



A S T R A N E T W O R K

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CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

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Happy New Year from ASTRA Network – we wish all our supporters, friends, partners, feminists and donors a very happy and fruitful new year - 2016!

BURNING ISSUE

Constitutional court to review the law on abortion in Croatia

The president of Croatia's constitutional court, Jasna Omejec, announced the start of a constitutional review of the law on medical measures, which allow abortion until the 10th week of pregnancy. The review will most likely happen by June 2016.

The proposal of the Croatian Movement for Life and Family was filed 24 years ago, to institute proceedings to review the constitutionality of the law which allows abortion. The founder of this

socially conservative Christian NGO, Ruzica Cavar, “thanked God for the willingness of the constitutional court to deal with the issue. I almost lost all hope, after more than 20 years when nothing was happening. The only thing the court did until now was to send an inquiry to a team of medical experts in 2009,” she said. According to her, the experts had agreed that “life begins with conception”, which she said worked in favour of her application. Legalized abortion was “unjust from a number of perspectives”, she said, as it breached article 21 of the constitution, which says that “every human being has a right to life”.

Only recently the President of HDZ's Health Committee and the leading candidate for new Croatian health minister Ante Ćorušić talked about abortion at a radio broadcast claiming that "human life begins when male and female gametes combine. Abortion is an agreed form of violent interruption of human life. That is the only truth. However, absolute prohibition is out of the question." Speaking in some earlier interviews, Ćorušić said that he liked the Polish model where abortion is legal with considerable limitations stipulated by law. "We will definitely change the law on abortion from 1978. Modern Croatia must not and cannot be subject to a law adopted during the totalitarian regime. We will give women a week to once again think about their decision, with the help of experts, gynaecologists and psychologists", Ćorušić said.

Croatia, mainly Catholic country, inherited the law of 1978 from communist Yugoslavia. According to the World Health Organization, there were 85 abortions for every 1,000 births in Croatia in 2012, compared to an EU average of 216.

Sources: [Total Croatia News](#), [Total Croatian News](#), [Balkan Insight](#),

REGIONAL UPDATES

Polish Health Ministry: IVF will not be state-funded

Konstanty Radziwiłł, the Health Minister of Poland, said that the state funding programme for in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) will only last until June 2016, and will not be prolonged. Although the previous liberal Civic Platform (PO) government decided that in-vitro fertilisation funding would be extended until December 2019, the newly elected Law and Justice (PiS) government wants to overturn the decision.

The programme was criticised by PiS since the very beginning. “It was not set in stone that in-vitro fertilisation is to be state-funded forever,” Radziwiłł said after a parliamentary health commission meeting. The Minister also indicated that “the in-vitro procedure is not the only one possible, when it comes to infertility treatment.”

At the same time, Radziwiłł stressed that the procedure “is legal, the legislation [of in vitro fertilisation] is in effect. We are discussing the hundreds of millions of Polish złoty which is derived from the national budget, which we cannot afford to spend,” the minister said.

Radziwiłł added that a new legislation on “procreation” will soon be tabled by the health ministry.

Source: [TheNews.pl](#)

Preparing for the law on in vitro fertilization in Lithuania

The first project of the law on in vitro fertilization (IVF) was registered in 2002, but there is still only a valid law of 1999, which instigates lots of misunderstandings for more than 15 years. Politicians cannot agree on the compensation of procedure, the number of frozen embryos, the terms of freezing, for whom to let and for whom to forbid to use this opportunity. The medical professionals agree that this law is necessary, but there is still a strong church opposition. To add more, in prepared project of law there are lots of minuses for patients with oncological diseases, whom definitely are the most important group of people that might need to think about IVF before the treatment. There are suggestions to forbid donations of germ cells, maternity of surrogate, also to let use fertilization only for married couples or for those who had registered their relationships (but still Lithuania doesn't have the regulation of law of civil partnership). Another thing that has to be changed is the term of freezing, because for now it's only 5 years, but the treatment and rehabilitation for oncological patients definitely can last longer; and age to use fertilisation as for now only adult people can use it, but it isn't indicated what to do if a young person aged 11 or 17 falls ill.

Source: [FPSHA](#)

Moldova to adopt a new strategic document in the field of sexual and reproductive health

The training in strategic planning for the development of the National Reproductive Health Strategy (NRHS) 2016 – 2020, followed by the working meeting "Presentation of priorities and areas of the new intervention in reproductive health" took place on the 4th – 6th November 2015, in Chisinau, Moldova. The event was organized by the [Reproductive Health Training Center \(RHTC\)](#), coordinated by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Moldova, with the support of WHO and UNFPA, Moldova. Representatives of MOH and civil society, national and international experts in SRHR and strategic planning attended the event.

The new NRHS 2016 – 2020' priorities and the discrepancies on access, quality, and cost on each domain of the Strategy, from the beneficiaries' perspective, were established and the structural causes of these discrepancies have been identified. The training was conducted by Borbala Koo, international expert in reproductive health, Romania, Rodica Comendant, national expert, director [RHTC](#), Moldova and Alexei Buzu, expert in strategic planning, executive director, Partnership for Development, Moldova. The next steps of the development of the RH Strategy will include the development of the action plan and tools for monitoring and evaluation, which is planned for the next two weeks.

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

16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence in Armenia

To mark 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence in Armenia, Society Without Violence has organized the discussion on the topic "[The perception of beauty](#)". The discussion was focused on the prevalence of feminine beauty ideals and confirmation of women to beauty norms. It was

highlighted that these beauty ideals are rooted in heteronormative values and that they strongly influence the rights of women to make decisions about their bodies. The meeting aimed at revealing all stereotypes regarding the current perception of beauty in Armenia and at empowering women to recognize they have the right to make decisions about their bodies, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Source: [Society Without Violence](#)

Training on CEDAW in Armenia

On December 22, Society Without Violence founder Anna Arutshyan held a [CEDAW training](#) for SWV staff and partners. As an organization playing an active role in monitoring and implementing CEDAW, SWV strongly valued the necessity of raising awareness on this instrument and on highlighting the importance of using it in organization's work. The training introduced the UN system and the Convention to the participants and highlighted some of the provisions of CEDAW, including Article 12 on health care services. The participants acquired skills on how to advocate for the implementation of provisions of CEDAW.

Source: [Society Without Violence](#)

Participation in the TV programme devoted to the domestic violence issue

Women's Rights Center representatives were guests in the programme 'Human Factor' broadcasted by Armenia TV Channel on December 8, 2015. The Women's Rights Center attorney and psychologist discussed the issue of domestic violence along with UNFPA and other NGOs' representatives. During the programme a number of problems were raised, including causes and factors of domestic violence. The programme is accessible at [YouTube](#).

Source: [WRC](#)

Press conference concluding 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence Campaign in Armenia

On the International Human Rights Day (10th December), Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women organized a press conference devoted to the conclusion of the '16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence Campaign' in the Media Center. Speakers of the conference were member organizations of the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women. The aims and important dates of the campaign were presented at the conference, including the International Human Rights Day and the anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Deeply rooted stereotypes and problems regarding domestic violence were discussed within the framework of the campaign. The necessity of adoption of the Draft Law on Domestic Violence Prevention was also highlighted. The press brief from the conference along with the video are accessible at [Media Center](#).

Source: [WRC](#)

Trainings on domestic violence issue in Armenia

Women's Rights Center psychologist and attorney organized a training on domestic violence for psychologists, social and special teachers. 16 participants from 10 schools in Yerevan attended the training. The issue of domestic violence, its features and factors, types of domestic violence were introduced. The trainers talked about the cases and cycle of domestic violence and discussed main mechanisms of legal protection. The core aim of the training was how to reveal the cases of domestic violence and how to assist a possible victim. The participants raised many different questions and discussed the school cases of violence which demanded intervention. Such trainings will be organized in 2016 once a month and will be conducted by different specialists in order to provide primary prevention of domestic violence.

The photos from the trainings are available at [Women's Rights Center website](#).

Source: [WRC](#)

Slovenia against same-sex marriage

Slovenians voted in a referendum against an amendment which would have given same-sex couples the right to get married. Although 63.5 percent voted "No", turnout was low at 36 percent. In March 2015, the Slovene Parliament agreed to redefine marriage as "between two people" instead of "between a man and a woman." However, a Church-led citizen's initiative, called 'for children', appealed the decision, calling for a referendum to repeal the amendment. Although family law, including marriage, remains the exclusive competence of Member States, Members of the European Parliament regret the referendum, which was initiated to withhold equal rights.

Source: [European Parliament's Intergroup on LGBT Rights](#)

GLOBAL UPDATES

Will the next UN Secretary General represent Eastern Europe?

The United Nations formally kicked off the race for the next secretary-general on December 15th and the world body's 193 members were encouraged to consider putting forward a woman for the top job that has been held by a man for the past 70 years. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, a former South Korean foreign minister, is due to step down at the end of 2016 after serving two five-year terms. The job customarily rotates between regions, with Eastern Europe next on the list.

The 15-member Security Council, including veto powers China, Russia, the United States, Britain and France, traditionally considers an undisclosed list behind closed doors and recommends a candidate to be elected by the General Assembly. U.N. officials say they hope a list of candidates will be completed by March 2016. So far two candidates had been put forward for selection - former U.N. General Assembly President Srgjan Kerim of Macedonia and Croatian Foreign Minister Vesna Pusic

Source: [Reuters](#)

UN Secretary-General appoints Special Adviser on 2030 Agenda

The UN Secretary-General has appointed Dr David Nabarro of the United Kingdom as his Special Adviser on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He will work with Member States and other relevant stakeholders “to galvanize action on implementation of the Agenda, while overseeing the Secretary-General’s special initiatives,” such as “Every Woman Every Child”.

David Nabarro has over 30 years experience in public health, nutrition and development work. Having led the UK delegation at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994. Most recently he was the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy on Ebola, providing strategic and policy direction for the international response.

Source: [NGOs Beyond 2014](#)

AWID and partners brief the CEDAW Committee on religious fundamentalisms

During the 62nd CEDAW session held in November 2015, AWID, ARROW, SRI and the World Council of Churches presented a thematic briefing to the CEDAW Committee in Geneva titled “Religious Fundamentalisms, Extreme Interpretations of Religion and Gender Justice”. The aim of the briefing was to illustrate how rising religious fundamentalisms, across regions and religions, inhibit implementation of the CEDAW Convention and the accountability of states to their legal obligations under the Convention, and to share some of the existing best practices for the defence of women’s rights and gender justice.

Source: [AWID](#)

YOUTH

UN adopts resolution on youth, peace and security

United Nations Security Council has adopted unanimously the ground-breaking resolution on youth, peace and security in early December. The resolution builds on five blocks: participation, protection, prevention, partnerships and disengagement and reintegration. It recognizes youth as important group able to contribute positively to prevention and resolution of conflicts as well as influencing maintenance and promotion of peace and security. The Council urges Member States to increase youth participation in decision-making processes at all levels and consider ways to develop mechanisms for prevention and conflict resolution. Facilitation of inclusive and enabling environment in which youth actors, local communities and non-governmental agents can be engaged to develop strategies to counteract violent extremist narrative is also addressed in the document. Member States are also urged to increase their political, financial, technical and logistical support which pays attention to young people’s needs and participation in peace efforts, conflict and post-conflict realities. The resolution is accessible at [UN website](#).

Source: [UN](#)

“It’s about you” campaign on abortion stigma in Macedonia

On the International Human Rights Day (10th December), the campaign „It’s about you” was launched as part of H.E.R.A. Youth project ‘Abortion Stigma’. The launch of the campaign was accompanied by a statement from the HERA Youth calling the Government and the Ministry of Health to take into consideration the concluding observations of the UN Human Rights Committee to review the law and stop the anti-abortion campaign.

Young girls and activists developed four videos, in which they share their opinions on the situation in Macedonia. The first video was focused on the analysis of the effects of the anti-abortion campaign launched by the government. This campaign included spreading films with upsetting and shocking anti-abortion messages such as ‘Women who had an abortion are killers’ broadcasted on national TV. In the second video the activists were looking back at the protests that were organized against the restrictive changes on abortion law, as well as were discussing the proposed changes, how they affected and will affect women, and how they discriminate and stigmatize women. The third video depicted the analysis of the changes of law and limits in the access to abortion in Macedonia. Finally, in the last video girls of diverse ethnicities shared their opinion on abortion stigma and abortion.

The videos are available at YouTube [here](#) and [here](#).

Source: [H.E.R.A.](#)

Launch of the study on young people’s situation in Moldova

The Center for Demographic Research and UNFPA has released its third Barometer [“The Situation of Young People in the Republic of Moldova: from Desiderata to Opportunities”](#) and launched it officially during the Final Conference of the Academy of Young Workers, organized by the National Youth Council of Moldova.

The Barometer examines the situation of young people in the field of education, health and labour market. As it evidences, young people face social exclusion in education and employment, as 29% of young people are not enrolled in any form of training or professional development and are unemployed. At the same time, many young Moldovans study or seek a job abroad.

As regards youth health, the study evidences that the prevalence of sexually transmitted infections remains high, as 6 out of 10 people infected with STI are young people aged 15-29. In 2013, about 14% of new HIV cases were registered among people aged 15-24. This data testifies to lower percentage of young people holding comprehensive knowledge on HIV/AIDS transmission, as this rate dropped from 40.5% in 2005 to about 32% in 2013.

The participants of the conference discussed the outcomes of the Barometer, focusing on recommendations aiming to improve the quality of young people’s lives. The proposed solutions were related to enhancement of healthcare quality, including sexual and reproductive health; development of family life education and psychological support services.

Source: [UNFPA Moldova](#), [Mednews.md](#)

Lithuanian girls will get a free vaccination from HPV

From 2016, girls in Lithuania will have an opportunity to get a free vaccine for human papilloma virus that can cause cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is diagnosed for two women per day in Lithuania, and half of diagnosed women die. It is established that vaccination can reduce morbidity by 70%, so WHO recommends it as an effective solution that has to be free on the national level. So far, there are 26 countries in Europe that ensure these vaccinations for girls without any charge.

Source: [FPSHA](#)

Protest to encourage politicians to solve the problem of sexuality education in Lithuania

Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights and young activists lead the protest near the Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science office. With this protest, the activists wanted to encourage politicians to solve the problem of sexuality education in Lithuania. They highlighted that HIV spreads rapidly among youth and teen girls get pregnant two times more often than girls in the Western Europe countries. The protest participants held the banners with messages: 'Ignorance doesn't protect from diseases', 'I want to know about contraception', 'I want planned parenthood'.

As the data of the Statistical Department shows, there were 13,3 labours for 1000 teenagers in Lithuania. It also evidences that teenagers start their sexual lives at the average of 16-17 years old, but one out of five doesn't use any contraception at all.

The photos from the protest are accessible [here](#).

Source: [FPSHA](#)

ASTRA Youth photo event for 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence

To mark the campaign 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, ASTRA Youth organized a social media photo event 'I have the right to...' to bring attention to violation of youth sexual and reproductive health and rights in the region.

ASTRA Youth members published their photos with messages calling for recognition of young people's right to comprehensive sexuality education, access to SRH services, contraception and safe abortion. They also paid attention to the fact that limiting or banning the access to SRH services and goods is a form of institutional violence towards young people and adolescents.

All the photos can be viewed at [ASTRA Youth Facebook](#).

UPCOMING EVENTS

International Conference on Family Planning and panel of ASTRA member from Poland

The [International Conference on Family Planning \(#ICFP\)](#) will now take place on January 25-28, 2016 in Nusa Dua, Indonesia. It will be co-hosted by the National Population and Family Planning Board of Indonesia (Bkkbn) and the Bill & Melinda Gates Institute for Population and Reproductive Health at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. This conference is expected to draw the largest number of attendants yet, and the ICFP will help shape and influence the role and contributions of family planning in attaining the new Sustainable Development Goals. The theme is *Global Commitments, Local Actions*. Each day of the conference will feature a plenary session focused on a different track theme. The tracks will feature issue-oriented themes, such as: addressing youth needs and involvement; rights and quality of care: true improvements or lip service; the demographic dividend: how south-to-south exchanges can help its realization; implementation best practices (IBP); advancing FP through faith organizations; FP2020 progress and challenges; innovations in financing (GFF, Universal Health Care); and accountability and advocacy.

The Executive Director of the Polish ASTRA Member – the Federation for Women and Family Planning – Krystyna Kacpura together with Executive Director of ARROW, Sivananthi Thanenthiran, will participate in a panel „What is our responsibility towards women when contraception fails or is not used?“ on Tuesday, 26th January in room Kintamani 7 from 16.20 – 17.40.

Source: <http://fpconference.org/2015>

3rd International Congress on Women’s Health and Unsafe Abortion

The 3rd IWAC congress to be held on 26-29 January 2016 in Bangkok, Thailand. The Theme of this congress is "Working Together Towards Global Safe Abortion". To view the preliminary program click [here](#).

Source: www.womenhealth.or.th

12th Conference of the International Federation of Professional Abortion and Contraception Associates

The international bi-annual conference for health care professionals working in the field of abortion care and contraception will take place in Lisboa, Portugal on 14-15 October 2016. The theme for this event is “Improving women's journeys through abortion”.

Access the conference flyer [here](#).

Source: [FIAPAC](#)

PUBLICATIONS

World Health Organization launched a new comprehensive analysis of global health trends since 2000 and an assessment of the challenges for the next 15 years. "Health in 2015: from MDGs to SDGs" identifies the key drivers of progress in health under the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It lays out actions that countries and the international community should prioritize to achieve the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which come into effect on 1 January 2016.

Source: [World Health Organization](#)

State of World Population 2015

„*Shelter From the Storm: A transformative agenda for women and girls in a crisis-prone world - the State of World Population 2015*” report by UNFPA is a annual report presenting the most urgent and up to date population issues.

More than 100 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance—more than at any time since the end of the Second World War. Among those displaced by conflict or uprooted by disaster are an estimated 26 million women and adolescent girls in their childbearing years. The State of World Population 2015 is a call to action to meet their needs and protect their rights.

Related links:

[SWOP 2015 launch page](#)

Regional overview: [Addressing the Needs of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Emergencies in Eastern Europe and Central Asia](#)

Regional feature story: [When time won't wait: Meeting basic health needs for pregnant women on the move](#)

Regional map: [Interactive Map on Emergencies and Humanitarian Response and Preparedness to Provide SRH Services in Eastern Europe and Central Asia](#)

Source: [UNFPA EECA](#)

Factsheet: Efficacy of emergency contraception and body weight

New factsheet by the European Consortium for Emergency Contraception - [Efficacy of emergency contraception and body weight: Current understanding and recommendations](#). This summary was developed by Kelly Cleland of the American Society for Emergency Contraception in January 2015, and the document had been adapted to the European context.

Source: [European Consortium for Emergency Contraception](#)

YCSRR World AIDS Day Watchdog

The Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (YCSRR), in cooperation with WGNRR, the International Community of Women Living with HIV and members of the initiative 'More Than Our Status' has released its 2015 edition of the [World AIDS Day Watchdog](#).

The watchdog includes stories of young women and adolescent girls and their experiences as people living with HIV and/or affected by HIV. The stories examine oppression, discrimination and lack of respect for human rights which persons living with HIV struggle worldwide.

Source: [YCSRR](#)

ASTRA Network Members: Albania - Albanian Family Planning Association; Armenia - Society Without Violence; Armenia - Women's Resource Center; Armenia - Women's Rights Center; Azerbaijan - Center "Women and Modern World"; Belarus - Women's Independent Democratic Movement of Belarus; Bulgaria - Bulgarian Family Planning and Sexual Health Association; Bulgaria - Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation; Bulgaria - Gender Education, Research and Technologies; Bulgaria - Demetra Association; Bulgaria - Gender Alternatives Foundation; Bosnia and Herzegovina – Sarajevo Open Center; Croatia - B.a.b.e.; Croatia – CESI; Croatia - Women's Room; Georgia – HERA XXI; Georgia – Real People, Real Vision; Georgia - Women's Center; Hungary – PATENT; Kazakhstan - The Legal Center for Women's Initiatives "Sana Sezim"; Lithuania - Family Planning and Sexual Health Association; Latvia - Latvia's Association for Family Planning And Sexual Health; Macedonia - Association for emancipation, solidarity and equality of women; Macedonia – H.E.R.A.; Macedonia – Shelter Center; Moldova – Family Planning Association; Moldova - Reproductive Health Training Center; Poland - Federation for Women and Family Planning; Romania - A.L.E.G.; Romania - AnA: Society for Feminist Analysis; Romania - Euroregional Center for Public Initiatives; Romania - The East European Institute of Reproductive Health; Russia - Novogorod Gender Center; Russia – Russian Association for Population and Development; Slovakia – Pro Choice; Tajikistan – Gender and Development; Ukraine - Women Health and Family Planning; Ukraine - Charitable SALUS Foundation; Uzbekistan - Future Generation

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