CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Rights

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BURNING ISSUE

Bratislava hospital revokes decision to stop conducting abortions. The controversial decision of the university teaching hospital in Bratislava to stop carrying out abortions has been taken back. The news was confirmed by the head of the hospital today for daily SME.

Abortions are legal in Slovakia up to the 12th week of pregnancy. According to the official announcement from last week, the university teaching hospital in Bratislava has decided to stop carrying out patient-requested abortions at its three clinics from 1 February. The issue has raised questions about whether current health minister from the Christian democratic party KDH, Ivan Uhliarik, might have been behind the move. According to daily Pravda, the decision was made unofficially and without due justification, although it is allegedly based on the demand of the physicians to have the right to conscientiously object to doing certain work that goes against their religious faith. Conscientious objection is one of the issues that the KDH party feels strongly about. Uhliarik says abortions have been refused for years and that it is nothing new, pointing to the hospital in Nove Zamky as an example, where no voluntary abortions have been carried out for six years already.

REGIONAL UPDATES


The aim of the report and of the launch event was to highlight the problem and to raise awareness about sexual education in the Central and Eastern Europe and Balkan Countries’ on the European Union level and to bring attention of the EU policy makers to the situation of sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people in these countries. The report covers issues related to the sexual education, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS, abortion, contraception, youth health care and evaluation of official data and legal issues. The data in the reports is provided for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Georgia, Macedonia, Poland, Ukraine and Kazakhstan. The most important issue arising from the reports is the lack of the sexual education in all of the countries covered by the report. According to the study, in none of these countries young people receive reliable and science based sexual education in schools. The existing curricula are most often influenced by ideology and/or religion while the term “sex” is constantly avoided and limited by access to contraception.


EU’s Hungarian Presidency recognises MDGs in six-month programme. The programme of the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, entitled ‘Strong Europe’ has been released. Although this 56-page document does not make specific reference to health in development, it does include the MDGs. It states there is a ‘need to elaborate on the progress of commitments made by EU member states towards reaching the Millennium Development Goals’, of which health is central and in particular MDG 5 (improving maternal health and universal access to contraception), has a long way to go and needs urgent attention.

To access the full programme, please see: http://www.eu2011.hu/files/bveu/documents/HU_PRES_STRONG_EUROPE_EN_3.pdf

Russian Orthodox Church calls for abortion restrictions. Russia is battling a demographic crisis, with its population dropping by almost six million since 1993, and the government has tried to boost the birth rate by offering mothers cash payouts for the birth of each child. Abortion rates remain high in Russia, due to factors including a lack of free contraceptives and a low take-up of the birth control pill. Abortions are provided for free by law. In 2009, 1.29 million abortions were registered, against 1.76 million births, according to figures released by the state statistics agency, which do not include backstreet abortions. The socially influential Russian Orthodox Church opposes abortion unless the woman's life is in danger. The Russian Orthodox Church appealed to the Russian government to restrict women's rights to abortion to cut high abortion rates in a list of policy suggestions published Monday. Abortions should not be covered by compulsory health insurance, unless the woman's life is in danger, the Church said in a list of suggestions published on its website and sent to the government ahead of a debate on family policy. Women should be told of "all the negative consequences and risks" and should have a compulsory cooling-off period after
agreeing to have an abortion, the Church said in its suggestions to improve family and child policies. Representatives of so-called "traditional faiths," a term that in Russia usually refers to Orthodox Christianity, Judaism and Islam, should consult women at "crisis centres" in maternity hospitals, the Church suggested.

Source: AFP

Anti-choice campaign in Macedonia. The Government of Macedonia launched a new media campaign against abortions, under the motto “Choose Life, You Have the Right to Choose”, with serious of print media ads and two videos that focus exclusively on the negative consequences of abortions. The information provided to the citizens is one-sided and doesn’t cover other aspects of termination of pregnancies. Human rights experts fear that the campaign aims to prepare the public opinion for an outright ban on abortions. This is not the first anti-abortion campaign in Macedonia. In 2007, the Government claimed it didn’t know who was behind the posters with the message “Don’t abort” and a picture of a bloody foetus, that covered downtown Skopje. Last year, the “Revita” NGO from Bitola launched an anti-abortion campaign and a special website, www.abortusne.org.mk, dedicated to the fight against the right to abortion. Pro-choice organizations called the Government to stopping and withdrawing the campaign.

Poland : Parliament passes Gender Quota Bill. The Polish Parliament has approved a bill which aims at promoting gender equality in the country’s political life. According to the new legislation, at least 35 percent of all candidates on the lists of all parties running for seats in the 460-seat lower house must be women. The rule will not apply to elections to the 100-seat upper house, the Senate. Currently women account for some 20 percent of deputies in the lower house and for only 8 percent of senators. The next parliamentary elections are scheduled for autumn in 2011.

Source: Federation for Women and Family Planning

European Parliament asks Lithuania to reconsider homophobic laws. The European Parliament called on Lithuanian MPs to reject an amendment to the Lithuanian Code of Administrative Offences. The proposed amendment would punish the ‘public promotion of homosexual relations’ with fines from €580 to €2,900. Since 2009, Lithuania has amended its legislation to ban minors from accessing information on homosexuality, censor mentions of sexual orientation in advertising, and withdraw sexual orientation from the list of grounds protected by its educational equal opportunity policy. The EP’s resolution calls on Lithuanian law-makers to reject the proposed amendment put forward by MP Petras Gražulis of the Order and Justice party, and review previously-passed homophobic laws. The resolution also welcomes positive developments in Lithuania, such as previous presidential vetoes on homophobic laws, and the inclusion of sexual orientation as a motive for hate crime. The European Parliament had already expressed its concern at the Law on the Protection of Minors from the Detrimental Effects of Information in September 2009.

Source: ILGA

Birth rate drops in Ukraine for first time in many years, population loss grows, says statistics service. A total of 456,900 babies were born in Ukraine over the first eleven months of 2010, which is 14,500 less year-over-year, while population loss increased from 172,600 in 2009 to 181,500 people year-over-year. According to the State Service of Statistics of Ukraine, a reduction in the birth rate and growth in population loss was recorded last year for the first time since 2005. At the same time, the death rate also started to drop: in January through November 2009 some 644,000 people died in Ukraine, in comparison to 638,400 people year over year. The state statistics service also reported that the population of Ukraine was 45,795,911 people, as of December 1, 2010.
Chechnya: HIV-Negative Status Needed To Marry. The spiritual leaders of Muslim Chechnya have ordered that all couples who plan to marry prove they are HIV-negative, sparking outrage from activists and residents who say it violates Russian law. "Any potential bride or groom is obliged to receive a medical certificate proving they are HIV-negative," the Chechen mufti's press service informed. An imam can only approve of a marriage once the HIV-negative certificate is obtained. The order comes after the mufti and other spiritual heads demanded last year a total shutdown of all eateries during the holy month of Ramadan and ordered bands of armed men to harass women who did not wear headscarves. The mufti's orders have no legal weight but are generally followed because he is a respected spiritual leader and because of his ties to Chechnya's hardline leader Ramzan Kadyrov.

GLOBAL UPDATES

New UN Women’s head lays out 100-day action plan. UN Women – known formally as the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women – was established by the General Assembly in July last year, with the merger of four former UN agencies and offices: the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues, and the UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW). The 100-day action plan of the agency embraces a full spectrum of issues from supporting national partners to promoting coherence within the UN system. Stressing the need to “balance ambition with common sense,” Ms. Bachelet said UN Women would focus on five core principles: enhancing implementation of international accords by national partners; backing intergovernmental processes to strengthen the global framework on gender equality; advocating gender equality and women’s empowerment; promoting coherence with the UN on the issue; and, acting as a global broker of knowledge and experience. In her remarks to the board, Mr. Bachelet also presented five thematic priorities in the country-specific context: expanding women’s voice, leadership and participation; ending violence against women; ensuring women’s full participation in conflict resolution; enhancing women’s economic empowerment; and gender equality priorities central to national, local and sectoral planning and budgeting. The new agency will be formally launched on 24 February during the 55th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the global policy-making body dedicated exclusively to gender equality and the advancement of women.


No funding for SRHR under the European Commission’s “Investing in People Programme” in 2011. Due to the sheer volume of proposals received under the European Commission’s thematic programme ‘Investing in People’, chances of success are currently very low. In light of this, the Commission’s Directorate General for Development Cooperation (DG DEVCO) has reorganised the programme in its Mid-Term Review, so that there will be larger but fewer calls for proposals during 2011-13. While there are arguments this will improve each proposal’s chances of success, an event at DG DEVCO info point confirmed the unfortunate news for SRHR advocates and civil society, that SRHR will not be covered by a specific call until 2013. The only theme which with certainty will be funded under IIP in 2011 is “Gender equality”.
Source: DSW. For more information concerning this thematic programme, please see the Europe Aid webpage: http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/finance/dci/investing_en.htm

UPCOMING EVENTS

Launch of ASTRA Youth Report. Representatives of ASTRA and ASTRA Network will speak on panel on sexuality-related problems of adolescent girls and boys in Central and Eastern Europe. The discussion will be an opportunity for launching ASTRA Youth’s newest publication ‘Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Adolescents in Central and Eastern Europe and Balkan Countries’. The event will take place in the Downstairs Room room at the SA building, 4pm-5.30 pm on Wednesday, March 2nd. (address: Salvation Army International Social Justice Commission 221 East and 52nd St.).


CSW 2011. The fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women will take place at United Nations Headquarters in New York from Tuesday, 22 February to Friday, 4 March 2011. The priority theme of this year’s session is access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women’s equal access to full employment and decent work. Following these interactive events in the first week of the Commission, Member States will negotiate agreed conclusions (new policy recommendations) to accelerate implementation of existing commitments, including those in the Beijing Platform for Action.

Source: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/55sess.htm#priority

PUBLICATIONS

ICMA Newsletter. International Consortium for Medical Abortion has a new website and the newest issue of their newsletter has just come out. We recommend an article on Women on Web by Kinga Jelinska, and Daniela Draghici’s text: “Challenges and Perspectives in Advocacy for Safe Abortion”. It is available at: http://www.medicalabortionconsortium.org/uploads/file/newsletter%204%20eng%2020%20Jan.pdf

‘The police beat you up, demand money and will detain you until you pay’ - Police violence against sex workers in eleven countries in Europe and Central Asia. By Anna-Louise Crago, Aliya Rakhmetova & Acacia Shields. In Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia, a survey of 238 male, female, and transgender sex workers conducted by the Sex Workers’ Rights Advocacy Network (SWAN) found that 42 percent of sex workers in the region reported having experienced physical violence by the police and 36 percent had experienced sexual violence. Available in: Research for sex work 12 at: http://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/research-for-sex-work-12-english-russian_0.pdf

Evidence based guidelines for Youth Peer Education. Published by the Interagency Youth Working Group.

Available at: http://www.iywg.org/sites/default/files/peer_ed_guidelines.pdf
**Guttmacher Institute Launches New International Data Center.** New tool for researchers, advocates, policymakers, journalists and others working on reproductive health issues at the international level created to build, download and print custom tables and maps using the most current information available from a wide range of countries and regions. The International Data Center includes country and regional level data, which the user can compare and customize to meet his or her needs.

Accessible at: [http://www.guttmacher.org/idc/](http://www.guttmacher.org/idc/)

**IPPF EN Choices Magazine** – the newest issue of Choices focuses on sexual and reproductive health and rights in Europe. It is dedicated to Abortion in Europe and Central Asia and is available in English and in Russian. This edition of Choices covers some of the changes in recent years affecting the access to abortion in different countries, the work of IPPF globally and IPPF EN regionally on abortion and positive initiatives taken by various regional and international organizations working on the right and access to safe abortion.


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