



CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

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BURNING ISSUE

48th session of the UN Commission on Population and Development

The 48th Session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD48) was held at the United Nations headquarters in New York on April 13th to 17th. This year's topic was "Realizing the Future We Want: Integrating Population Issues into Sustainable Development, Including the Post-2015 Development Agenda."

The informal sessions began one week before the session as the Financing for Development preparatory meetings were simultaneously taking place across the building. The week after the CPD the intergovernmental meeting on Means of Implementation for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) took place. The time is definitely a very busy one with the Post-2015 discussions happening at very advanced level and the many converging themes and processes.

The *International Sexual and Reproductive Rights Caucus*, of which ASTRA is a member, had the possibility to present an [oral intervention](#) during the CPD session calling for "respect and protection of our right to have control over our own bodies and our sexuality, without any form of stigma, discrimination, coercion, or violence. (...)It is critical that we build on the gains we have made so far, and build on the momentum that exists. This is the time; right here, right now, at CPD 48 and during this critical moment in the post-2015 process, more than twenty years after Cairo. It is high time that

our language and policies adapt to the realities and needs of our people.” The international SRHR coalition also came forward with a [civil society statement](#) to express its position as well as disappointment with the process as well as lack of outcome document

At the end of two weeks of thought-provoking and intense discussions, the Commission on Population and Development (CPD) concluded on April 17, 2015 without a resolution. On the final day, the chair produced a well-balanced text reflective of the various positions staked by governments, but to everyone’s surprise, this text was suddenly withdrawn by the chair only two hours after being distributed to delegates, without the chance for governments to engage in the normal fine-tuning that is routine at CPD negotiations. The ISRRC came forward with a statement of the civil society urging the UN Member States to “continue to work together at CPD to reach agreement on how best to address gaps and challenges in implementing the Programme of Action. We hope that when the CPD reconvenes in April 2016 to review its methods of work, governments will use this opportunity to strengthen the CPD as a space to build consensus through negotiations, as they have for 20 years.” For the first time in the 21 years of CPD’s history the session ended without a resolution.

Source: [ASTRA Network](#), [UN DESA](#)

REGIONAL UPDATES

Barriers in access to emergency contraception in Croatia

Thanks to the decision of the European Commission emergency contraception (at least the new type - EllaOne) was made available over-the-counter in Croatia. However, as usual when it comes to sexual and reproductive rights things aren't that simple. Even though this pill is not an abortive one, neoconservative forces along with different Catholic groups one of which was Croatian Catholic Medical Society have managed to put pressure on the Croatian Medical Chamber in order to increase the level of steps that are needed to buy the pill.

The right of a conscientious objection is being brought up with almost every reference of EllaOne. Since this is not an abortive pill, conscientious objection is justified with the care of a pharmacist for the person that is trying to buy the pill. It is extremely interesting that this kind of care only occurs when it comes to women and their sexual and reproductive rights. Secondly, it is also important to note that before receiving the pill women will need to fill out a questionnaire about their sexual activities and other private information. If the pharmacist finds some of the answers unsatisfactory he/she can refuse to issue the pill. A copy of the questionnaire will be kept at the pharmacy and the pharmacist will need to report to the gynecologist of the women in question that she had bought the pill. Minors will not be able to buy the pill without a presence of a parent or a legal guardian.

Source: [Libela.org](#)

Projects on preventing sexual violence in Romania

Although 6% of women in Romania were subject to a form of sexual violence, the issue is still invisible at policy level when it comes to access to justice and services for survivors, and linked to serious impunity for perpetrators. To break away from this silence awareness is needed at all levels, and work needs to be done from top- down – to design survivor oriented policies, as well as at community level with specialized services and prevention campaigns.

With funding support of EEA Grants, under the NGO Fund in Romania, ASTRA member A.L.E.G. initiated two projects on sexual violence: a project developing the first network of NGOs on this topic, (Breaking the Silence on Sexual Violence) and a project developing a pilot center offering support to survivors and educational prevention programs in local communities (My Body My Own). Both projects were developed and implemented in partnership with Stigamot from Iceland. More details about the projects [here](#) and [here](#).

Two important events were organized throughout 20-24th of April 2015 in the framework of these projects. One event took place in Bucharest as a public seminar where Breaking the Silence on Sexual Violence Network launched a Call to Action signed by 15 NGOs and targeting the decision makers at national level. For the first time, members of Parliament and of the Government shared their own stories of abuse. Women's rights also NGOs received the draft law for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention as a sign of active support and commitment on the behalf of decision-makers. Working on change at community level, a second event took place in Sibiu and gathered over 40 social service providers, police officers, teachers and councilors and offered practical workshops and case study work, in order to promote cross-sector cooperation and professional conduct that avoids re-victimization.

Change needs to start from how prevention work on sexual violence is understood and designed and A.L.E.G and Stigamot propose to shift the focus more to boys and men. The amount of guilt we cast on the survivors is equal to the amount of tolerance we have for the perpetrators and it is this that keeps us from moving forward towards elimination of violence against women.

Mention should be made that three of the NGOs in the Breaking the Silence on Sexual Violence network are also ASTRA Network members, namely A.L.E.G., AnA-Society for Feminist Analyses, and East European Institute for Reproductive Health (EEIRH). The fourth ASTRA Network member association, European Center for Public Initiative (ECPI) was also present at the mentioned national seminar, which shows the close collaboration between these NGOs at national level.

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

Conference “Human Rights in Childbirth in Eastern Europe” in Zagreb

An important regional reproductive rights event took place on 16 and 17 of April in Zagreb. [“Human Rights in Childbirth”](#), international organization working on the advancement of the rights connected with childbirth together with [“RODA – Parents in Action”](#) – the Croatian organization also working in the field of reproductive rights organized a conference “Human Rights in Childbirth in Eastern

Europe". The regional conferences are the follow-up to the first "Human Rights in Childbirth" conference that took place in the Hague in 2012.

The inspiration for the movement of midwives, doulas, doctors and activists was the judgment by the European Court of Human Rights in the case of *Tersznovsky vs. Hungary* where the court ruled that every woman has a right to choose where and how to give birth. The situation of restrictions in home births, repercussions towards midwives and lack of respects for women's choices is especially seen in the case of Agnes Gereb – a midwife who faces criminal charges for helping women deliver at home.

The conference on the situation in Eastern Europe went far beyond the right to have a home birth. It showed the multiple layers of poor level of health care services that are connected with pregnancy and child birth. It clearly showed the connection between abortion laws and practices and the standards of obstetric care for women. It became very visible that the grounds for lack of good standards lie in the lack of respect for women's choices, no matter if they are reflected in the shape of abortion laws or in the harmful birth practices (like the Kristeller maneuver or episiotomy). They also have very similar effects on women.

The conference was the occasion to share knowledge and practices about laws and strategic litigation, monitoring activities, research, medical facts and studies, campaign ideas and advocacy strategies as well as using media and international mechanisms for advancement of the situation. It also was an unique chance for further networking of activists working in the field in the region.

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

Gynecologists in Romania refuse to perform abortions

A group of around 30 gynecologists in a Romanian town have decided to stop all abortions during the week leading up to Orthodox Easter on April 12, so as to not "upset God". "We do not perform abortions during the major holidays, especially during Holy Week and Christmas because we think it is not right to upset God," said Marius Craina, gynecologist and director of the local hospital of Timisoara, a town in western Romania.

Abortion was banned in Romania during the regime of dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, who was killed in 1989 after a popular rebellion pushed him from power. Abortion was then legalized in 1990. That year, as many as 992,000 abortions were registered; three times the number of births. Since then, the number of abortions has gradually decreased in the European Union's second poorest country, with 88,000 recorded in 2012 compared to 200,000 newborns.

Source: [Inquirer.net](#)

GLOBAL UPDATES

U.N. Committee Finds Women in the Philippines Face Reproductive Rights Violations and Discrimination

The Filipino government has violated women’s human rights by denying the full range of reproductive health services for thousands of women—including universal and affordable modern contraceptives—according to a [report](#) released this week from the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (U.N. CEDAW)

The U.N. CEDAW report holds the Philippines government accountable for failing to ensure women’s access to contraceptive information and services and putting their health and lives at risk. The Committee specifically criticizes the government for failing to prioritize women’s human rights over religious ideology and cultural stereotypes, which has led to widespread discrimination against women and hindered access to sexual and reproductive health information and services. It expressed concern about current funding restrictions on modern contraceptives in Manila City and called for the decriminalization of abortion in cases of rape, incest, when the health or life of the woman is at risk, and in cases of severe fetal impairments.

Said Nancy Northup, president and CEO of the Center for Reproductive Rights:

“Religious ideology and gender stereotypes should play no role in whether a woman can get the reproductive health care and information she needs.

“For decades, the Filipino government has denied millions of women the ability to control their fertility, health, and lives, and this report makes clear that this is a gross violation of women’s fundamental human rights.

“The Filipino government must immediately work to enforce policies that guarantee women’s access to reproductive health services and recognize their right to safe and legal abortion.”

Despite passing the [Reproductive Health Law](#) in 2012, the Filipino government’s long-standing hostility towards modern contraception contributed to an estimated 610,000 illegal abortions in 2012, according to the Guttmacher Institute. In November 2012, designated members from U.N. CEDAW traveled to the Philippines to conduct the inquiry after the Center for Reproductive Rights and other NGOs raised concerns over the human rights violations women in the country were facing mainly due to Executive Order 003, which effectively banned women’s access to modern contraceptives in Manila City.

In 2007, the Center for Reproductive Rights released [Imposing Misery](#), a report documenting the human rights violations associated with Executive Order 003. This report was the basis for the Center’s request for a U.N. CEDAW Special Inquiry—the first one for the Asia region and on contraceptive access.

The U.N. CEDAW report recognizes the far reaching consequences of denial of access to contraception, stating that Executive Order 003 and a subsequent order banning funding for contraceptives resulted in unplanned pregnancies, unsafe abortions and unnecessary and preventable maternal deaths, as well as particularly harmed economically disadvantaged women, adolescent girls, and women in abusive relationships. The report calls on the Filipino government to

enact measures to guarantee universal access to modern contraceptives including related information and services and revoke the executive orders that have denied women such access for over a decade. And although post abortion care is legal in the Philippines, U.N. CEDAW notes the government must prevent the abuse of women seeking post-abortion care and establish effective reporting procedures to handle complaints. Furthermore, the committee strongly recommends the decriminalization of abortion.

“Women in the Philippines deserve to live with dignity and this can only be achieved by ensuring their sexual and reproductive rights, which includes the right to contraceptive information and services, said Melissa Upreti, regional director for Asia at the Center for Reproductive Rights. “President Aquino has shown political will towards ensuring women’s reproductive rights. We hope that the findings of the U.N. CEDAW report will hasten the implementation of the Reproductive Health Law and influence the current penal law reform process to amend the criminal ban on abortion.”

Source: [Center for Reproductive Rights](#)

YOUTH

Youth Forum in Georgia - More Strategic investments in Youth and Adolescents

On April 27, 2015 Georgian Parliament’s Gender Equality Council, UNFPA Georgia and European Youth Parliament – Georgia organized the Youth National Forum. Representatives of the Parliament of Georgia, the Government of Georgia, European Youth Parliament, various youth, local and international organizations participated in the event, ASTRA Youth Member organizations Real People Real Vision and HERA XXI among them. The goal of the Youth National Forum was to advocate for the increased investment in adolescents and youth development and the realization of their rights for ensuring sustainable development of the country. Participants of the Forum had a chance to listen to the presentation regarding the overview of the Youth SRHR conditions in Georgia made by the representative of ASTRA Network, the main challenges address lack of comprehensive sexuality education and access to the youth frilled SRH services in line with the youth and adolescents needs. The main priorities for the implementation of ICPD beyond 2014 programme of action (ICPD Beyond 2014 framework of action) were also presented. During the day several plenary sessions and discussions took place, where participants reviewed possibilities of improving the youth development environment; and present implemented or planned actions in Georgia in this regard.

Recommendations for the youth development and realization of their rights, and national implementation of the ICPD beyond 2014 global priorities were developed during the Forum. The group of Access to SRH services was also lead by ASTRA Youth representative. The Youth National Forum was organized within the framework of UN Joint Programme “To Enhance Gender Equality in Georgia” through generous support of the Swedish Government.

Source: [ASTRA Youth](#)

Study on sexual abuse of young people in Cyprus

The recent study on sexual abuse of adolescents, conducted by University of Cyprus, has revealed that one in four children in Cyprus is a victim of sexual abuse or harassment. The study has been carried out among 2000 young people aged 15 to 22. Due to the research, almost one-fourth of participants were victims of sexual harassment via Internet or mobile phones. Young people were also subjected to grooming on social media and asked for sexually explicit video or photo materials. What is alarming, the reporting rate of abuse cases is extremely low – only 6% of adolescents mentioned the incident to parent or legal guardian.

The House Committee on Human Rights held a meeting to discuss this issue. The Committee members found out that the coordination between relevant agencies and services is insufficient, thus impedes the provision of support for victims. Commissioner for the Protection of Children Leda Koursoumba pointed out that also inadequate sexuality education hinders the effectiveness of prevention of sexual abuse among teenagers.

Source: [In-Cyprus](#)

Girls Not Brides survey on ending child marriage

Girls Not Brides will be convening a May meeting of campaign's partners to exchange knowledge, track progress and prepare strategies for civil society to tackle the issue of child marriage. Prior to the meeting, Girls Not Brides wants to find out what are young advocates' reflections on youth engagement and efforts to end child marriage through short survey. The findings will be fed into a session 'Young but Capable: How youth add value in the fight against child marriage'. The survey is accessible [here](#).

Source: [Girls Not Brides](#)

Open Society Youth Fellowship

Open Society Foundations has opened the submission of applications for Youth Fellowship. Young activists under the age of 30, proficient in spoken English are invited to apply. Applicants should demonstrate a deep understanding of their particular field and a record of successful movement – building initiatives, project management experience, and/or experience in research/ tools development. Applications are open till 15th May 2015.

More information on the eligibility criteria and fellowship conditions can be found [here](#).

Source: [Open Society Foundations](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS

ASTRA Network Hearing at the European Parliament

ASTRA Network will hold a public hearing on the issue of "Barriers in access to reproductive health goods and services". It will be held under the auspices of the [European Parliament Working Group on Reproductive Health HIV/AIDS and Development](#), especially MEPs Sophie in't Veld and Heidi Hautala. The hearing will be held on June 4th from 12.30 to 14.30 in the premises of the European Parliament in Brussels. More information will be available soon on ASTRA's website.

Source: [ASTRA Network](#)

PUBLICATIONS

Preventing gender-biased sex selection in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Gender-biased sex selection has emerged since the early 1990s as a widespread practice in parts of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) region and now constitutes a significant challenge to the countries affected. The preference of many parents for sons, combined with the use of modern technologies and declining fertility, has skewed the normal ratio between male and female births in several countries, mostly in the South Caucasus and parts of South-East Europe. As a result, an estimated 171,000 girls are already 'missing' in the region, and there has been a growing surplus of men. Research conducted in the region suggests that gender-biased sex selection occurs in a diverse range of countries that have three elements in common: a strong preference for male offspring, declining fertility rates, and access to modern ultrasound technologies. The practice has far-reaching negative consequences, as it endangers the health and rights of women and girls, perpetuates a culture of gender inequality, and jeopardises sustainable social development and stability. A number of policy options are available for governments to prevent and combat gender-biased sex selection.

Access the publication [HERE](#).

Source: [UNFPA EECA](#)

Barometer 2015 - Women's access to modern contraceptive choice

A new 'Barometer' report launched by IPPF EN on 24 March analyses how easily women in 16 EU countries can access modern contraceptives. It reveals that overall the situation in most countries has stagnated or worsened in recent years. IPPF EN calls on decision-makers at all levels to implement a comprehensive approach to contraceptive choice in Europe as a crucial precondition to ensuring the wellbeing of women and adolescent girls.

The Barometer highlights that women's access to modern contraceptives varies significantly from one EU country to the next. Encouraging developments include some limited examples of improved

sexuality education policies, more generous reimbursement schemes for contraceptives in France and improved medical guidelines on contraceptive service delivery in Poland and Sweden. But overall, these are overshadowed by growing obstacles to women getting the contraception they need. Access in countries such as The Netherlands that have a relatively strong track record is under threat from austerity measures and financial constraints. Meanwhile, in several countries where access is already more problematic, political and economic instability and lack of funding have prevented progress.

Access the report [HERE](#)

Source: [IPPF EN](#)

Anti-Gender Movements on the Rise?

The concept of "gender backlash" encompasses too activities pursued by a multitude of different local initiatives all over Central and Eastern Europe, which strongly promote tradition over equality. In many cases these groups appear to be backed and inspired both by influential US-American "pro life" organisations as well as the Kremlin's "Gay-rope" propaganda, which aims to discredit the European Union as a place of moral decline. The contributors to this publication express grave concern about the current situation of gender equality and LGBTI rights in Central and Eastern Europe but give reason for hope too.

With contributions of Ekaterine Aghdgomelashvili, Anna Arganashvili, ASTRA member - Anna Nikoghosyan, Borbála Juhász, Zuzana Maďarová, Elżbieta Korolczuk, Magdalena Grabowska, Tamara Zlobina, Tamara Martsenyuk, Volha Piatrukovich, Jana Smiggels Kavková, Veronika Šprincová, Jelena Višnjić.

Access the publication in [PDF](#).

Source: [Heinrich Böll Foundation](#)

Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016

A major report from UN Women brings together human rights and economic policymaking to call for far-reaching changes to the global policy agenda that will transform economies and make women's rights, and equality, a reality. It takes an in-depth look at what the economy would look like if it truly worked for women, for the benefit of all.

Access the report [HERE](#)

Source: [UN Women](#)

CALL TO ACTION

Call for action for the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia

On the occasion of the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT) on 17th May, the alliance of LGBTQI youth networks calls for action all young advocates worldwide. Young activists are invited to mobilize globally and join Thunderclap – the online flashmob in order to express their support and stand for the rights of all LGBTQI young people. To join the campaign, visit: <https://www.thunderclap.it/projects/24900-speak-up-for-lgbtqi-youth>

Source: [IGLYO](#)

ASTRA Network members

Albania - Albanian Family Planning Association
Armenia - Women's Rights Center
Armenia - Society Without Violence
Armenia - Women's Resource 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. (Be Active, Be Emancipated)
Croatia - CESI - Center for Education and Counseling of Woman
Croatia - Women's Room
Georgia – Real People, Real Visio
Georgia – HERA XXI
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 – Shelter Center
Macedonia - Association for emancipation, solidarity and equality of women
Macedonia - Health Education and Research Association
Moldova – Family Planning Association
Moldova - Reproductive Health Service Center
Poland - Federation for Women and Family Planning
Romania - Euroregional Center for Public Initiatives
Romania - A.L.E.G.
Romania - The East European Institute of Reproductive Health
Romania - AnA: Society for Feminist Analysis
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

Prepared by Marta Szostak

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