



Recent trends regarding Sexual and Reproductive Rights in Central and Eastern Europe with special Focus on Poland

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1. LINKAGES BETWEEN SRHR AND EQUALITY

International consensus

- The Beijing Platform of Action recognizes that the protection of women's sexual and reproductive health and rights is essential for women's ability to participate equally and fully within all spheres of society (para. 92).
- It recognizes that *"the human rights of women include their right to control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health free of coercion, discrimination and violence."* (para 96)
- *"The ability of women to control their own fertility is absolutely fundamental to women's empowerment and equality. When a woman can plan her family, she can plan the rest of her life. When she is healthy, she can be more productive. And when her reproductive rights...are promoted and protected, she has freedom to participate more fully and equally in society. Reproductive rights are essential to women's advancement."*
- Thoraya A. Obaid, UNFPA Executive Director

1. LINKAGES BETWEEN SRHR AND EQUALITY

International consensus con't

- Ministers from EU members states agreed that “*gender equality cannot be achieved without guaranteeing women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights*”, and reaffirmed that expanding access to sexual and reproductive health information and health services are essential for achieving the Beijing Platform for Action, the Cairo Programme of Action and the Millenium Development Goals;”
Declaration of the Conference of EU Ministers on Gender Equality, Luxembourg, 4 02 2005

1. LINKAGES BETWEEN SRHR AND EQUALITY

International consensus con't

- European Parliament

- June 2002, Anne Van Lancker, MEP, presented a report of the Committee on SRHR to the plenary session of the EU Parliament. The starting point focused on the commitments made by the EU to the outcomes of Cairo and Beijing conferences. The report calls for EU member states to ensure SRHR policies and standards. No policies, however, have been adopted for the EU countries themselves.

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February 2004, Karin Junker, MEP, presented a report on population and development that was adopted by the European Parliament 10 years after the UN Conference in Cairo. The report recalls the commitments made in Cairo, and calls on the EU and its member countries to undertake widespread campaigns to fulfill the promises of ICPD by emphasizing the importance of reproductive health in development policy.

- March 2004 Véronique de Keyser, MEP presented the report on human rights in the world, which also included issues related to SRHR, to the EP Committee on Foreign Affairs. The report was adopted in a plenary session.

2. TRENDS REGARDING SRHR in CEE COUNTRIES

[CEE covers New Member States of the EU accepted in 2003 and 2007, Neighbouring Countries and former Soviet Union members]

General Overview

Since the 1990s while Romania's and Albania's restrictive abortion legislation have been liberalized, in many countries of the region, abortion and other SRHR have increasingly become hot political issues, influenced by the increasing political role of religious institutions, in particular of the Roman Catholic Church. Similarly, access to contraception and sexuality education has also become politicised, controversial and/or constantly ignored by policy-makers trying to avoid what are considered controversial issues.

TRENDS REGARDING SRHR in CEE COUNTRIES con't .

■ 2.2. Common characteristics

- The countries of the CEE share common characteristics that led to inadequate policies in the area of SRHR.

■ Key actors

- - Very weak civil society movements, including the women's movement,
- - Role of religious institutions,
- - Left parties,
- - Anti-choice movements

TRENDS REGARDING SRHR in CEE COUNTRIES con't .

- Conceptual issues
 - From non-issue into controversial issue
 - SRHR – not equality issue
- Regional political context
 - Sharing anti-choice strategies region-wide
 - Increasing conservatism among professionals
 - Demographic arguments

3. ACCESS TO SRHR REGION-WIDE

- **Sexuality Education**

Comprehensive sexuality education that provides young people with accurate and unbiased information is still lacking in the CEE region.

- **Contraception**

Prevalence of modern contraceptives methods in CEE is 36% as compared to 71% prevalence rate in Western European countries.

- **Abortion**

Although in theory abortion is available on request during the first trimester in CEE countries, with exception of Poland, there are various restrictions in law and in practice, which make abortion services inaccessible

4. COUNTRY SITUATION

- Poland
- SRHR are permanently on political agenda of conservatives and religious fundamentalists. In early 2000s there have been constant attempts to further restrict the current anti-abortion law effective since 1993, which allows for abortion on medical, criminal and genetic grounds.
- Croatia
- Lithuania
- Slovakia
- Russia

5. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

- Prepare a report on the current situation re SRHR in Europe with policy and programme recommendations;
- Explicitly state support for SRHR as a gender equality issue which must be addressed by EU institutions;
- Encourage Member States and neighbouring countries to base their SRHR policies, laws and programmes on gender equality principles and scientific evidence, not on religious ideology;
- Encourage the European Commission to strengthen initiatives regarding SRHR within equality policies of the European Union;
- Encourage the EU Fundamental Rights Agency and the EU Gender Equality Institute to include SRHR issues as within their mandate