



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

PLOVDIV CALL TO ACTION

We, the undersigned civil society organisations, members of the ASTRA Central and Eastern European Network for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights including organisations from Central Asia and Balkan and Caucasus countries, point to the vast challenges posed to non-governmental organisations in our region. In particular we are concerned about the challenge to secure funding for the existence of NGOs, as well as the diminishing investments in civil society working on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) at country level.

The presence of NGOs in our region is inherent and indisputable, as the region finds itself still in times of transformation and political turbulence. After the fall of communism civil society learned how to navigate in the new reality and this process continues until today, making the region of Central and Eastern Europe neither part of the Global North nor the Global South with its own specifics and characteristics.

NGOs are essential in creating a dialogue between policy makers, governments and citizens, represented by civil society organisations. NGOs act as advisors, watchdogs and often provide specific resources, bring solutions and expertise. Without the presence of civil society organisations there would be no true democracy and the voices of the most at risk and marginalised groups would remain unheard. Moreover, the NGOs which are members of the ASTRA Network, empower women and girls, raise awareness on key issues related to reproductive and sexual health and educate people of all ages on their human rights,

especially sexual and reproductive rights. Many of the organisations act on grassroots level, often being the only source of support and information within the local community.

Women's reproductive rights and their reproductive health are in crisis in Europe. For the past few years we have experienced numerous attacks on women's reproductive rights which always have had the same consequence: hampering access to reproductive health services and supplies. With the help of civil society organisations these trends can be observed, inspected, brought to the public knowledge and acted upon on regional and international level, especially in spaces where the reproductive and sexual rights are neglected. Neo-conservative groups that question gender equality, sexuality and reproductive health and rights, point fingers at women who defend human rights, which can result in violent actions. Women human rights defenders, besides being subject to the same types of risks as any human rights defender, are also targeted for or exposed to gender-specific threats and gender-specific violence.

The most burning issue of the NGOs in our region boils down to one word: funding. Non-governmental organisations are dependent on funding and financial support for their development. Most governments in our region are less than willing to fund projects and initiatives on sexual and reproductive health and rights. Some also neglect the role of their civil society sometimes labelling them "foreign agents". Private funds are located elsewhere and the many international

agencies have moved away from the region with the few of them remaining in Central Asia and Balkan countries. The most disturbing scenario is taking place in the “new” European Union Member States where most funding options for women’s rights, especially SRHR, are currently inaccessible. Moreover, the few available funding options rarely address core funds, which are a matter of survival for most NGOs. Lack of human resources impedes their work and forces them to make difficult choices. This often results in very few, even one or two, office staff and a number of volunteers who are sometimes the only workforce.

Funds from the most influential institutions have been relocated to other regions and to big international organisations working on SRHR. These organisations, apart from doing outstanding and important work on global level, also derive their knowledge and information on what is happening in other regions from smaller organisations, including those working on very local level. This cooperation between international organisations, regional and grassroots NGOs has mutual benefits and generates positive outcomes. However, to be sustainable and forward looking this process requires investments for the country-based organisations. Without such investments and support these will fail to be productive and as a consequence this mutually beneficial cooperation may come to an end.

Investments must be made to secure the future and to guarantee that NGOs remain the watchdogs and reliable information and support sources. ASTRA Network calls on European Union institutions, United Nations agencies, regional and global foundations and donors and national governments to take a closer look at their donor policies and the struggle of the civil society of the CEE/CA region in current times when reproductive rights are questioned and challenged every day.

Note: On October 12 – 13, 2015, ASTRA Network members met in Plovdiv, Bulgaria to participate in an annual workshop and strategic meeting. “Plovdiv Call to Action” is the result of that gathering and presents a set of the most burning issues of non-governmental organisations in the region.

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

ASTRA Secretariat

Federation for Women and Family Planning

Nowolipie 13/15, 00-150 Warsaw, Poland

www.astra.org.pl