



## **CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights**

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### **BURNING ISSUE**

#### **Slovak abortion law stays intact after an attempt of limiting access to abortion**

At the end of November, a draft of a bill limiting access to abortion in Slovakia was presented to the Slovak Parliament.

The bill, presented to the Parliament by three members of a conservative Slovak National Party was drafted to oblige women and pregnant persons to undergo an ultrasound before terminating a pregnancy. It also banned advertising abortion services and forced doctors to enable the patient to listen to the heartbeat of the embryo or fetus. After a heated discussion in Slovak Parliament, several new amendments were introduced to the document, including:

- Prolongation of a mandatory waiting period from current 48 hours to 96 hours;
- The need for informing spouse/a man (the proponents of the draft amendment use: “father of the unborn”) about the existence of pregnancy and her intention to terminate her pregnancy;
- Reinstating prescriptions for emergency contraception.

As a result of the proposal, a protest took place in Bratislava. Those in attendance declared their outrage by an attempt to limit access to abortion and protested against gender-based violence.

Slovak Parliament voted on the bill on 5<sup>th</sup> December, with following results:

Present: 124

Number of MPs who voted: 123

In favor: 59

Against: 24

Abstained: 40

Did not vote: 1

Therefore the bill did not pass the voting, although by majority that abstained from the voting rather than voting against proposed change.

As we reported back in October, some Slovaks have been speaking out about the need to restrict abortion law in the country for several years now. Anti-choice rallies grow to be more and more powerful, with the last one taking place at the end of September and gathering over 50,000 people.

On the other hand, is taking place in Bratislava on 8<sup>th</sup> December.

Abortion remains legal and accessible in the country.

## **REGIONAL UPDATES**

### **New members from the CEE region in the UN Human Rights Council**

The UN General Assembly recently elected fourteen new Human Rights Council members for a period of three years starting in January 2020. Two of them are countries from the region of Central and Eastern Europe – Armenia and Poland.

In the voluntary pledges, [Armenia](#) has declared an aspiration to fight intolerance and discrimination, including “racism, xenophobia and related intolerance”. The document also stresses the importance

of NGO's work for advancing human rights and fundamental freedoms. When it comes to women's rights, point four of Armenia's pledges states:

*4. Armenia attaches paramount importance to equality between men and women, which is one of the key factors for the promotion of human rights, respect for the rule of law and democracy. Safe and dignified families and work environments, as well as the full and equal participation of women in political, economic, social and cultural life, are considered essential for economic growth and the prosperity of society as a whole.*

[Polish](#) voluntary pledges, on the other hand, do not bring up matters of discrimination, racism, gender equality or protection from violence whatsoever. The document puts the biggest pressure on protection of "human rights" in general (only worker's rights are brought up directly).

Both sets of pledges contain a list of actions undertaken by each country to advance human rights. The lists can serve as a great tool both for advocacy and shadow reporting.

Sources: [Sexual Rights Initiative](#) and [United Nations](#)

## FROM ASTRA MEMBERS

**Within the framework of 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence Campaign a number of following events were held in Kazakhstan**

One of them was a drawing contest "Happy family without violence" among 5th grade students of secondary schools. Initially, students were given the concept of what violence is, its types and ways to protect themselves and their family members from violence, as well as the goals of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence International Campaign. In addition, the staff of NGO "Sana Sezim" gave brief information about the organization's activities to prevent and combat domestic violence against women and children, as well as contact numbers by which anyone can seek legal and psychological help free and confidentially. Then the students were asked to express their view on how and what they mean by a happy family. Based on the results, the 5 best drawings were selected and the winners were awarded commemorative T-shirts and notebooks with the logos of NGO "Sana Sezim" and "UN Women".

Additionally, informational meetings in city schools with the participation of NGO "Sana Sezim", representatives of the Commission on Women's Affairs and Family Demographic Policy under the Akimat, representatives of Nur Otan party, employees of the Unit for protecting women from violence, the Department of Internal Affairs of Shymkent. The purpose of these meetings was to

increase legal literacy of students, understanding and awareness of all forms of violence, familiarization with the prevention and combating domestic violence, as well as informing students about existing hotlines and crisis centers.

Last but not least, an informational campaign for polyclinics and perinatal centres was organised in Shymkent. Healthcare professionals were instructed about the consequences of domestic violence and presented with statistics about domestic violence and people suffering from it. A screening of thematic videos also took place.

The employees of NGO "Sana Sezim" conduct such preventive activities annually.

Source: [Sana Sezim](#)

### **Urologists and gynaecologists at the training on human rights and needs of trans persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

In scope of the program for marking 16 Days of Activism, Sarajevo Open Centre (SOC), on 30 November 2019 in Sarajevo, held the training for urologists and gynaecologists named "Medical aspects of gender reassignment: On adequate, trans specific and inclusive services and support providing to trans persons in the transition process".

Education was led by Marta Bižić, MD, specialised in urology and reconstructive surgery (University children's clinic Belgrade, Serbia) and Jovan Džoli Ulićević, activist for human rights of transgender, intersex and gender variant persons, trans man (Balkan Trans Network, Association Spektra, Montenegro). Jovan is also one of the authors of the publication [Medical Aspects of Gender Reassignment: Manual for medical professionals and healthcare workers on providing services and support to trans persons in the transition process](#), that was published in September 2018 by Sarajevo Open Centre.

This half-day training gathered around 10 medical experts from the public health institutions - clinical centres, hospitals and health care institutes from Sarajevo, Tuzla, Goražde and Mostar. They presented to the participants urology and gynaecology perspectives in the process of transition of gender variant/non-conforming, transgender and transexual persons, needs and experience, guidelines for protection of reproductive health of trans persons, as well as the experience of trans persons from BiH.

So far, SOC organised trainings for psychologists and psychiatrists, medicine and psychology students, and after this one we plan to organise education for endocrinologists and plastic, reconstructive and aesthetic surgeons on this topic, with hope of intensifying further efforts towards enabling adequate

medical gender reassignment services in BiH and raising awareness on trans identities, problems, needs and human rights of trans persons within the BiH healthcare system.

Source: [Sarajevo Open Center](#)

### **Public Awareness Campaign under the slogan “The Violator is guilty” in Yerevan, Armenia**

On November 25, Women's Rights Center NGO participated in public awareness campaign entitled "The Violator is Guilty" which was organized by the Coalition to Stop Violence against Women and its members, including Women's Rights Center. The main purpose of the campaign was to break stereotypes about gender violence explaining people how to perceive and to stop the violence against women.

The campaign was dedicated to the elimination of violence against women, mainly sexual violence. Usually, the society blames the victims pointing their gender, outlook, clothing and other circumstances as an irritator. Therefore, the protestors wanted to emphasize that each man can be a violator regardless to his profession, social status, education, income, etc.

Through campaign materials like posters, leaflets the protestors wanted to inform people that sexually abused woman is not guilty.

As we know, November 25 is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, which also launches a 16-day Campaign against Gender-Based Violence, which takes place every year from November 25 to December 10.

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

### **New rights-based training for Armenian gynecologists and obstetricians**

The Training Module on rights-based and non-discriminative approach on providing reproductive health services was developed by the “Advocates for Reproductive Health and Rights” network initiated by the Women's Resource Center.

The Module for gynecologists and obstetricians has been accredited by the Ministry of Healthcare of Armenia. On November 7, 8 field's specialists did 2 days trainings for obstetricians-gynecologists and as a result of the training evaluation, it became clear that there was a 10% increase in the sensitivity of health care providers when providing health services to women of different groups.

## **#16daysAgainstGenderBasedViolence**

On November 25, the 'Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women' in Public Places in Yerevan launched a [16-day campaign](#) to combat gender-based violence that targeted the perpetrator. The focus of the action was sexual violence.

Women and adolescents often subjected to sexual abuse are subjected to psychological pressure by the public, often blaming them for what has happened; "the dress was short," "the perfume was catchy." We changed our responsibility by placing the burden of guilt on the perpetrator.

The YSU Center for Gender and Leadership Studies is organizing a conference on sexual harassment and violence in Armenia followed by the opening of the exhibition SILENT VOICES focusing on these issues in close collaboration with the European Union, UNICEF Armenia and the US Embassy in Armenia. The event will offer information on the problem, the experience of different actors fighting VAWG and stories of the survivors. Globally, 154 countries have laws on sexual harassment. However, even where laws exist, women from all walks of life still face sexual harassment every day, at school, at work, in public transport, to mention some places. Crimes of sexual nature do not only impact adults, but they also affect children. Worldwide, around 15 million adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 have experienced forced sex in their lifetime. However, most stay silent throughout their lives. Only 1% of adolescent girls who have experienced forced sex reached out for professional help or reported it.

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

## **16 Days of Activism**

On November 25, [Society Without Violence \(SWV\)](#), as a co-founder and current member of "[Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women](#)" participated in the awareness raising campaign in public places of Yerevan. The main theme of the activism was sexual violence.

Breaking the unhealthy mentality and stereotypes that blame the victim instead of the perpetrator was central goal of the campaign. The slogans were aimed to show that short dress, catchy perfume or alcohol cannot be the circumstances for justification of the abusive behavior. During the activism, the brochures covering recent statistics regarding sexual assault in Armenia and giving general information about the different types of the violence were also distributed.

The social media was used as a platform to raise awareness about the idea of 16 Days of Activism itself and to provide useful information regarding gender matters. SWV mostly followed the slogans and

themes that UN adopted for this year. On [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) “16 Days, 16 Ways” campaign was launched. The objective of daily published posts was to show the ways that contribute to the elimination of gender-based violence and help the survivor. Another essential message of the campaign was to highlight that everyone has a role in combating gender-based violence.

On Human Rights Day, December 10, SWV will participate in [“Opportunity Fair”](#) where the projects and volunteering options in NGO will be presented. The event, organized by “For Equal Rights” NGO, is designed for the human rights defender NGOs. SWV aims to give information about its story, spheres of activities, expertise, researches, ongoing and past projects. The organization will present the opportunities for the people who are enthusiastic to be active in human rights advocacy.

Source: [Society Without Violence](#)

## RESOURCES

### **Sexuality education readings for children of all ages**

A list of books about sex and sexuality grouped accordingly to a child’s age is available online. It is a great resource for anyone working with sexuality education or simply a parent who wishes to teach their children about human body, consent, sexual orientation, gender identity and more.

The list, put together by Sex Positive Families, is available [here](#).

### **Study on the development of transgender children and youth**

*Abstract:* Gender is one of the central categories organizing children’s social world. Clear patterns of gender development have been well-documented among cisgender children (i.e., children who identify as a gender that is typically associated with their sex assigned at birth). We present a comprehensive study of gender development (e.g., gender identity and gender expression) in a cohort of 3- to 12-y-old transgender children (n = 317) who, in early childhood, are identifying and living as a gender different from their assigned sex. Four primary findings emerged. First, transgender children strongly identify as members of their current gender group and show gender-typed preferences and behaviors that are strongly associated with their current gender, not the gender typically associated with their sex assigned at birth. Second, transgender children’s gender identity (i.e., the gender they feel they are) and gender-typed preferences generally did not differ from 2 comparison groups: cisgender siblings (n = 189) and cisgender controls (n = 316). Third, transgender

and cisgender children's patterns of gender development showed coherence across measures. Finally, we observed minimal or no differences in gender identity or preferences as a function of how long transgender children had lived as their current gender. Our findings suggest that early sex assignment and parental rearing based on that sex assignment do not always define how a child identifies or expresses gender later.

Source: [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America](#)



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; BOCS Foundation; 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 - Novgorod 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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