#) is a space of experience and knowledge sharing, networking for current and former volunteers, members, activists and program beneficiaries. Due to the pandemic, the need for such online platforms is increased. HERA XXI's Alumni Network unifies 72 youth. Space offers to youth information about the latest activities of HERA XXI, also, the informative articles of SRHR are placed on this platform.

The innovative group - [Women's Reproductive Health and Rights](#) - aims to create a space for women where they can receive sexual and reproductive health and rights services and relevant information from specialists.

In this way, the group serves to raise awareness of SRHR issues and promotes the targeted and free delivery of services to women, which in turn is a prerequisite for women's health and empowerment. Members of the group can post their questions anonymously. This allows users to post more freely and get their questions answered by experts without exposing their real name.

The group offers consultations with medical professionals, lawyers and social workers.

### **Strategic Partnership among Youth-led CSOs**

At the initiative of HERA XXI and with the involvement of the main youth organizations of Georgia, a strategic partnership was established and a document of agreements was signed by the organization. Based on the document, the direction of future cooperation was defined. The partnership organization supports the strengthening of youth components with common capabilities. Youth organizations will focus on international days, which is an important way to boost activism and volunteer involvement. Strategic Partnership among Youth-led CSOs provides that challenges at the

national level in the field of youth should be highlighted and problem-solving should be developed by youth-led CSOs.

Georgian TV program covering the partnership was [published on our Facebook page](#).

Source for two previous entries: [HERA XXI](#)

### **The Orange Report on the state of women's rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2020**

Since the last report that covered the three-year period from 2016 to 2019, the changes that have taken place have not significantly affected the improvement of the quality of life of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the fields and areas covered within this report. Quite the opposite happened: at the end of 2019, the world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected all aspects of human life, first of all health, and the economy, education, and politics. In this sort of situation, women bore a specific burden. Areas in which the majority of the workforce is made up of women have been directly affected by the crisis, women who are victims of domestic violence fell under the additional control of the perpetrators, access to certain medical and health services was further aggravated, and working mothers have, among other things, had to deal with the challenges of transitioning to online schooling, trying not to neglect their own business along the way.

The structure of the 2020 Report follows the continuity of past reporting and monitoring against the changes that have taken place. However, given the fact that 2020 was marked by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, this year's Orange Report is primarily thematically oriented to its effects in the four areas: socio-economic rights, sexual and reproductive health, political life and decision-making, and gender-based violence against women and domestic violence.

Source: [Sarajevo Open Center](#)

### **Romanian educational program to tackle gender equality**

ASTRA members Society for Feminist Analyses AnA and SEX vs The STORK have joined the Coalition for Gender Equality to kickstart a new project, **“EGALIS: gender equality through social change and education”**, with the support of the Active Citizens Fund - Romania program, funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA Grants 2014-2021.

Through EGALIS we will act in 2 main directions:

1. Youth education and teacher training under the umbrella of the awareness campaign "Feminism for All" which aims to deconstruct, among young people and teachers, the myths and prejudices related to feminism and provide information on gender equality. We are employing a variety of attractive and modern tools: videos, infographics, an interactive game proposed as educational material, and WikiGap hackathons. Teachers and public educational institutions will benefit from a guide and methodology for teaching gender equality in pre-university education.

2. Advocacy activities for the widespread use of the created educational tools, proposals for the revision of the occupational standard for the professions of equal opportunities expert and equal opportunities technician, in order to bring gender equality closer to institutions and companies, as well as monitoring sexism in the public sphere and reporting such instances to the National Council for Combating Discrimination. The project also includes legal assistance and representation in court cases of gender-based discrimination.

Through education we can change outdated mentalities and build a society in which girls and women have equal opportunities, respect and full rights. Education is the best way to prevent sexism, discrimination and gender-based violence.

*Input provided by Daniela Draghici, member of the ASTRA Network's Advisory Board.*

## RESOURCES

### **Our "SRHR and COVID-19 in Eastern Europe – snapshots from the region" brochure is out!**

*COVID-19 pandemic has changed the face of the world as we knew it. The lives of whole societies were put on hold, almost all works halted in order to focus on challenging one of the biggest global health crises in almost a century. (...) As ASTRA Network, we believe in experience-based policymaking. In this brochure, we will therefore be taking a closer look at some Eastern European countries and the state of SRHR amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, as only understanding the context will allow us to prepare the best solutions for challenges of the post-pandemic era.*

The brochure aims to throw light on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on reproductive rights in Eastern Europe by offering an overview of regional developments and country-focused snapshots presented by our member organisations.

The publication is available on [our website](#).



## **Global Count's findings published online**

*The Global Count (GC) is a global mapping project designed to ensure that individual women's and gender-diverse people's opinions, needs, and perspectives inform the Global Acceleration Plans for Gender Equality formed by each Action Coalition (AC) at the Generation Equality Forum (GEF) 2021.*

*At the close of a year defined by the COVID-19 pandemic when human rights authorities declared that gender-based violence and inequities in the workplace are as bad as they were 25 years ago, in 2021, it is more crucial than ever to get an accurate and comprehensive picture of how individuals around the world are being impacted by gender inequality. The post-pandemic "Global Reset" allows us an opportunity to give people from all contexts and walks of life the opportunity to define the issues affecting their lives and inform how we rebuild our systems and societies in an equitable way.*

*The Global Count is an opportunity to ensure the voices of women and gender-diverse people define what is needed when it comes to funding and policy-making decisions that will impact them.*

*The GC Steering Committee members include representatives from [White Ribbon Alliance](#), [CIVICUS](#), [Girl Up](#), [Global Fund For Women](#), [Care International](#), [Facebook](#), and [Impact Mapper](#) as well as local movements and partners including [Akili Dada](#), [Akina Mama Wa Afrika](#), [BONELA](#), [ASTRA Network](#), [ARROW](#), and [New Women Connectors](#).*

The results are available [online](#).

ASTRA Network Members: Albania - Albanian Center for Population Development; 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 – PaRiter; 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"; Latvia - Association for Family Planning And Sexual Health "Papardes Zieds"; Lithuania - Family Planning and Sexual Health Association; Moldova – Family Planning Association; Moldova - Reproductive Health Training Center; North Macedonia - Association for emancipation, solidarity and equality of women; North Macedonia – H.E.R.A.; North Macedonia – Shelter Center; Poland - Federation for Women and Family Planning; Ponton Group of Sex Educators; Romania - A.L.E.G.; Romania – AnA – Society for Feminist Analyses; 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 – Moznost Volby; Tajikistan – Gender and Development; Ukraine - Women Health and Family Planning; Ukraine - SALUS Charitable Foundation; Uzbekistan - Future Generation

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