

BULLETIN

SRHR NEWS FROM CENTRAL
AND EASTERN EUROPE AND
CENTRAL ASIA

02/2025

Burning issue:
**Hungary Bans
Budapest Pride —
A Red Line Crossed
for Democracy and
Human Rights**

astra
network

Table of contents

Burning Issue: Hungary Bans Budapest Pride — A Red Line Crossed for Democracy and Human Rights	3	From Poland to Georgia: Building Local Responses to Gender-Based Violence	14
Armenia’s New Gender Equality Strategy Prioritizes Reproductive Health and Right	4	The SRH working group of the Romanian Ministry of Health continues	15
Three Decades of Impact: ACPD Celebrates Over 30 Years of Advancing Sexual and Reproductive Rights in Albania	5	Stay connected, love responsibly – responsible relationships in high schools in Romania	15
Lithuania Takes a Stand: New Reproductive Health Law Faces Fierce Debate in Parliament	6	“Legal center Women’s Initiatives “Sana Sezim” with UNESCO Empowers Youth in the Turkestan Region with 21st Century Skills and Promotes Values of Equality	17
Empowerment through Self-Defence, Chisinau, Moldova	7	Slovakia at a Crossroads: Human Rights Under Pressure, Advocacy in Action	19
Barriers to Contraceptive Use in Moldova: A Fifth of Women Still Not Protected Despite Free Access	8	Uzbekistan: Strategic Achievement in Protecting Children’s Rights - New Law and Plans for Implementation	20
Improving the Cervical Cancer Screening Program by involving family physicians – family medicine specialists	9	ASTRA Network at CSW69: Elevating Feminist Voices from Central and Eastern Europe on the Global Stage	20
Georgia on the Brink: Civil Society and the Fight for Rights and Freedoms	12	Member Spotlight: Association for Liberty and Equality of Gender A.L.E.G from Romania	22
Under Siege: Polish Doctor Targeted for Providing Legal Abortion	13	Upcoming events	27
		Publication Highlights	28

Photo on the title page: by Barcelos_fotos: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/woman-with-rainbow-light-reflecting-her-face-2859616/>



BURNING ISSUE

Hungary Bans Budapest Pride — A Red Line Crossed for Democracy and Human Rights

On March 18, 2025, Hungary's National Assembly passed a law under the guise of "child protection" that criminalizes peaceful assembly and bans public expressions of LGBTQ+ identity. Just one day later, the President signed it into law. Budapest Pride has been officially banned.

This legislation allows authorities to prohibit any event that depicts gender diversity or homosexuality. Those who participate in or organize such events now face steep fines, surveillance through facial recognition technology, and even criminal charges. These developments represent an alarming escalation in the Hungarian government's systematic dismantling of fundamental rights.

This law is not about protecting children—it is about silencing dissent,

erasing LGBTQ+ visibility, and crushing democratic freedoms. Under Viktor Orbán's leadership, Hungary has become a testing ground for anti-rights actors who use disinformation and moral panic to justify authoritarian control. The banning of Pride is the clearest indication yet that the government is willing to criminalize identity and shut down civil society under the veil of "traditional values."

This is not an isolated incident, nor is it simply a national issue. It is a European emergency. If Hungary can ban Pride and criminalize peaceful assembly without facing consequences, other governments will be emboldened to do the same. The far right is watching—and waiting.

Civil society must respond. We stand in full solidarity with Hungary's LGBTI+ community, with Budapest Pride, and with all those who continue to resist this oppressive regime. We call on European leaders, institutions, and citizens to defend the core principles of democracy and human rights.

Freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, and the right to live safely and openly as LGBTQ+ people are not negotiable. They are non-negotiable foundations of any democratic society.

We urge everyone to speak out, raise awareness, and demand action. Sign the petition calling on European leaders to hold the Hungarian government accountable:

<https://action.allout.org/en/m/58994dd1/>

This moment demands more than statements of concern. It demands resistance, solidarity, and action. Let this not be the beginning of a wave of repression across Europe. Let it be the moment we say: no more.

Europe must not back down.

Armenia's New Gender Equality Strategy Prioritizes Reproductive Health and Rights

On April 23, 2025, the Government of Armenia adopted the 2025–2028 Strategy for the Implementation of Gender Policy, placing a strong emphasis on advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Driven by sustained advocacy from the Women's Resource Center (WRC) and partners, the strategy introduces key reforms: the application of gender-sensitive standards in Armenia's upcoming universal health insurance system, the development of clinical guidelines for post-rape care and screening mechanisms for postpartum depression. It also ensures free contraceptives for vulnerable groups, ongoing SRHR training for healthcare workers (including on disability and HIV), the expansion of "Family Corners", and preventive screenings for women in detention.

These measures mark a significant step toward building a more equitable, inclusive, and rights-based healthcare system for all.

Sources: <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2025/04/23/Cabinet-meeting/>, <https://panarmenian.net/m/eng/news/321785>

Source: [WRC Armenia](#)

Three Decades of Impact: ACPD Celebrates Over 30 Years of Advancing Sexual and Reproductive Rights in Albania

On April 11th, the Albanian Center for Population and Development (ACPD) marked a powerful milestone—over 30 years of service championing the sexual and reproductive rights of Albania’s population. Since its founding in 1993, ACPD has been a cornerstone of progress, advocating for policies that center health, dignity, and equality, particularly for young people and marginalized communities.

A Legacy of Leadership and Commitment

ACPD began as a modest non-profit initiative in post-communist Albania. Today, it stands as a key actor in the region, with active centers in Tirana, Vlora, and Shkodra, and over 200 committed activists. Through partnerships with global allies such as IPPF, UNFPA, the Global Fund, OSFA, and ASTRA Network, ACPD has amplified its reach and impact. The anniversary celebration featured prominent voices from the International Planned Parenthood Federation, including Director-General Dr. Alvaro Bermejo and European Network Regional Director Micah Grzywnowicz. Their presence underscored the importance of solidarity and shared purpose across borders.

Driving Change Through Advocacy and Education

ACPD’s impact spans multiple domains:

Comprehensive Sexuality Education:

The organization has long promoted inclusive, science-based education, equipping young people with the knowledge to make informed choices.

Healthcare Access: It has worked relentlessly to enhance the quality and reach of reproductive health services, particularly for underserved populations.

Gender Equality and Anti-Violence Efforts:

From policy advocacy to community outreach, ACPD has helped shift public discourse and institutional responses to gender-based violence.

Anti-Trafficking Initiatives:

Programs aimed at both prevention and victim support have positioned ACPD as a trusted leader in human rights defense.

Looking Ahead

As ACPD celebrates more than three decades of achievements, its mission remains resolutely forward-looking. With new challenges emerging—from regressive legislation to health disparities—ACPD pledges to continue its work grounded in volunteerism, justice, and equity.

In a time when sexual and reproductive health rights face backlash across parts

of Europe and beyond, ACPD's longevity offers both a lesson and a beacon: lasting change is possible when local action is combined with international solidarity.



More information about the project can be found here: [Project Page](#).

Source: [ACPD](#)

Lithuania Takes a Stand: New Reproductive Health Law Faces Fierce Debate in Parliament

In 2025, a historic opportunity has emerged in Lithuania to advance reproductive health and rights. The Family Planning and Sexual Health Association (Šeimos planavimo ir seksualinės sveikatos asociacija) has authored a progressive draft law on reproductive health, now poised for its first parliamentary hearing. This marks the first serious legislative step on this issue in over a decade.

From Silence to Action

The last official attempt to legislate

reproductive health in Lithuania dates back to 2013, when the Ministry of Health drafted a bill that never reached parliamentary debate. The new 2025 draft, written by civil society leaders themselves, fills a long-standing legal void and reflects international human rights standards and best practices in public health.

But the path forward is anything but smooth. As soon as the draft law was introduced, organized opposition forces sprang into action. Conservative and anti-rights groups have begun spreading misinformation among members of parliament and across mainstream media, misrepresenting the contents and aims of the bill. These narratives threaten to derail the democratic process before open debate can even begin.

Civil Society Responds

Progressive NGOs, women's rights groups, and human rights defenders are not standing idle. A growing coalition is mobilizing public support, collecting signatures under a declaration addressed to Lithuanian parliamentarians, and organizing visible acts of solidarity—including a planned public action in front of the Seimas (Lithuanian Parliament).

This coordinated effort underscores the broad societal demand for a modern legal framework that guarantees access to reproductive health services, education, and autonomy for all

individuals in Lithuania.

As Executive Director Esmeralda Kuliešytė affirms, “This is not only about law—it is about dignity, health, and the future of our society.”

Source: [Family Planning and Sexual Health Association](#)

Empowerment through Self-Defence, Chisinau, Moldova

From April 9th to 11th, for 8 full hours each day the Reproductive Health Training Center (RHTC) hosted a vibrant and hands-on Training of Trainers workshop in Chişinău, Moldova, as part of the project Supporting Youth-Friendly Education and Awareness Raising on Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) and Gender-Based Violence Prevention. The project is made possible with the kind support of the Finnish Embassy in Bucharest and Chişinău.

This workshop brought something totally new to Moldova—a powerful mix of physical self-defense techniques and psychological tools to help young people build confidence and stay safe in difficult situations. It was the first time we introduced this kind of approach here, and it was a big step forward as gender-based violence remains a serious and widespread issue in Moldova, affecting women and girls across all regions and communities.

We were lucky to have two incredible

trainers leading the way: Daniela Drăghici from Romania, a certified Empowerment Self-Defense (ESD) Level 3 instructor, and Olga Afanas, a psychologist from Moldova. Olga, who also lives with a disability, offered a deeply personal and inspiring perspective on psychological self-defense. They were assisted by Ana Dascălu and Olga Panis—both certified ESD instructors—who helped ensure that all 25 participants were fully supported throughout the three days.



The training wasn't just about learning new skills—it was about passing them on. Our participants, most of them from Neovita's Youth-Friendly Health Clinics, are now ready to take what they've learned back to their own communities and even lead similar workshops themselves. It was an intense few days, full of energy, connection, and personal growth. We're incredibly proud of everyone who joined us and can't wait to see how they continue spreading this knowledge across.

Source: [Reproductive Health Training Center \(RHTC\)](#)

Barriers to Contraceptive Use in Moldova: A Fifth of Women Still Not Protected Despite Free Access

Every fifth woman of reproductive age (15–49 years) in the Republic of Moldova chooses not to use any form of contraception—even while expressing a desire to delay or avoid future pregnancies. This concerning statistic comes from a recent qualitative study titled “Factors Influencing the Use of Contraceptive Methods among Vulnerable Groups in the Republic of Moldova.”

Unused Access and Persistent Misconceptions

Although Moldova’s public health system provides free contraceptive methods to certain vulnerable groups—such as adolescents, low-income individuals, and those at risk of sexually transmitted infections—uptake remains lower than expected. The study found that barriers range from limited knowledge and misinformation about modern contraceptives, to stigma and negative social attitudes, particularly in rural areas.

Women and couples reported concerns over side effects, doubts about the effectiveness of contraceptives, and a preference for traditional methods or abstinence. Additionally, many healthcare workers themselves lack training or confidence in counseling on modern contraceptive options, leading

to inconsistent or poor-quality advice.

Vulnerable Groups Disproportionately Affected

Young people, persons with disabilities, and ethnic minorities face even greater challenges. For example, young women often fear judgment when seeking reproductive health services, while individuals with disabilities encounter physical and communication barriers in clinics.

The report also notes a lack of tailored outreach and education campaigns that could address these populations’ specific needs and cultural contexts.

Recommendations for Action

To close the gap between contraceptive availability and use, the study offers several recommendations:

- Enhance provider training on contraceptive counseling and sensitivity towards vulnerable groups.
- Invest in community outreach and public information campaigns to counter myths and stigma.

Improve data collection to monitor service uptake and identify unmet needs.

- Strengthen coordination between health institutions and community organizations.

- Ultimately, addressing these barriers is essential not only to reduce unintended pregnancies but also to support women’s autonomy and public health goals.

As the Ministry of Health and its partners consider these findings, the focus now shifts toward ensuring that every person—not just those who actively seek help—has the knowledge, confidence, and support to make informed reproductive health choices.

The full research report can be found [here](#).

Source: [Societatea de Planificare a Familiei din Moldova/Family Planning Association of Moldova](#)

Improving the Cervical Cancer Screening Program by involving family physicians – family medicine specialists

Cervical cancer is a significant public health challenge in North Macedonia. Effective organized screening is crucial for early detection of precancerous lesions and prevention of invasive disease. The current screening model relies mainly on gynecologists, but the insufficient number of primary care gynecologists in certain regions leads to low PAP test coverage. Namely in 40 municipalities there is no single gynecological office (half of the municipalities in Macedonia), while in 25 municipalities there is insufficient number of gynecologists. Although there has

been an increase in coverage of women with the screening in recent years, there is still unequal access to screening among women in rural areas, Roma communities and other environments where there are no primary care gynecologists. This situation indicates an urgent need to expand this model by involving primary care physicians – family medicine specialists in the implementation of cervical cancer screening. The involvement of primary care physicians, family medicine specialists, can increase the availability and coverage of screening, especially in rural areas and municipalities where there are no primary care gynecologists.

Key reasons for involving family doctors

- **Professional staff and prior training:** Family medicine specialists are already trained in taking PAP smears (part of their specialization), which can be upgraded with additional training to refresh practical skills and interpret PAP results at the PHI Clinic for Gynecology and Obstetrics.
- **Wide network and trust:** They are present in all environments, including rural and hard-to-reach places; At the same time, patients have a high level of trust in their family doctors. Therefore, they represent an underutilized potential for improving the screening program.
- **Constant contact with the target**

population of women for screening:

Family doctors cover a large number of patients, including girls and women in the target age group (21–59 years), with whom they are in constant contact due to various health problems.

- **Opportunity for health education and stigma reduction:** Family doctors can effectively educate women about the importance of regular check-ups and encourage them to get a Pap test or HPV test. In doing so, they can help overcome cultural barriers and stigma associated with visiting a gynecologist.
- **Flexibility in screening methods:** Implementing the HPV test as the primary method will further facilitate the involvement of primary care physicians, as no gynecological equipment or a separate room is required. At the same time, the HPV swab can be taken during a woman's regular visit, without the need for a prior appointment.

Recommendations for the Ministry of Health:

1. Amendments to the laws and bylaws

- To amend the relevant laws and bylaws in order to enable family doctors - family medicine specialists, to issue referrals for PAP test /HPV test , to have access to the electronic cervical cancer screening module to enter data and receive information on the status of

patients.

2. Inclusion of family physicians – family medicine specialists in the National Cervical Cancer Commission

- To appoint representatives from family doctors - specialists in family medicine , especially from rural areas, to the National Commission for prevention of cervical cancer, so that their views, experiences and needs are taken into account when planning the screening program.

3. Implementation of HPV testing as a primary screening method

- To prepare a strategic plan for the gradual replacement of the PAP test with the HPV test . The HPV test will improve the quality of screening, will enable adequate involvement of family doctors – family medicine specialists, and will increase the coverage of women with screening.

4. Organizing training and continuing education

- The Ministry of Health, together with the Medical Faculty, Center for Family Medicine and University Clinic for Gynecology and Obstetrics, to organize trainings for family doctors - specialists in family medicine for: renewing practical skills for taking PAP smears and interpreting results according to the Bethesda system. Correctly taking and interpreting HPV swabs.

5. Package of services and allocation of financial resources

- To develop a clear package of

services for cervical cancer screening that will encompass the activities of family physicians – family medicine specialists.

- To provide additional financial compensation for family physicians – family medicine specialists, in accordance with the defined package of services for cervical cancer screening.

6. Improving health infrastructure in primary health care

- To equip gynecological offices in Primary health centers and health stations (public health institutions) in rural settlements, which will be used by family medicine specialists to take PAP smears as needed.
- Provide financial and technical resources to prepare laboratories in public health facilities for a significant increase in samples for analysis to reduce waiting times for results.

7. Improving cooperation at the primary health care level

- To encourage formal and informal cooperation between family physicians – family medicine specialists and family gynecologists through the establishment of joint protocols, guidelines and regular meetings for the exchange of experiences and updating of data, such as for screening cervical cancer as well as for the overall sexual and reproductive health of women.

8. Administrative relief for family doctors

- Consider the possibility of introducing a minimum co-payment or

another appropriate model that would reduce the large influx of unnecessary visits to family doctors, allowing general practitioners to have sufficient time for screening, health education, and preventive health care.

Needs and prerequisites for effective inclusion

The recommendations to the Ministry of Health are based on the opportunities, needs and challenges identified by family medicine specialists.

- **Renewal and improvement of knowledge:** Training is needed to renew practical skills for taking a PAP smear as well as for interpreting the results according to the Bethesda system, due to the fact that after completing specialization, most doctors have not had the opportunity to practice taking PAP smears in their work. If the HPV smear is introduced as a screening method, the training will be much shorter and simpler.
- **Infrastructure:** If the PAP test continues to be used, it is necessary to purchase appropriate equipment in the offices. If the HPV test is introduced, there is no need for additional equipment in the offices of family doctors.
- **Legislation and administrative access:** Family doctors do not have access to the electronic cervical cancer screening module, nor can they record services for Pap smears/HPV smears taken, nor can they issue referrals for

Pap tests/HPV tests to laboratories.

- **Financial incentive:** The inclusion of screening-related services represents additional health services for primary care physicians for which adequate financial compensation is necessary.
- **Existing overload of family doctors:** Family doctors are overloaded with examinations and administrative tasks, which can lead to resistance to accepting additional health services related to screening.
- **Insufficient communication and coordination:** There is a lack of adequate coordination and communication between the various health institutions at the primary level, as well as at the different levels of health care, throughout the country. As a result, there is an absence of a coordinated holistic approach to preventive health care for women's sexual and reproductive health.

Download the policy brief [here](#).

Source: [ESEM](#)

Georgia on the Brink: Civil Society and the Fight for Rights and Freedoms

As mass protests erupt in Tbilisi and the streets echo with chants of resistance, a quieter but equally powerful movement is growing among Georgia's women,

youth, and grassroots organizations. A recent factsheet by HERA XXI provides a crucial window into how these groups are navigating—and challenging—the country's increasingly authoritarian political and legislative climate.

A Nation at a Crossroads

On one side is a government pushing controversial legislation reminiscent of Russian-style “foreign agent” laws. On the other is a growing civil movement—fueled by students, feminist groups, activists, and young professionals—determined to preserve Georgia's European aspirations. As captured in France 24's on-the-ground reporting, demonstrators are declaring, “We will fight until we win.” Their defiance represents a broader yearning for democratic accountability, freedom of association, and fundamental rights.

Barriers and Resilience

HERA XXI's findings expose the deeper, systemic struggles that often go unseen. Women and young people—especially in rural and marginalized communities—face entrenched patriarchy, lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services, and political exclusion. Local civil society organizations (CSOs) find themselves under financial pressure, targeted by hostile legislation, and often distrusted by state institutions.

Yet despite these challenges, resilience persists. Local CSOs play a vital role in bridging the gap between

citizens and institutions, delivering education, mobilizing communities, and defending hard-won rights. Their work is now more critical—and more threatened—than ever.

The Stakes for Civil Society

In the shadow of new laws aimed at stifling dissent and foreign support, Georgia's civil society faces an existential threat. As activists on the streets of Tbilisi protest for their future, organizations on the ground are calling for:

- Stronger civic education and youth engagement programs.
- Legal protections and public support for human rights defenders.
- Policies that uphold sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).
- Long-term funding models that ensure CSO independence.

A Defining Moment

What's unfolding in Georgia is more than a clash over a single bill. It is a struggle over the country's identity and direction—East or West, autocracy or democracy. The courage of those marching in the capital reflects the same spirit found in classrooms, local clinics, and community centers across the country.

By centering the needs and voices of women, youth, and grassroots actors,

Georgia has a chance to realize its democratic promise. The question now is whether Europe and the global community will stand with them—before the window closes.

Download the full factsheet by HERA XXI [here](#).

Source: [HERA XXI](#)

Under Siege: Polish Doctor Targeted for Providing Legal Abortion

On April 16, 2025, a deeply disturbing event unfolded in a hospital in Oleśnica, Poland. Polish far-right Member of the European Parliament, Grzegorz Braun, stormed the facility in an attempt to detain dr. Gizela Jagielska—a gynecologist who had legally performed an abortion at 37 weeks. The procedure was carried out due to severe fetal anomalies and a significant risk to the patient's mental health, in full accordance with Polish law.

The patient, who had previously been involuntarily committed to a psychiatric ward, was ultimately able to access the medical care she needed thanks to the intervention of FEDERA (The Federation for Women and Family Planning) and allied organizations. She is now under FEDERA's legal protection. Dr. Jagielska, despite the intimidation and public vilification, has returned to work and continues to provide care to her patients.

This incident is not isolated—it is part of a broader campaign of harassment and fear targeting women, healthcare providers, and reproductive rights advocates in Poland. It reflects the dangerous intersection of political extremism and anti-choice ideology, where legal and ethical medical care is framed as criminal, and doctors are publicly attacked for doing their jobs.

The act of forcibly entering a hospital to intimidate a physician is a chilling violation of medical autonomy and patient privacy. It underscores how volatile and unsafe the climate has become for those involved in reproductive health, even when acting fully within the law.

We stand in full solidarity with Dr. Jagielska, with the patient, and with all those in Poland working under immense pressure to defend the right to safe, legal, and compassionate reproductive care.

This is not just about one doctor, one patient, or one procedure—it is about the future of reproductive rights and the rule of law in Poland.

Source: [FEDERA](#)

From Poland to Georgia: Building Local Responses to Gender-Based Violence

With the support of Fundacja YES. Jestem Kobietą and Wysokie Obcasy

Extra, the HumanDoc Foundation recently completed the pilot edition of “NIEobojętne – Supporting Women from Small Communities.” This initiative brought together 20 women leaders from across Poland—village heads, educators, legal professionals, and grassroots activists—for a blended series of in-person and online trainings.

The program focused on deepening participants’ knowledge and practical skills in addressing gender-based violence, empathetic communication, and fostering institutional collaboration. Beyond training, NIEobojętne created a space for mutual empowerment, solidarity, and the emergence of new local support networks. Participants rated the experience highly and reported a marked increase in their confidence and capacity to respond to violence in their communities. The project concluded in March 2025, with promising potential for future expansion.

Complementing this effort, a project titled “Development of Georgian state and non-governmental system of support for people experiencing domestic violence,” co-financed within the framework of the Polish development cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, launched its first webinar on January 31. This series supports individuals in Georgia facing domestic violence and crisis situations. The inaugural session introduced participants to Psychological First

Aid—a practical and accessible skill set, even for those without formal psychological education. The session, led by Magdalena Kondas from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), was met with overwhelmingly positive feedback, with all attendees reporting that it met or exceeded their expectations.

Together, these initiatives demonstrate how targeted, collaborative projects—rooted in local leadership and international solidarity—can build resilience and advance gender justice across borders.

Source: [HumanDoc](#)

The SRH working group of the Romanian Ministry of Health continues

The group has continued to meet up for weekly meetings in order to shape the official strategy for sexual and reproductive health. SEX vs THE STORK Association has pushed for and managed to include in the strategy an extension for the role of the family planning clinics towards maternity and HIV care, but also towards prevention and harm reduction, including family planning doctors as possible sexuality educators in schools. Granting the family planning clinics more permissions is a logical step for increasing access to SRH services, given the fact that The National Plan for Recovery and Resilience includes the

reform and renovation of these clinics.

SEX vs THE STORK Association has been deemed a best practice model by The National Agency for Equal Opportunities

The Association was invited by The Agency to a bilateral seminar that was part of the project “RoNor - Stronger together against gender violence”. The organization presented the results and the impact of their SRH work and celebrated 12 years since the official launch of the sex education platform in The Romanian Parliament.

Source: [Sexul vs Barza](#)

Stay connected, love responsibly – responsible relationships in high schools in Romania

This spring, the A.L.E.G. Association, in partnership with AVON Space, launched an educational campaign aimed at teenage girls and boys from several high schools in Romania, entitled “Stay Connected, Love Responsibly”. Inspired by the month of love, marked by days with romantic significance such as Valentine’s Day and Dragobete, the campaign aimed to promote healthy relationships, mutual respect and open communication, with the aim of transforming these values into normality from the school benches. A.L.E.G. trained 35 AVON leaders in the field of gender equality, combating

stereotypes and promoting healthy relationships, providing them with the necessary tools to address these topics in dialogue with young people. These leaders arrived in high schools across the country, alongside association collaborators with experience in implementing classroom educational activities on these topics.

Through this campaign, together with our collaborators, we managed to reach over 1000 students from 6 high schools in Romania (Bacău, Cugir, Cluj-Napoca, Sibiu, Iași and Vaslui), to discuss topics often not addressed in the formal educational framework: emotions, limits, consent, signs of a toxic relationship and the ingredients of a balanced relationship.

Many teenagers confessed that, until now, discussions about relationships only took place between friends, rarely, if ever, with a trusted adult. The A.L.E.G. x AVON workshops became a safe space for dialogue for them, where questions received honest, empathetic and non-judgmental answers. From “what role does jealousy play in a healthy relationship?” to “how can I distinguish between a joke and abuse?”, participants found clarity and real support.

What did teenagers say?

- “A relationship shouldn’t cancel us out as people. We need personal space.”
- “We learn about relationships from the internet, from friends,
- from parents (“but we talk to them

less”), but also from the relationships we’ve already had, up until this age.”

- “Trust doesn’t come because we fall in love, it’s earned over time. We have to be patient to see if we can trust.”
- “The way we function in relationships also depends on the attachment we develop in the family, but also on how we see our parents relating to each other.”
- “Relationships make us more empathetic. We put ourselves
- in each other’s shoes and see life and people differently.”
- When there’s pressure, we don’t feel like we’re choosing.”
- “When we end a relationship we take time to be alone to think about what we want and don’t want anymore”, “we go out with friends”, “we think about what we did wrong and how we could do better in the future”, “we do the activities we like or discover new hobbies”.

The workshops were designed in an interactive way, combining games, questions and individual self-assessment exercises, through which young people learned to recognize acceptable, unacceptable, negotiable or non-negotiable behaviors in a relationship. Some shared examples from their own family or personal experience, while others, although more withdrawn at the beginning, managed to open up with courage along the way. In some classes, the enthusiasm and involvement were remarkable, while in others, the initial reservations highlighted how great the

need for emotional education is among adolescents.

Each workshop was accompanied by moments of deep awareness. Sometimes, discussions continued during breaks, and at other times, teachers requested additional materials to explore the topics addressed in more detail or to display them in visible places. In some situations, we were impressed by the maturity and empathy of the adolescents, but we also realized the size of the huge challenges they face.

Conclusions

We have observed that in environments where adolescents feel accepted, supported by peers, where mutual respect and the courage to speak honestly prevail, discussions about healthy relationships develop deeply and meaningfully. In such contexts, young people have the opportunity to learn from each other what it means to support, encourage and balance in relationships. On the other hand, in classes where authentic connections, empathy and care for others are lacking, difficulties become more evident, and openness to dialogue decreases. It is precisely these contrasts that underline how essential it is not to give up, but to continue to build safe and open spaces for relational education, because the need is profound, and the effects – long-term.

This campaign not only educates, but also cultivates hope that every small step taken today will have a positive impact

on the way young people will experience love and build relationships tomorrow.

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

“Legal center Women’s Initiatives “Sana Sezim” with UNESCO Empowers Youth in the Turkestan Region with 21st Century Skills and Promotes Values of Equality

In today’s world, where rapid technological advancements and global changes demand flexibility, critical thinking, and social responsibility from young people, it is particularly important to support them through quality educational initiatives. The UNESCO Regional Office in Almaty is implementing a project in the Turkestan region aimed at equipping young people with essential 21st century skills and enhancing gender sensitivity. As part of this initiative, a series of seven training seminars are being held to foster intercultural dialogue, strengthen female leadership, and promote social responsibility among the younger generation.

On 14 April 2025, one such seminar was held at the Child Support Centre of the Sairam District. The Centre brings together children facing difficult life circumstances, making such events especially relevant and meaningful. The seminar, entitled “Empowering Youth through 21st Century Skills and

the Values of Equality”, provided a platform where participants not only learnt about essential life skills but also reflected on the importance of equal rights, inclusivity, and gender equality.

During the event, young participants were introduced to the concept of the four key 21st century skills: critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. They worked in groups, discussed real-life cases, and developed solutions based on these skills. Parallel to this, participants explored the concept of equal opportunities and the differences between equality and equity, contributing to the development of a tolerant and empathetic approach towards others. Special attention was given to discussing gender stereotypes and their impact on everyday life, career aspirations, and young people’s self-esteem.

The seminar not only broadened the participants’ horizons but also equipped them with practical tools for confident engagement in contemporary society. Realising their own value, understanding the importance of equal participation regardless of gender or social status, and developing critical thinking and teamwork skills – all these elements lay a solid foundation for the youth’s future. Such events help young people to become active members of society, capable of making decisions and defending both their own rights and the rights of others.

The project implemented by UNESCO

is seamlessly aligned with international processes, including the UNESCO initiative Transforming MENTalities, the UN Youth Strategy 2030, and the Pact for the Future. It highlights the importance of equality, inclusivity, and education as keys to building a just and sustainable world, in which youth are not merely observers but active agents of change.

Source: [Sana Sezim](#)

Slovakia at a Crossroads: Human Rights Under Pressure, Advocacy in Action

At Freedom of Choice, we continue our mission to build a fairer and more informed society through education. In April, we launched a new round of gender training aimed at media, PR and marketing professionals, educators, and students. We are now exploring the possibility of expanding this training to include medical staff and doctors. Additionally, we are considering organizing a Human Rights Summer School later this year to further broaden public engagement and learning.

Our advocacy efforts are also delivering meaningful results. Over the past six years, 32 attempts to restrict access to reproductive healthcare have been introduced in Parliament. This month, the latest proposal—to shorten the legal abortion period from 12 to 8 weeks—did not pass. Ahead of the vote, we sent a

letter and an invitation to MPs, clearly outlining the harm such legislation would cause. We also engaged in multiple consultations with parliamentarians. We are grateful that our voices were heard.

Earlier this year, we became part of the Human Rights Coalition—a network of NGOs across Slovakia committed to mutual support and collective resistance in the face of increasingly repressive government actions.

Meanwhile, our confidential support line for women continues to operate. Each month, we assist around 20 to 25 women seeking abortion-related information—resources that remain hard to access in Slovakia.

What’s Happening in Slovakia?

New Law Targeting NGOs

The Slovak National Council recently passed a new law in a fast-tracked process without public consultation. This law seriously undermines the functioning of NGOs and violates EU legal standards. Apart from Hungary, no other EU country has such legislation.

Key concerns:

- It dramatically increases the administrative burden on NGOs, especially smaller ones.
- It requires the disclosure of donors’ personal data, infringing on privacy rights and potentially discouraging

donations.

There is no legitimate justification for this law—it appears to be a deliberate attack on civil society and a step backward for freedom, solidarity, and human dignity.

Threatening Constitutional Amendment

A proposed constitutional amendment, which is currently in its second reading, poses a serious threat to LGBTIQ+ rights. Worryingly, an opposition party with a similar agenda plans to support it.

If passed, the amendment would:

- Define gender strictly as male or female.
- Restrict adoption rights to spouses or close relatives only.
- Allow parents to opt their children out of sex and relationship education.

While the situation is increasingly difficult, we remain committed to our work: advocating for human rights, educating the public and policymakers, and standing firm in the face of regression.

Source: [Možnosť voľby \(Freedom of Choice\)](#)

Uzbekistan: Strategic Achievement in Protecting Children's Rights - New Law and Plans for Implementation

Uzbekistan reached a strategic milestone in ensuring children's rights with the adoption of the [Law on the Protection of Children from All Forms of Violence in November 2024](#), which comes into force on May 15, 2025. This step was a logical continuation of previous legal reforms aimed at protecting women and filled an existing gap in the law, ensuring that children receive the level of protection they need.

The long-awaited law provides comprehensive mechanisms to prevent and respond to violence, including those not previously legislated, and expands the interpretation of exploitation, particularly sexual exploitation. Among the key innovations of great practical importance are:

- The introduction of protection orders to protect child victims of abuse.
- Establishment of a national 24-hour hotline.
- Introduction of enhanced procedural guarantees for children in justice (specialized premises, video recording of testimonies, special focus on confidentiality of information).
- Establishment of the right to

compensation for moral harm.

Republican Social Information Center "ISTIQBOLLI AVLOD" conducted active internal training of the team to promote the law and its implementation. The Center has contributed to the advocacy of the law and in partnership with the Commissioner for Children's Rights (Children's Ombudsman) of the Oliy Majlis (the parliament in Uzbekistan) is launching a large-scale national campaign to explain and promote the law. At least two events are planned in each region of Uzbekistan, with each regional office adapting the content and format to the priority target audiences in its territory. Regular events aim to raise awareness and understanding of the law among parents, local self-governments, volunteers, women's activists and other stakeholders to ensure its effective implementation on the ground.

Source: [Republican Social Information Center "ISTIQBOLLI AVLOD"](#)

ASTRA Network at CSW69: Elevating Feminist Voices from Central and Eastern Europe on the Global Stage

At the 69th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69) held in March 2025 in New York, the ASTRA Network powerfully reaffirmed its role as a leading feminist voice from Central

and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. This year's CSW marked 30 years since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action—offering both a moment for reflection and a vital opportunity for renewed commitment to gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

ASTRA's delegation brought the realities of a region facing democratic backsliding, increasing hostility to gender justice, and shrinking civic space into focus. Representatives from across the region—including Poland, Hungary, Armenia, and others—shared national-level concerns while identifying regional trends of policy rollback, coordinated attacks on SRHR, and the spread of ultraconservative narratives.

As ASTRA Network Coordinator, Ewa Szymera actively distributed ASTRA's joint country-level statements and advocacy materials, highlighting threats and priorities to policymakers and global partners. One-pagers presenting ASTRA's mission, regional strategy, and network of members ensured that the voices of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia were both visible and valued in global conversations.

Strategic Voices for Change

As noted in [SRHM's coverage of CSW 2025](#), many advocates voiced concern that “multilateral spaces are increasingly fragile” and that women's rights are often used as political bargaining

chips. ASTRA and its allies argued that the response must be collective and urgent—grounded in community realities and inclusive of the voices most often marginalized, including youth, migrants, and LGBTQ+ communities.

The network highlighted the need for:

- Sustainable funding for feminist movements in under-resourced regions.
- Policy accountability mechanisms that go beyond declarations
- Stronger partnerships between civil society, youth advocates, and international bodies.

Beyond New York:

Building the Momentum

For ASTRA, CSW69 was not simply a venue for advocacy—it was a powerful reminder that transformative change requires coordinated action, global solidarity, and unwavering commitment to feminist principles. In a time of political uncertainty and rising backlash, ASTRA returns from New York with renewed energy to hold governments accountable, protect rights defenders, and push forward a shared agenda for SRHR and gender justice.

As one ASTRA delegate said: “We cannot afford symbolic wins. We need transformative action—now.”

Member Spotlight:

Association for Liberty and Equality of Gender A.L.E.G. from Romania



Beyond the Echo Chamber: Camelia Proca's* Call for Empathy, Action, and Youth Power

Q: Your work with A.L.E.G. has spanned two decades, focusing on gender equality and combating gender-based violence. How have you seen the landscape of SRHR evolve in Romania and Eastern Europe during this time, especially for young people?

CP: In terms of policy support and attitudes from public authorities towards the topic of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), I am afraid we are seeing a major regression in the last ten years. Back when Romania was preparing for EU accession, there were still many campaigns coming from international UN bodies. There were for example campaigns on safe sex, contraception and protection from STIs supported by the Ministry of Health and/or Public Health Directorates at the county level. I haven't seen any such campaign since before the pandemic. The topic of sexuality has almost vanished from the public agenda, as though this dimension of human health had disappeared.

The more the internet took over our lives, the heavier the silence of the authorities on this topic. Unfortunately, the need for good quality information is maybe greater than ever, with rising misinformation and accessible pornography, but the high school students today seem to have fewer

trusted sources of information than the previous generations. One of our volunteers was just saying the other day: we have no sexuality education in our schools, but lots of pregnancies and abuse.

Even in official statistics, Romania scores high in several serious indicators like teenage pregnancy and human trafficking affecting minors. We also linger on the last place among EU member states when it comes to the index of gender equality, looking at the way men and women access money, time, power, health and education. These are signs that policies are going in the wrong direction, but we have few courageous politicians ready to take on controversial issues: most are busy populists striving to appear conservative and uphold the same old puritan norms.

The bravest actors breaking the conspiracy of silence and hypocrisy are the independent journalists and the civil society organizations, including students groups. They continue to raise the issue, investigate and publish stories, petition, organize public protests, and offer platforms for information.

Q: Youth engagement is often seen as crucial in pushing forward SRHR agendas. What are some promising examples you've seen of young people leading or influencing change in this field?

CP: The National Student Council, an

informal student body with structures at every county level, has been constantly demanding compulsory sexuality education in schools over the course of several years. In 2022, when the Parliament voted for allowing only sanitary education in schools and only in certain conditions, the Council has been active in pointing out the need and demanding alternatives such as to integrate the topic in existing subjects like biology to make sure universal access is ensured.

I am often amazed at the resilience of NGOs working in this hostile environment and still finding the resources and the energy to go on. Midwives Association and Filia are undertaking brave research and advocacy on access to abortion. E-Romnja is ensuring assistance for some of the most vulnerable groups. Sexul vs Barza offers the most comprehensive web platform for sexuality education. SECS and Tineri pentru tineri are maybe the oldest NGOs delivering info on contraception and healthy relationships to young people, careful to reach vulnerable groups. Iele Sanziene and Pe Stop are young organizations striving for wider access to menstrual education and products, delivering both educational workshops and advocacy actions. Coalition for Gender Equality brings together 15 organizations, including A.L.E.G., and is active in promoting gender equality education as well as advocacy for improved access to safe abortions in the public medical system,

as well as collecting signatures for My Voice My Choice.

Q: *A.L.E.G. introduced an innovative peer-to-peer support model for survivors of gender-based violence. Could you tell us more about how this model works and how youth are involved or benefit from it?*

CP: The #ȘiEuReușesc programme run by A.L.E.G. is complementary to classical services for survivors by adding peer-to-peer support and inspiration. The idea is to establish local groups where survivors who overcome violence share their experiences and provide emotional and practical support to other women facing abuse. These communities also include professionals like psychologists and legal advisors, ensuring comprehensive assistance.

Youth involvement is part of the programme as an effort to support healthy relationship patterns among young people who witnessed controlling behaviour in their homes. The “Smart Heart” initiative educates adolescents about emotional intelligence and recognizing early signs of coercion and abuse. They not only contribute to a supportive network but also gain valuable skills, awareness and the resources to support those in need.

Q: *What are the key barriers young people in Romania face in accessing comprehensive sexuality education and SRHR services today?*

CP: Sexuality education is not consistently part of the national school curriculum. Talking about relationships, contraception, or reproductive health remains taboo. Stigma prevents young people from seeking information or services. Strong conservative and religious influences often oppose sexuality education, framing it as inappropriate or immoral, which limits public and political support. Without reliable education, many young people rely on peers or the internet, leading to misconceptions and risky behaviors.

Q: *How can organizations like A.L.E.G. and networks like ASTRA better support young activists and youth-led initiatives around SRHR and gender justice?*

CP: The best support is to give in simple words easy-to-understand arguments why sexual and reproductive health and rights matter to everyday life of young people and the impact it can have for the better or worse. Very often, activists tend to speak in technical terms that are very hard to understand by young people, their parents and teachers, especially when they didn't have any training on this topic. While conservative groups come with highly emotional and oversimplified messages, human rights organizations tend to remain isolated in an echo-chamber where only those already aware understand them. This only adds to the existing barriers and further contributes to ineffective solutions and lack of proper information. We need to be speaking not only to allies, but learn to

communicate with those who disagree with us. This is easier said than done, so help is welcomed.

Q: *From your experience, what role do intersectionality and inclusivity play in SRHR advocacy, especially when working with diverse youth communities?*

CP: It is important to be open to all young people and refrain from judging their different needs. The emphasis should be on building bridges and empathy, not contributing to further polarity and separation in our societies. And we need to be aware that the existing backlash is a consequence of fear and lack of communication. It will not be solved unless we find ways around these fears, around these breakdowns in communication.

Q: *You've collaborated with European networks such as WAVE and ASTRA. How important is regional and cross-border cooperation in advancing SRHR for youth in Eastern Europe?*

CP: European networks and organizations should now collaborate more than ever, beyond traditional country or topic boundaries, helping each other overcome difficulties and staying connected. We can only preserve peace if we care about neighbours. The increasing nationalism in our countries require us to keep communication lines open and raise awareness about emerging trends and solutions. Both ASTRA and WAVE are extremely good at facilitating quick reaction when

needed and experience exchanges to keep hope alive.

Q: What gives you hope when it comes to the future of gender equality and youth activism in SRHR? Are there any particular moments or people who inspire you?

We have recently helped train the staff of a new counseling center for survivors in the Republic of Moldova: Femei pentru femei (Women for Women). Their youth and passion was inspiring to us. Soon after our training, they faced a major challenge: a fire in their building nearly destroyed their office. But thankfully nobody got hurt and the fire did not stop them from continuing their work.

It feels like this is what we are all doing these days: putting out fires and carrying on. It is very exhausting and we should expect to feel tired and overwhelmed at times. We should take breaks to recharge, but keep our hopes up. And help each other.

* **Camelia Proca** is founder and director of A.L.E.G., non-governmental organization active since 2004 in Romania and Eastern Europe on promoting gender equality, preventing gender-based violence and providing support to survivors. Camelia has a diploma in the equal status and human rights of women from Raol Wallenberg Institute for Human Rights in Sweden and served as board member of the European WAVE Network.



UPCOMING EVENTS

1. **Seventy-eighth World Health Assembly is being held in Gva, Switzerland, on 19–27 May 2025.**

The theme of this year's Health Assembly is: One World for Health.

Proceedings will be webcast live from this web page. Simultaneous interpretation will be available in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

[More information](#)

2. **European Humanitarian Forum 2025**

The 4th European Humanitarian Forum 2025 (EHF), will be co-hosted by the European Commission and Poland, holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU, **on 19-20 May 2025 at The Square in Brussels.**

As for the previous 3 editions, the event will be organised back-to-back with the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) meeting.

[More information](#)

3. **The Oslo Freedom Forum (OFF) will take place May 26-28, 2025 in Oslo, Norway.**

This year's Oslo Freedom Forum will explore the theme "Imagine." In authoritarian regimes, even the simple act of imagining a better future can be seen as a threat. Dictators fear this because meaningful change begins when people dare to envision something greater for themselves and future generations.

[Apply for OFF 2025](#)

4. **High-Level Political Forum, New York**

In 2025, the HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC will be convened from **Monday, 14 July, through Wednesday, 23 July 2025.** The high-level segment of ECOSOC, including the three-day ministerial segment of the HLPF, will be convened from Monday, 21 July, through Thursday, 24 July 2025. The theme of the 2025 ECOSOC and HLPF is "Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs for leaving no one behind". The SDGs to be reviewed in-depth are Goals 3, 5, 8, 14 and 17.

[More information](#)

5. **4th International Conference on Financing for Development Sevilla, Spain | 30 June - 3 July 2025**

The Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD4) provides a unique opportunity to reform financing at all levels, including to support reform of the international financial architecture and addressing financing challenges preventing the urgently needed investment push for the SDGs.

[More information](#)

PUBLICATION HIGHLIGHTS

1. **Obstetric violence against women living with HIV in Eastern Europe and Central Asia** by the Eurasian Women's Network on AIDS ([EWNA](#))

[Download](#)

2. **'It's Happening Even Without You Noticing': Increasing Barriers to Accessing Sexual and Reproductive Health Care in Romania** [by Human Rights Watch](#)

[Download](#)

3. **Sustainable Development in the UNECE Region in 2025: More Data, Persistent Challenges** by the Economic Commission for Europe

[Download](#)

4. **Childbirth Experience in Romanian Hospitals**", prepared by Diana-Elena Neaga (PhD), Professor Laura Grünberg (PhD), and Crina Radu (PhD candidate)

[Download](#)

ASTRA

Secretariat

Foundation for Women and Family Planning

Nowolipie 13/15, 00-150 Warsaw, Poland

ph/fax +48 22 635 93 95,

federa@astra.org.pl

astra.org.pl



Follow ASTRA!

[Facebook](#) facebook

[Instagram](#) instagram

[X](#) x

[Linkedin](#) linkedin