January 2020
NEWSLETTER in NUMBERS

4 MPs sent letter to President Trump urging him to repeal the Mexico City Policy
Each year, 25,000 women die from cervical cancer in Europe
Delegation of 5 MPs participate in UHC Forum in Bangkok

In the news

EPF NEWS

New study reveals Europe’s patchwork of policies on cervical cancer prevention is failing women who need it most
• Every year, over 25,000 women die from cervical cancer in Europe
• HPV vaccine almost 100% effective in in preventing the persistent HPV infections that cause cervical cancer
• All 46 countries need to do more to put an end to preventable deaths
• Belgium, Denmark, Ireland and the UK are the policy champions
• Azerbaijan and Belarus worst performing countries

LONDON, 22 January 2020 – an atlas that scores 46 countries throughout geographical Europe on cervical cancer prevention policy launches today in London. The launch is set during the UK’s Cervical Cancer Prevention week and ahead of World Cancer Day on 4 February.

The rankings, which are based on national cervical cancer screening and HPV vaccination programmes as well as online information, reveal a very uneven picture across Europe.

The European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (EPF) produced the Atlas, supported by experts in cervical cancer and oncology.

“HPV-related cervical cancer is a preventable and curable disease. It is established that vaccination and well-organised cervical screening programmes can reduce cervical cancer incidence and mortality and yet some European countries are failing to provide these policies that can truly save women’s lives”, commented Neil Datta, EPF Secretary.

“While effective policies and political will are a crucial step in the right direction, without proper implementation of the policies, cervical cancer incidence and mortality rates will still remain high.”

The Atlas clearly illustrates the issue of healthcare inequality across Europe with eastern and southern countries lagging behind in cervical cancer prevention policies, which unfortunately results in a disproportionately heavy burden of cervical cancer incidence and mortality in those regions.

“Nobody should be denied healthcare according to where they live. All European governments need to do more to raise public awareness around HPV and cervical cancer to ensure more people are vaccinated and regularly attending cervical screening tests. A simple first step is to improve online information on HPV and cervical cancer prevention.”

Highlights from the findings and key statistics

Current estimates indicate that every year, 61,072 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer and 25,829 die from the disease in Europe.

In Europe, cervical cancer ranks as the 9th most frequent cancer among women and the 2nd most common female cancer deaths in women aged 15 to 44 years.

Belgium, Denmark, Ireland and the UK take the top spot with 100% scores for their cervical cancer prevention policies.

There is a clear divide between regions, with western and northern Europe ranking higher than eastern and southern Europe.

Fifteen countries have an excellent government-supported website with information on HPV, vaccination, cervical cancer and screening.

European Union Member State Romania ranks among bottom ten countries.
Azerbaijan comes in last place with no policy recommendation for HPV vaccination and no cervical cancer screening.

Eight European countries do not provide primary prevention to cervical cancer (national policy on HPV vaccination).

Sixteen countries do not provide organised population-based secondary prevention to cervical cancer (cervical cancer screening).

Poland and Russia offer little to no reimbursement for HPV vaccination.

- [Download the full atlas](#)
- [Press release](#)
- [Visit the atlas webpage](#)

**EPF-GPA Parliamentary Delegation to PMAC2020 - UHC Forum 2020**

BANGKOK, 31 January 2020 - EPF brought a five-member parliamentary delegation to this year’s Prince Mahidol Award Conference PMAC 2020 - UHC Forum 2020, which was held from 28 January to 2 February 2020 in Bangkok, Thailand. This year’s edition of the PMAC Conference focused on “Accelerating Progress Towards UHC”. Members of Parliament from Albania, Kenya, Romania, Tanzania and Zimbabwe took part in the visit.

The Parliamentary Delegation was conducted within the framework of the Global Parliamentary Alliance on Health, Rights and Development (GPA) and featured various sessions of MP Forum. The MP Forum focused on supporting parliamentary involvement on Universal Health Coverage (UHC) with a view to ensuring a high level and informative exchange with relevant stakeholders on the issue and that a parliamentary perspective supporting urgent action on UHC is brought in relevant settings.

In addition to the delegation’s active participation in the official PMAC2020 Agenda, Parliamentary delegates met with representatives from MSD, PATH, PHCPI, UHC2030 and UNFPA Asia-Pacific. MP Forum discussions enabled delegation participants to learn and exchange on the role of parliamentarians in all legislative, budgetary and policy progress
matters related to UHC as well as on the importance of challenging decision-makers about the progress that is currently being made in advancing the UHC agenda.

During the final plenary session entitled "From Political Declaration to Real Actions", Hon. Esther Passaris, MP, Kenya, addressed all distinguished panellists and PMAC2020 participants on the importance of human resources to build the health workforce of the future, achieve UHC and ultimately deliver for the people.

**Cervical Cancer Prevention Policy Atlas launched in London**

LONDON, 22 January 2020 - EPF's Cervical Cancer Prevention Policy Atlas was launched in the House of Commons today, during the UK’s Cervical Cancer Prevention week and ahead of World Cancer Day on 4 February.

Hosted by EPF and the UK APPG on PDRH, panellists included Baroness Jenny Tonge, Dr. Margaret Stanley, member of the project's Expert Group and emeritus Professor of Epithelial Biology at the University of Cambridge, Kate Sanger, Head of Communications and Public Affairs at Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust and Neil Datta, EPF Secretary.

Speakers introduced the topic of HPV and cervical cancer, followed by a presentation of the results of the 2020 atlas, which clearly highlights policy discrepancies between 46 European Countries with western and northern Europe generally ranking much higher than southern and eastern Europe.

Finally, the discussion turned to the situation in the UK. With a score of 100%, the UK was one of four atlas prevention policy champions and so the onus was placed on reducing stigma and myths around HPV and cervical cancer and encouraging more women to attend cervical screening tests to increase coverage rates in the country, with one in four women currently not attending routine screenings that can detect cervical cancer.

Visit the atlas webpage
Visit the event photo album
EPF co-organises SRHR workshop for European Parliament assistants and advisers

BRUSSELS, 24 January 2020 - In cooperation with the European Parliament working group MEPs for SRR, EPF, DSW and IPPF EN led a workshop for parliamentary assistants and policy advisers in the European Parliament.

The workshop focused on how the new Parliament can protect, promote and champion sexual and reproductive health and rights in Europe and globally by discussing global challenges as well as EU and international commitments.

EPF Executive Committee Meets in Brussels

BRUSSELS, 20 January 2020 - The EPF Executive Committee assembled in EPF's Brussels office for their first official meeting of the year, where members discussed the background, origins, and current and future activities of the parliamentary forum.

Topics of the day included an overview of 2019 activities as well as the proposed plans for this year's conferences, study tours and other events, and our latest research into sexual and reproductive rights in Europe, development aid for RMNCAH, and anti-SRR movements.
In attendance were 9 of the 11 Executive Committee members: EPF President Hon. Petra de Sutter, MP (Belgium), vice-President Hon. Öznur Çalık, MP (Turkey) as well as members: Hon. Goedele Liekens, MP (Belgium), Hon. Bojan Glavašević, MP (Croatia), Hon. Alice Mary Higgins, MP (Ireland), Hon. Dovilė Šakalienė, MP (Lithuania), Hon. Florian Dorel Bodog, MP (Romania), Hon. Sara Heikkilä-Breitholtz, MP (Sweden), and Hon. John Mann, MP (UK).

Save the date: MEPs for SRR event on “Championing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Europe & globally”

BRUSSELS, 28 January 2020 - It is our pleasure to invite you to the MEPs for SRR event on "Championing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Europe & globally” which takes place on Wednesday, 25 March 2020 between 13:00-15:00 in the European Parliament (EP) in Brussels.

The past decades have seen substantial progress in the areas of women’s rights, gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). At the same time, opposition against women’s rights, gender equality and SRHR has been gaining traction at the EU level as well as in international negotiations and UN fora. Many of the arguments used by those pushing back against rights are based on ideology rather than evidence. This ‘pushback’ obstructs the realisation of people’s rights and countries’ development. The event will highlight the political challenges in Europe and globally and the urgency to counter these movements and will also give details what the backlash means in practice and for women on the ground.

Moreover, MEPs for SRR want to mobilise further political support needed to promote SRHR at the EP and in EU policies.

Please register to attend the event here.
COUNCIL OF EUROPE NEWS

Victory in defeating an anti-choice Resolution at PACE

STRASSBOURG, 29 January 2020 - PACE has defeated the tabled Resolution "On the protection of freedom of religion or belief in the workplace". The draft resolution and report presented serious human rights violations. Far from combating discrimination based on belief or conviction, the proposed motion would have given a privileged position to claims based on religious beliefs over other, thus sowing discord between employees and increasing conflicts, not reducing them. Accommodating religious demands at the workplace could also come at the expense of the rights of LBGTIQ people, as religious claims are often used to discriminate against them. It inappropriately applied the concept of "reasonable accommodation" to freedom of religion or belief in the workplace, which leads to undermining and restricting the human rights of others, in particular, sexual and reproductive rights (notably the access to safe and legal abortion or to contraceptives) and the rights of LBGTI people.

The author of this draft resolution, Hon. Davor Ivo Stier, MP (Croatia / EPP) is a well know anti-choice politician from Croatia. He is well connected to anti-choice groups in Croatia, including Vigilare foundation with whom he i.a. inaugurated the Festival of tradition and conservative ideas aiming to push back "advanced and militant ideas and policies that seek to destroy the original traditional, conservative and Christian foundations of culture in Croatia". PACE members proposed relevant amendments to bring the resolution in line with human rights standards. They stressed, that while freedom of religion or belief is a fundamental human right, its manifestation must not lead to discrimination or violate the human rights and freedoms of others.

EPF is happy to continue working with parliamentarians at the Council of Europe, who were able to mobilise to make this achievement possible.

On 28 January, EPF conducted its regular Luncheon on Reproductive Rights, with Parliamentarians from Austria, Germany, Poland and Sweden. The main topic of this luncheon was to present to the Members the newly launched Cervical Cancer Prevention Policies Atlas for Europe. Parliamentarians appreciated the study and looked for ways to use it at their parliaments to advance women health.
On the 3rd anniversary of the Mexico City Policy, Nordic MPs write open letter to President Donald Trump

Open letter to President Donald Trump from Nordic Parliamentarians

Dear Mr. President, Donald Trump

We, parliamentarians from Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland, believe in the right of every individual to decide over their own lives, bodies and futures. All women and girls should have the information and services they need to have their right to health fulfilled, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights. The Mexico City Policy (MCP) - and the Trump administration's expanded version of this policy - has severely violated these rights. Today - on the 3rd anniversary of your signing of this policy - we urge you, Mr. President, to repeal the policy.

The United States - the largest government funder of reproductive health in the world - has a major role to play in the global effort to eliminate maternal mortality and ill-health by preventing unsafe abortions and in supporting access to the full range of comprehensive health services. The effects of the reinstated and expanded MCP mean that critical health and life saving organisations have lost substantial funding for services that serve the most vulnerable communities. The policy is resulting in fewer service providers being able to serve communities on the ground, even in contexts where abortion is legal, and furthermore prevents collaboration between organisations and health care actors.

The effects of the MCP go beyond simply preventing access to comprehensive abortion care; the policy also limits access to a broad range of health services like; contraception, maternal health, youth friendly services, water and sanitation and HIV/AIDS prevention and care, contributing to the increased risk of unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions. Moreover, international research unequivocally shows, that restrictive access to legal and safe abortion is causing a higher number of unsafe abortions, risking serious consequences to women’s health and well-being.
We are concerned about the damaging effects of the MCP on women’s lives and on the ability of health providers to deliver lifesaving services. The MCP jeopardizes the many gains we have made in the sexual and reproductive rights and justice movements, as well as all of the many investments and long term commitments that Nordic donors have made in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all over many years.

Mr. President: we urge you to ensure that all women and girls, youth and adults can exercise their rights to health, life and well-being. We urge you to immediately repeal the Mexico City Policy.

Sincerely

Sara Heikkinen Breitholtz, Swedish Social Democratic Party, on behalf of the Swedish All-Party Parliamentary Group for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (Chair)

Heidi Nordby-Lunde, Conservative party, on behalf of the Norwegian All-Party Parliamentary Group for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (Chair)

Saara Hyrkkö, Green League, on behalf of the Finish All-Party Parliamentary Group for Sexual Rights and Development (Chair)

Karen Ellemann, Liberal Party, on behalf of the Danish All-Party Parliamentary Group for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights SRHR (Chair)

Visit of the Basque Country APPG to El Salvador: between worry and hope

EL SALVADOR, 28 January 2020 - The Basque Country APPG has just returned from a study visit to El Salvador whose objectives were to have more knowledge, on the ground and first hand, of the situation and debates about health and SRHR, dialogue and exchange experiences with Salvadoran organizations that defend these rights and learn from Salvadoran initiatives to advance the national and international agenda on population and development.
The visit was promoted and organised by the Feminist Collective and the Citizen Group for the Decriminalization of the Ethical and Eugene Therapeutic Abortion with the support of the Spanish Cooperation Technical Office (OTC) in El Salvador and supported by FPFE.

In 2018, El Salvador reported the highest rate of femicides in Latin America and the Caribbean, with 6.8 per 100,000 women. In 2017, the national rate of sexual violence was 175.3 per 100,000 women. In addition, in 2015 there were 25,132 pregnancies of girls and adolescents, 30% of pregnancies in the country. Of these, 1,445 were between 10 and 14 years old and did not have the option of being able to decide the termination of pregnancy due to the penalty of abortion in the country.

During their visit, Basque parliamentarians have exchanged experiences and proposals for action and collaboration with civil society organizations, diplomatic representatives, United Nations agencies, ministries and other public bodies.

From the absolute respect for the country's policies and institutions, the members of the intergroup have expressed their concern about the situation of access to education and guarantee of sexual and reproductive rights that Salvadorans live, especially the situation of women imprisoned for suffering obstetric emergencies or spontaneous abortions, as Iñigo Iturrate, APPG coordinator, pointed out after visiting one of the prisons where women serve sentences of up to 30 years for this reason.

During the intergroup visit, a public forum was held in which representatives of civil society and journalists participated, and which served to take stock of the progress and challenges in meeting, more than 25 years later, the objectives of the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. In this forum, as well as throughout the visit, the Basque MPs had the opportunity to recognise the great work of Salvadoran organisations.

During the forum, Natalia Rojo, MP of the Socialist Party, stressed that "the biggest challenge is to move from the equality of the word to the equality of the facts. Never make politics with your back to society.”

Among the meetings with representatives of the governmental institutions of El Salvador, it is necessary to highlight the meeting with the president of the Legislative Assembly, Mario Ponce; with the members of the Women’s Commission in the Legislative Assembly and with the Youth Parliamentary Group, to exchange experiences on the achievements and operation of APPG in the Spanish Congress and in the Parliament of Basque Country.

Throughout the visit, multiple organisations repeatedly expressed the lack of family planning services and supplies for those who need them most, particularly in rural areas. They also pointed out the absence of these services for young people, and that they suffer both these and in general the population of El Salvador. The Basque deputies have been told about the reality of stigmas, silence, misinformation and myths around sexuality, and the innumerable direct and indirect legal barriers to accessing services and information on sexual and reproductive health. This situation is also framed by threats against sexual and reproductive rights and the organisations that defend them, not only in El Salvador but throughout the world, by highly organised coercive and fundamentalist organisations that put pressure on governments, to deputies and civil society organisations.