

This newsletter presents monthly highlights of EPF's and our member parliamentary groups' work and gives an overview of legislative and Parliamentary initiatives on sexual and reproductive health and rights and international development in Europe and around the world on the part of the global community of Parliamentarians committed to the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).

Enjoy the reading!

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I. EPF Activities May 2009

1. European Parliamentarians learn more about Reproductive Health Supplies situation during study tour to Zambia



During their week-long stay in Zambia, from 16-23 May, European Parliamentarians from the Netherlands, the UK, Ireland, Scotland, Sweden and Azerbaijan gained first hand information about the population's unmet sexual and reproductive health needs as well as the reproductive health situation in a country where young people represent more than 70% of the population, where the birth rate in rural areas, where nearly 60% of Zambia's 12m population resides, is amongst the highest in Africa (between 6.9 and 7.5 children) and where the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate lies at 14.3%. 57% of people living with HIV/AIDS are women and the epidemic continues to pose one of the most significant development challenges to the country.

The joint study tour co-organised by the **Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (RFSU)** and the **European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development (EPF)** was held in the framework of the **Countdown 2015 Europe** project and hosted by the Planned Parenthood Association of Zambia (PPAZ) and Youth Vision Zambia (YVZ). Focusing on the sexual reproductive health and rights situation as well as the availability of and access to reproductive health supplies, delegation participants were able to meet with the main stakeholders and decision makers in this field. These included the Ministry of Health, the Mayor of Lusaka and district commissioners of Lusaka, Kafue and Choma (the latter ones being rural areas) but also representatives of the donor community such as DFID, USAID, SIDA, the Worldbank and the EC Delegation in Zambia. Meetings with UNFPA representatives, Marie Stopes International, and various community and outreach projects in urban and rural areas complemented the picture of the SRHR and RHS situation on the ground in Zambia.



This wide range of stakeholders involved in meetings allowed the European delegation members to gain first-hand experience of domestic living conditions in both urban and rural areas, the complex inter-related



development issues, and the relationship between NGOs, the public sector and the international community. **"If every Zambian would use a condom, we could only have sex three times a year"**, a PPAZ representative described the reproductive health supplies situation in his country. Lack of youth-friendly health services, a massive brain drain of health workers, especially doctors and nurses, the lack of well-trained health personnel as well as the poor access to health facilities, predominantly in rural areas, have been identified as challenges for the development of a strong health system in Zambia.

In spite the strong donor and government commitment to SRHR and contraceptive security, long-term funding for contraceptives remains inconsistent and stock-outs at health facilities are common. During a retreat meeting between Zambian MPs and the European Delegation members, focus was laid on the importance of a legislative enabling environment to ensure political long-term commitment for health and to enable Members of the Zambian Parliament to hold their government accountable on these commitments. The adoption of the draft law on Reproductive Health that has been under discussion for the past seven years now was identified as an essential step in the right direction.

The European Parliamentarian Delegation included:

Hon. Nesib Nesibli, MP	Azerbaijan
Senator Fiona O'Malley	Ireland
Hon. Janneke Schermers, MP	The Netherlands
Hon. Patrick Harvie, MSP	Scotland
Hon. Ameer Sachet, MP	Sweden
Baroness Susan Thomas of Walliswood	United Kingdom

For more information about the joint EPF/RFSU study tour to Zambia, please contact: **Ms Nadine Krysostan** at: Nadine@iepfpd.org, **Ms Saskia Pfeijffer** at: Saskia@iepfpd.org or **Ms Lina Granlund** at: Lina.Granlund@rfsu.se

A detailed report about the study visit will be available on the RFSU and EPF website within a month.

2. Partnering for Youth: EU-UN-Parliamentarians together for a Healthy Future of the South Caucasus. 3 Years of Reproductive Health Initiative for Youth in South Caucasus

On 29 May, 2009, to mark the end of the 3 years Reproductive Health Initiative for Youth in South Caucasus, EPF organised a Conference entitled: **Partnering for Youth: EU-UN-Parliamentarians together for a Healthy Future of the South Caucasus - 3 Years of Reproductive Health Initiative for Youth in South Caucasus (RHIYC)**, in Brussels to which it is an implementing partner. The purpose of the Conference was to present RHIYC's successful impact on young people's sexual and reproductive health in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia to the project donor - the European Commission and other invited guests; to identify the challenges faced during project implementation and to discuss the project's "exit strategy". Another aim was to formulate future steps necessary for continued improvement of sexual and reproductive health of young people in the South Caucasus, including funding opportunities from the European Commission and bilateral donors.



Launched in 2006, RHIYC reached at least 50 per cent of 2,85 million young people between 15 and 24 years of the South Caucasus. The 3-year project aimed at empowering young people to realize their rights to accessible, youth-friendly, high quality sexual and reproductive health services and supplies in order to reduce unwanted pregnancies, prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS, and eliminate gender based violence. Through inter-country and country activities, the project has greatly contributed to the expansion of sexual and reproductive health services in line with International Conference

on Population and Development and the Millennium Development Goals. Within three years, more than 80 new youth friendly reproductive health centres opened across the region, 31000 young people received information on their sexual and reproductive health and rights, over 4000 medical care providers received trainings on modern reproductive health care and provision of family planning services and new legislative acts on reproductive health, family planning and healthy and harmonious education are in the making in Azerbaijan and Georgia.

As a result of the Conference the project partners decided:

- To continue working on improving sexual and reproductive health of young people in South Caucasus in a Phase II, with possible funding from the European Commission, bilateral donors and the private sector
- That a possible new project must be build on the lessons learned:
 - 1) by putting more emphasis on working with legislative powers, i.e. through inter-country networking
 - 2) by focusing more on healthcare in rural areas
 - 3) by addressing the needs of the most vulnerable young people including Internally Displaced People (IDP)

Conference participants included: Representatives from UNFPA Country Offices from South Caucasus, Turkey and Brussels, EPF, representatives from the European Commission, European Parliament, and Permanent Missions of various countries to the European Union, Federal Public Service of Belgium and Brussels-based international civil society organisations.

For more information on the conference, please contact **Marina Davidashvili** at: Marina@iefpd.org

II. Parliamentary Leadership

1. Hon. Maria Rosa Fortuny i Torroella, MP takes the lead in raising awareness about malaria in the Catalan Parliament

On Thursday 14 May 2009, the Spanish Federation for Family Planning (FPFE) organised a meeting with a specific focus on malaria in the Catalan Parliament. **Hon. María Rosa Fortuny i Torroella, MP**, EPF Malaria Taskforce member promoted this meeting to raise awareness on the fight against malaria among Catalan Parliamentarians. Researcher and founder of the Manhica Health Research Centre in Mozambique, Dr. Pedro Alonso provided Parliamentarians with a clear description of the cycle of the disease, the population affected, and the current prevention and treatment strategies for malaria control as well as with an overview of the current status of malaria research, including the challenges towards the development of a malaria vaccine. "Why hasn't anyone developed a malaria vaccine before now? The problem is that the parasite is so biologically complex that it's difficult to prime the immune system to fight it off and part is that most of its victims are so poor that drug companies are reluctant to take experimental vaccines out of their lab and into the field for human trials" he said.



Dr Pedro Alonso highlighted that even if there is a malaria vaccine developed in the near future, it should be used in combination and in addition to existing malaria control strategies. The discussions enabled him to highlight that despite some progress in reducing child and maternal mortality more efforts need to be provided by Spain and the international community. Dr Alonso stressed the necessity to promote innovative funding mechanisms and increase countries' contribution to the Global Fund. **MP María Rosa Fortuny i Torroella** presented her experience and lessons learned during EPF's study tour to Cameroon on malaria issues, held in March 2009 and invited her colleagues to advocate for increased support in the fight against malaria.

Participating Parliamentarians included **MP Jose Antonio Doner, MP Dolores Camat, MP Marta Alós, MP Anna Figueras, MP Antoni Comin, MP Miquel Carrillo, MP Rafael Lopez an MP Lluís Postigo.**

2. Romanian Senator Tudor UDRIȘTOIU delivers a Political Declaration during Senate’s plenary on the occasion of the International Day of Families



On 11 May 2009, **Senator Tudor UDRIȘTOIU**, the Chairman of the Sub-Committee of the Senate on Population and Development, delivered a Political Declaration during a Senate plenary session on the occasion of the International Day of Families commemorated on 15 May. The Declaration focused on the key-role of the family in the general evolution of society; the government’s and parliaments’ responsibility in supporting families by providing chances and conditions enabling them to cope with today’s challenges, the main factors putting at risk the wellbeing of families in Romania, with a special emphasis on the situation of families in which children are left at home by parents working abroad, and of those in which domestic violence occurs. While calling for urgent measures to curb Romania’s demographic decline, **Senator UDRIȘTOIU** reiterated the Sub-Committee’s support for a National Strategy for Population and Development.

3. Romanian Senator Șerban RĂDULESCU highlights strategic partnership with UNFPA and progress made in population and development related issues

On 19 May 2009, **Senator Șerban RĂDULESCU**, member of the Romanian Sub-Committee of the Senate on Population and Development and EPF Malaria Taskforce member, met with Mr. Alexandre SIDORENKO, coordinator of the UN Programme on Aging. Mr. SIDORENKO’s visit to Romania aimed at assessing the implementation of the Population and Development component of the UNFPA Country Programme 2005-2009. **Senator RĂDULESCU** made a presentation of the mandate, role and activity of the Senate’s Sub-Committee on Population and Development, specifically emphasising its involvement in drafting legislation and exercising parliamentary oversight on issues related to health care, assistance to mothers and families, development cooperation policy in support to health. **Senator RĂDULESCU** highlighted the essential contribution of UNFPA Romania country office to the work of the Sub-Committee. He also mentioned the Sub-Committee’s initiative to host an event in June - the 35th Anniversary Meeting of the World Population Conference-Bucharest, 1974 – which will bring together relevant stakeholders to agree on a more coherent and structured national approach to population and development issues.



4. Hon. Antje Blumenthal, MP: “Active against Forced Marriage”

“Active against Forced Marriage” is an EU project initiated by the Ministry for Social and Family Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg which is funded by the Daphne programme of the European Commission. The results of the two-year project are recommendations to tackle forced marriage. They are intended as a contribution towards achieving the prevention of forced marriage and to develop effective means of assistance. The recommendations mainly refer to approaches such as preventative action, intervention and international activities.



For **Hon. Antje Blumenthal, MP**, EPF Executive Committee member and whose constituency is in the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, the guidelines are an important impulse to break the silence about forced marriage: “Because of the so-called “honour killings” forced marriage find its way into the public and political debate. Now we have to think about strategies against it. Forced marriage is a problem in the whole of Europe and it is time to find a Europe-wide objective to offer protection and help to men and women who are threatened by this.”

"The present guidelines are primarily addressed to decision-makers in politics and administration. It was one of the main objectives of the project to raise awareness among political and administrative decision makers in Hamburg and Europe. Together with European partners we aim at strategies and measures to tackle forced marriage. The project explicitly sets out to establish transnational cooperation where governmental and non-governmental bodies can work together" MP Blumenthal explains.

For more information, please visit: www.hamburg.de/zwangsheirat (in German)

5. Azeri MPs Discuss National Reproductive Health Law & ICPD - Two New Youth-Friendly Centres Opened



On 30 April, the EPF member Parliamentary group in the National Parliament of Azerbaijan organised a **National Parliamentary Forum on Youth Reproductive Health and Rights**, in Baku, Azerbaijan supported by UNFPA and as part of the EC/UNFPA funded Reproductive Health Initiative for Youth in the South Caucasus (RHIYC). Parliamentarians, key Government stakeholders and partner NGOs actively participated in the Forum to elaborate follow up plans on the RHIYC project in Azerbaijan and to formulate strategies for the sustainable improvement of youth SRHR, including discussions on an ambitious draft law on reproductive health proposed by the Parliamentary group and currently in discussions in

Parliament.

Hon. Malahat Ibrahimkizi, MP, Chair of the EPF Parliamentary Group and author of the draft law on Reproductive Health and Family Planning chaired the Forum and stated that "if adopted this June, the draft law will ensure budgetary coverage of a number of reproductive health services in the country and will contribute to the sustainable development of youth reproductive health services." EPF Executive Committee Member **Hon. Chantal Gill'ard, MP** (Netherlands) who participated in the conference praised Azeri Parliamentarians for their work on such an extensive law and informed about the current reproductive health challenges for young people in Europe and the Netherlands. "Since the adoption of the ICPD Programme of Action in 1994, Azerbaijan has achieved enormous progress in improving its reproductive health legislation and services and counts as a reproductive health champion in the region", said Neil Datta, EPF Secretary.

For more information, please contact **Marina Davidashvili** at: Marina@iepfpd.org

III. APPG Affairs

1. UK APPG launched its Maternal Morbidity Hearing report on 6 May 2009

The UK All Party Parliamentary Group on Population, Development and Reproductive Health launched its Maternal Morbidity Hearing Report, entitled "Better Off Dead?" in the House of Commons on 6 May with White Ribbon Alliance's Patron Sarah Brown and UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador Geri Halliwell.

The event was held in collaboration with White Ribbon Alliance, International Planned Parenthood Federation and Marie Stopes International. Maternal Morbidity roughly means women's illnesses and injuries related to pregnancy and childbirth. It leaves an estimated 10 - 20 million women and girls every year with long-term physical, psychological, social and economic problems. Many women are abandoned, ostracised and alone. The grim series of complications include: Obstetric fistula, perineal damage, prolapsed uterus, stress incontinence, puerperal infection and sepsis, haemorrhage, pre-eclampsia and fits, anaemia, infertility and ectopic pregnancy, depression and suicide.

Maternal morbidity has root causes in gender inequality and violence including early marriage and Female Genital Mutilation.

The APPG on PD&RH Maternal Morbidity Hearing Report recommends:

- 10 per cent of Official Development Aid to be spent on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights;
- Child marriage and Female Genital Mutilation to be outlawed;
- Abortion decriminalised;
- Legislation that criminalises transmission of HIV to be prevented or reversed;
- Family planning and clean and safe deliveries accessible to all;
- Equitable health care by removing financial barriers especially for the poor, the young, the marginalised including people in conflict;
- Expansion and registration of health workers with appropriate 'task shifts' and improved codes of practice, standards, guidelines and protocols;
- Improved maternal health data collection; and
- Country league tables published on maternal health to 'name and shame' those countries making insufficient progress.

The full Report and recommendations can be accessed on the Group's website at www.appg-popdevrh.org.uk or e-mailed by **Ms Kari Mawhood** upon request to mawhoodk@parliament.uk

2. Finnish APPG held its Annual Spring Seminar in Parliament, 7 May 2009

On 7 May, the Finnish APPG held its Annual Spring Seminar in Parliament. EPF's Executive Committee member and the APPG's President **Hon. Minna Sirnö, MP** chaired the meeting which focused on the challenges that Finland is facing for the implementation of ICPD Programme of Action (PoA), and particularly on meeting the targets related to maternal mortality. The seminar gathered around 40 participants and the key speakers included Ms Grace Kodindo, Ms Sharon Camp who emphasised the impact of the economic crisis on sexual and reproductive health and rights as well as a representative from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs who informed participants about Finland's efforts in the implementation ICPD PoA via Finnish development cooperation. Before the seminar the APPG had a screening of the BBC-documentary "Dead Mums Don't Cry" where Ms Grace Kodindo performed.



3. Romanian APPG Chair participates in Working Meeting on "Reproductive Health in Romania, 15 years after the ICPD, Cairo, 1994"

On 12 May 2009, **Senator Tudor UDRIȘTOIU**, the Chairman of the Sub-Committee of the Senate on Population and Development, participated in a Working Meeting on "Reproductive Health in Romania, 15 years after the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 1994". The meeting was the first in a series of events to be organised by UNFPA Romania in order to mark the ICPD 15th anniversary. The participants examined the state of play in achieving the ICPD objectives in Romania, namely reducing mortality rates among newborns and children, as well as maternal mortality rates, and an improved access to reproductive and sexual health services, including family planning. Recommendations were made for practical measures to speed up efforts in support to these objectives. **Senator UDRIȘTOIU** stressed the need for a new Reproductive Health Strategy, to be based on the results of the National Programme for Evaluating the Population's Health in primary health care, and on findings of the recent studies on Reproductive Health and Generations and Gender. He also underlined the need to set up permanent emergency medical centers in rural areas, to develop the abilities of future physicians to interact with their patients, and to include extensive family planning courses in the university curricula.

4. The Spanish cabinet of ministers approves draft law on "Sexual and Reproductive Health and Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy"

After the approval of the draft law on 14 May, proposed by the Gender Equality Ministry, parliamentary debate is expected for July. The proposal could possibly be voted in plenary in the Spanish Congress by the end of September. To be adopted, both chambers have to approve it by absolute majority. It is foreseen that the socialist party along with some minority groups (IU-ICV, ERC and BNG) would have tight but sufficient support to adopt the law.

The new law offers a broader framework to regulate sexual and reproductive health and rights, including sexual education and the right to abortion. The new law allows abortion until the 14th gestational week and can be extended to the 22nd gestational week in case the health or the life of the pregnant women is at risk or when serious foetal impairment is diagnosed, provided the positive report of two specialist doctors. After the 22nd week interventions would only be allowed after the approval of a medical committee. Before any intervention, a reflection period of 48 hours must be respected, during which women must receive comprehensive information. Under the draft law, abortion services would be included in the catalogue of free public medical services, ensuring its provision and gratuity across Spain. Autonomous Regions will be required to ensure the provision of these services in their regions, either in public or private hospitals.

Not surprisingly, the draft law has prompted heated debates in the Spanish society and has spilled over into the country's European elections campaigns. Public debate has focused mainly on the fact that the law allows young women over 16, to terminate a pregnancy without parental consent (according to the media polls, 56% of socialist voters and 88% of centre-right voters oppose the measure). Some vocal catholic groups have mobilised and demonstrated against the new law, demanding the effective illegalization of abortion. On the other end, feminist associations have rendered a signed petition to Congress to modify the proposal. They have considered the project insufficient and the periods too short, as the most vulnerable women, pregnant teenagers and women from lower social classes are more likely to surpass the given 14 weeks. They have also regretted that the law does not de-penalise abortion beyond the given 14 weeks, as women and health practitioners could be brought before court. In addition, the proposal fails to regulate conscientious objection, which is problematic in a country where only 3% of abortion services are provided in public hospitals.

For more information, please contact **Ms Filomena Ruggiero (FPFE)** at: fruggiero@fpfe.org

5. Portuguese APPG organises a Large Scale Conference on ICPD+15 in Lisbon

On the 19 May, the Portuguese APPG and the Portuguese Family Planning Association (APF) organised a Conference on "ICPD+15: development, sexual and reproductive health and fundamental rights in Lisbon, Portugal. Gathering nearly 100 participants, including Portuguese APPG members, representatives of the Portuguese Government, UNFPA, EPF, IPPF-EN, PAI, and other NGOs, the Conference enabled participants to review the progress and set backs in the ICPD Programme of Action and highlighted the remaining key challenges for reaching the MDGs and keeping-up the ICPD on Portugal's political agenda. During the conference, Ms Catarina Furtado, one of Portugal's most popular celebrities and UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador presented her film on Reproductive and Maternal Health and Obstetric Care in Guinea Bissau. During the mission, Ms. Catarina Furtado together with UNFPA representatives and the Minister of Health took part in the inauguration of the delivery unit of the Hospital of Gabú, which was built thanks to the Portuguese development cooperation.

For more information, please contact **Ms Alice Frade** (APF) at: alicefrade@apf.pt

IV. EPF Activities – Outlook 2009:

1. G8 Parliamentary Meeting on Reproductive and Global Health, 22-23 June, Rome, Italy

This year's G8 Parliamentary Meeting will focus on the "Strategic Investment in times of crisis. The rewards of making women's health a priority".

2. Young Decision Makers Study Tour 31 July – 9 August 2009, Uganda

This study tour is organised in collaboration with Sex and Samfund under the Countdown 2015 project. It will raise awareness and educate Young Decision Makers on the unmet SRHR needs of the Uganda population and places a special emphasis on the availability of and access to reproductive health supplies.

3. Fourth International Parliamentarians Conference on the Implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action Conference, 26-27 October, Cairo, Egypt (tbc)

The conference will be combined with EPF Executive Committee and Council meetings, and is preceded by a High-level Conference on MDG 5: Maternal Mortality hosted by the Dutch Minister for Development, H.E. Bert Koenders on 25 October 2009.

The EPF Secretariat

The EPF secretariat is based in Brussels and is responsible for implementing all EPF activities. EPF maintains a website with information about its activities and a monthly News Update on the activities of Parliamentarians, SRHR and development policy and related items. It can be found at www.iepfpd.org.

The EPF Secretariat staff is composed as follows (in alphabetical order):

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EPF's Mission

The European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development believes Parliamentarians have the opportunity and the responsibility to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender equality, which are core elements of human dignity and are central to human development.

About EPF

The European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development is a Brussels-based Parliamentary network that serves as a platform for cooperation and coordination for the 25 all-party groups in Parliaments throughout Europe that focus on improving sexual and reproductive health and rights at home and abroad through national and regional health and foreign aid budgets.

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EPF is a member of:

- The Steering Committee of the International Parliamentarians' Conference of the Implementation of the IPCI Programme of Action (IPCI/ICPD)
- Countdown 2015 Europe
- The Reproductive Health Initiative for Youth in the South Caucasus (RHIYC)
- The European Alliance against Malaria
- The Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition
- The Women Deliver Advisory Group

EPF

- has Special Consultative Status with the United Nation's Economic and Social Council
- has Participatory Status with the Council of Europe
- is an Associate Member of EuroNGOs