



**GENDER
AND DEVELOPMENT
IN PRACTICE**

Gender Backlash 3

International Feminist Conference



29 April 2022



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ORGANISATIONS

MENA – Middle East and North Africa

GBV – Gender Based Violence

MSB – The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (Myndigheten för samhällsskydd och beredskap)

EKHO - Ecumenical group for Christian LGBT

LGBTQI+ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex

MEP - Member of the European Parliament

NGO - Non-governmental Organization

GADIP – Gender and Development in Practice

ILGA Europe - the European region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association

LGB - Lesbians, gay men and bisexuals

TFY – Together For Yes

NWCI – National Women’s Council of Ireland

ARC – Abortion Rights Campaign

AWG – Abortion Working Group

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Maria Johansson has a background working with women's rights organizations in conflict-affected countries. Within the framework of that work, Maria has, among other things, written reports on anti-gender narratives in MENA and Europe. Maria is also a GBV-specialist and is part of MSB's resource pool and therefore receive assignments in humanitarian disasters. Most recently, in the spring of 2021, Maria was working with Tigray refugees in Sudan.

Oliver Jänkhe is a trans-activist and a board member of the EKHO ecumenical group for Christian LGBTQI+ and the Head of the West Pride Youth congregation. Oliver also works in the digital space to bring the trans perspective to social media, organizing the digital conference "Trans-blessing", and posting on the YouTube channel "Queers of the World".

Lena Martinsson is a Gender studies professor and associate professor at the Ethnology Department of Cultural Studies at the University of Gothenburg. She conducts research on the anti-gender movement in the Nordics. Lena is also interested in political processes and movements related to gender. Her current focus is movements that stands against sexuality, nationalism, feminism and LGBTQI+ rights.

Soraya Post has several years of experience working as a human rights strategist with a focus on Roma rights in Sweden and Europe. She has worked internationally within the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), the Council of Europe and The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). She held a seat in the European Parliament as a representative of "Feministiskt Initiativ", becoming their first elected MEP and the first Romani in Swedish history to be chosen as a candidate for a political party.

Evin Incir is representing the Swedish Social Democratic Party in the European Parliament since the 2019 European Elections. She's a member of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, Vice-Chair in the Delegation for Relations with Palestine, Member of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, the Delegation to the EU- Türkiye Joint Parliamentary Committee and the Delegation for Relations with Iran, as well as a member of the Intergroups on LGBTI Rights, Anti-Racism and Diversity, Trade Unions and Western Sahara.

Cianán B. Russell is the Senior Policy Officer of ILGA Europe. Cianán works on intersex rights, education, health, trans rights, and the anti-gender backlash in Europe and Central Asia. They also monitor and engage with the Council of Europe and United Nations institutions. They began LGBTI activism in the US in 1996 and previously worked with the Indiana Transgender Rights Advocacy Alliance and the Asia Pacific Transgender Network and Transgender Europe.

María Teresa Bosio is the President of the Catholic organization for The Right to Decide since 2012 and an active member of the campaign for The Right to Safe and Free, Legal abortions. She is a Professor of Educational Sciences, holds a Master of Science in Education and was awarded by the Fluminense Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. She is an adjunct Professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the National University of Córdoba and a researcher on issues related to sexual and (non-)reproductive rights.

Ailbhe Smyth is known for her track record in activism and campaigning since the late 1970s, being an active part of the Women's movement and, later, also the LGBTQI+ movement. She played a crucial role in the Marriage Equality Referendum in Ireland. She was also the leader of the campaign on abortion rights, against the growing strength of far-right extremism. Ailbhe is currently chair of the women's aid in Ireland and was listed as one of Time's Magazine's most influential people in honor of her contributions to the Irish abortion legalization campaign.

Evgenia Ivanova is a feminist researcher, educator and activist from Belarus. She has a master's degree in Gender Studies as well as in Sociology of Law. Evgenia is Co-Founder and Co-Chair of a women's NGO called "ADLIGA: Women for Full Citizenship". She is also a coeditor of a Russian-speaking feminist almanac "Women in Politics: New Approaches to the Political". Her academic interests include feminist political theory; gender, body and citizenship; feminist critique of the human rights conception; women's political participation; and gender and biopolitics.



WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Edmé Domínguez

GADIP was created in autumn 2007 with the purpose of facilitating the exchange of knowledge and experiences between researchers and practitioners within the frame of gender and global development issues. The aim is to establish bridges between researchers and activists. GADIP has been part of several international networks and joined WIDE+ soon after becoming an independent association. Edmé Domínguez, the president of GADIP, started the conference by welcoming the participants and guests.

This conference will be our third on the theme of “Gender Backlash”. The first one, in 2017, covered the themes of violence and political backlash in Latin America, masculinities, trafficking, Female Genital Mutilation, forced marriages, and how Culture of honor affects women’s lives. The second was held in 2019, covering the themes of political rights and Gender-Based Violence in Morocco, deterioration of freedom of expression and growing anti-intellectualism in Turkey and Bulgaria, Backlash against Gender Research in Albania and Belarus, Backlash in the area of reproductive justice in Poland and Economic Justice and Migration, with examples from Sweden.

This year’s conference will cover the topics of the progress and effects of the anti-gender movement in Sweden, how we can create a trans-inclusive feminist movement, how mobilization for change was possible in the movement for abortion rights in Argentina and Ireland, and the resistance from the feminist movement in Belarus, where many women are active in the peaceful initiatives for a democratic Belarus free from violence and terror. We will finish the day with a communal discussion, summarizing what we take away from the day and how we can move forward.

THE PROGRESS AND EFFECTS OF THE ANTI-GENDER MOVEMENT

Maria Johansson, Lena Martinsson, Oliver Jänkhe, Soraya Post

Maria Johansson, the moderator, introduces the panel discussion. The discussion will be on the anti-gender movement - What motivates the movement? What strategies do they use? How do they organize? What is their discourse? We will explore how it affects everyday life and how one can react against it. - What can we do together in the feminist movement?

Lena Martinsson, who is a professor in Gender Studies, tells us how she began to understand the danger of the anti-gender movement, and that she could now be perceived as a threat to the entire university based on the area of her research. Lena points out that there are different threats in different countries. For example, in the Catholic part of the world, the Church is threatened by gender. In Sweden on the other hand, many people think that the church is left-wing, feminist, and inclusive. The narrative is that the church is not threatened, it's "already destroyed". In Sweden, what is perceived as under threat by gender research is the "normal" family constellation.

The university is also perceived as being under threat by becoming too ideological and political. The concept of academic freedom has become a focus for the far-right. There is an idea that there is "neutral" and "rational" knowledge, of which gender research is not a part, and therefore lots of bills have been introduced in the Swedish parliament, stating that gender research should not receive funding. The Higher Education Act (Högskolelagen) states that the researcher has the right to design their own method and ask their own questions. The idea has been that politicians should not get involved. However, now there are narratives around there being "too many women in academia", which in turn creates a different culture, one that is not "harsh and tough" enough, which is seen as a problem.

That the university has opened to more voices and perspectives is seen as a threat to "common knowledge", based on the perception that there is one truth and only one way of understanding knowledge. We, as feminists, know that knowledge is an ideological process, where ideology can serve as a motor to seek understanding in the areas of justice and equality. What by the opposition is labeled "Gender ideology", that women should be able to live different lives, is the concept that is perceived as threatening.

Oliver continues the discussion, explaining that there are many prominent people in the anti-gender and anti-trans movement, especially online. The opposition seeks out Oliver and other trans people on social media to post negative comments. Before trans people were met with ignorance and questions, now, however, people perceive themselves as experts on the subject.

Even though the online space is more hateful, there is a positive change in the public environment, offline, with a greater acceptance of trans people.

Even though the Swedish church is progressive, Oliver has witnessed anti-trans rhetoric in the non-conformist churches. One of their biggest newspapers, which normally only reports on Christianity, has recently written two articles about a trans-woman athlete from the US. The perception is that the existence of trans people illustrates the “decay of society”, and they see Eastern Europe as a model in their ability to “pull the breaks” on the rights of trans people. One common narrative is that “if we let this in, what will happen next?”, referring to the “normalization” of homosexuality.

In June of 2021, unit managers at the Astrid Lindgren Children’s Hospital, a part of the Karolinska Institute, decided to stop giving hormone treatment to minors, and in 2022 the Social Board advised against making the gender correction to minors and the care sector had too few resources was quoted as a reason, the narrative becoming “protection of children”. Oliver states that children are not protected by being refused care and not being listened to. It is important to listen to the experts in these questions, and not just act on what people might feel is the right thing.

Soraya continues by how our political conversations often are based on feelings. She has observed how the far-right, nationalist and ultra-conservative have shifted the political conversation. The Feminist Initiative has long struggled as a party, with many saying that they support their ideology, but not placing their vote on them based on the fear that there will not be enough votes for them to win seats. Politicians, including the far-right, nationalist and ultra-conservative, know that politics is governed by fears and feelings. She has seen these movements working together on both a local and international level. With the economic crises, a war in Europe and Sweden’s application to join NATO she sees worryingly into the future. Politicians have a responsibility to do their utmost to understand the strategy of the opposition in order to build their own, effective strategy.

In the European Parliament, Soraya focused on building alliances. Women are seen as a minority and therefore must join forces with other disadvantaged groups. We must understand that women are not weak. We exist and live within weak structures and systems, but must not recognize ourselves as a weak group. Her experience is that we are not as successful as our opposition in building alliances. We must create a common struggle for equality, on common terms, on all levels and arenas, one that is based on human rights and that upholds democracy. An alliance was created in the European Parliament under, “European Feminist Unite”, and their focus was around what kind of future was wanted. On some questions, concerning prostitution and LGBTQI, for example, there were differences in opinions, but common ground could still be found.

“We must understand that women are not weak. We exist and live within weak structures and systems, but must not recognize ourselves as a weak group.”

- Soraya Post

The nationalists say that they are protectors of democracy. They focus on their interpretation of freedom of speech, that it gives right to them to express hostile narratives, using democratic tools for their purpose. In the European Parliament, she witnessed how they were effective in spreading their information online, filming everything. One of the fears of the nationalist is that there are too many women in powerful positions, patriarchal capitalism is built on that the woman should not be as economically independent as she is today.

"We can [move forward] by building our own and other's confidence, support each other, and include the trans-movement actively."

- Lena Martinsson

Lena continues our strategies forward. She finds comfort in her research and how it creates a greater understanding of how the far-right movement works. We all have responsibility in challenging their narratives and she stresses the importance of not getting stuck in dwelling on if we are doing things wrong, but to move forward. We can do this by building our own and other's confidence, support each other, and include the trans-movement actively.

Soraya resumes on how we need to come together and become clearer in how we communicate our ideology, that it is based on human rights. She saw what became known as the "Feminist spring", in 2014 in Sweden, where all politicians labeled themselves feminists. The narrative of "state feminism" was then used by the anti-trans and anti-gender movements. Lena explains, for example, a statement that it was the feminist's fault that we did not have proper protective gear during the pandemic and that the "feminist state" had strayed from the "hard questions".

Evin joins the conversation on Zoom. As a current member of the European Parliament, she has witnessed a growing movement of right-wing extremists. They are able to create alliances concerning many issues, such as the question of abortion rights. She focuses on acting against these forces on the European level by supporting legislation, the change won't come by itself. She works within the Equality Act, the newly established LGBTQI Act, and the anti-racist action plan. She was also a part of pushing through a report on Gender-Based Violence, demanding legislation. Witnessing the creation of LGBTQI-free zones in Poland has led to the creation of the motion to make the whole of the EU an LGBTQI-friendly zone.

Evin also witnesses the narrative of women's rights being perceived as a threat. With the anti-gender and anti-trans forces being able to come together across borders, we must also. She also stresses the importance of intersectionality, as she witnesses the arguments that "women's rights have to come first, then we can focus on other issues", but she does not see it like that, the change must happen at the same time.

Finally, we finish on the statements that with more knowledge we can move forward, in coming together on common ground, in our common responsibility for the climate and the peace. For this, we need more resources for the civil society. Another strategy mentioned is to mass-email politicians, in order to put our questions on the agenda. It is an effective strategy, as with enough

emails it can't be ignored. We must go back to the fundament of the feminist movement, not taking academic freedom and the welfare state, for example, for granted.



Photo by Linh-Trang Nguyen of Edmé Dominguez, Maria Johansson, Lena Martinsson, Oliver Jänkhe, Soraya Post

ILGA EUROPE: A TRANS-INCLUSIVE FEMINIST MOVEMENT

Cianán B. Russell

The presentation will concern the division regarding trans-inclusion in feminist movements and women's rights spaces, including the methods they have investigated to address this problem over recent years in their work at ILGA Europe. For this, we must start with the recent history of anti-trans actors in Europe. There are a wide variety of manifestations of anti-trans actors in Europe- they range from arguments about single-sex spaces in the UK, children and their access to transition-related health care in Sweden, and concerning legal gender recognition in Spain, to arguments by individual women's rights- or LGBT-rights activists and organizations, seen in the recent growth in online prevalence of the LGB-alliance, who appears in the context of "protection", supposedly, of lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

These are all manifestations of a broader, concerted effort, one that is not ultimately interested in trans people: Instead, it is much more interested in the anti-democratic, capitalist, authoritarian efforts, as well as protecting the interest of those in oligarchical positions, in order to centralize power and to scapegoat minorities. We see the way these movements manifest in different countries, being highly localized and contextualized. This shows us the functioning of anti-gender and anti-trans movements, and that they are highly adaptive. These movements look for "hot button" issues in local contexts and manipulate those issues in order to sway people further away from a human rights-based lens.

The vast majority of anti-trans arguments are not good-faith arguments, they are posed as questions that are not intended to be answered. There is very little actual engagement in conversation, instead, the purpose of raising the question is to stop, or derail, processes. One of the strategies in dealing with anti-trans actors is to point this out, to come to conversations about the question that is being raised in a solution-oriented frame of mind.

Trans people are frequently positioned as having a biased perspective in the discussions regarding their own human rights. Therefore, it is vital that non-trans actors engage in these discussions from an educated point of view. Non-trans actors need to be able to point to and respond to, misconceptions, to clarify what the real issues are, both in public and private. The insidiousness of the anti-gender and anti-trans movements means that a lot of work that they do affects private perceptions that our family members, our friends, and our colleagues hold. Their target is to sway those people to change their voting, and their engagement with the democratic process, using trans-people as a lever. The only way to protect peace is to engage in those conversations with our friends and family.

Trans people are in a precarious position when engaging in these conversations, as the arguments present us as violent, potential perpetrators, delusional, mentally ill, and don't allow us our humanity. The debate around these questions is very harmful. We have seen the consequences, particularly in the UK in the last couple of years, with the very public anti-trans media narrative, leading to many trans people seeking to leave the UK, and the trans movement is burnt out. This is the reality as trans people are the only ones who speak in favor of their own rights, and that is an exhausting process.

Another strategy involves addressing media narratives, which often exaggerate and misrepresent realities while promoting anti-trans viewpoints. For instance, headlines might falsely claim that clinics treating trans children offer sex change procedures when, in reality, legal restrictions prevent such surgeries for children under 16 or 18 years of age. Transgender children usually receive therapeutic support and potentially reversible hormonal treatments. The media's role in spreading misinformation contributes to a moral panic, driven by an underlying belief that being transgender leads to an unsatisfactory life, devoid of love, employment and success. The experience of many trans individuals contradicts this narrative. Supportive networks and access to necessary medical care lead to happier, more successful lives, post-transition.

There are also misconceptions surrounding the concept of "gender ideology", being that it promotes the rights of trans-people against the right of everyone else. The concept originated from the Vatican's 2018 document "Male and Female He created them" and has been propagated to suggest that this movement seeks to prioritize trans-rights above all else. Those advocating for human rights, including autonomy, bodily integrity, and democracy, aren't operating from an ideology, but rather within a human rights framework. The focus of the trans movement is to ensure equal access to human rights for everyone, not just trans individuals, particularly in areas like legal recognition, healthcare, and employment.

“Those advocating for human rights, including autonomy, bodily integrity, and democracy, aren't operating from an ideology, but rather within a human rights framework.”

- *Cianán B. Russell*

The argument is that “gender ideology” infringes on existing rights. However, the opposition does not engage in affirming rights but rather opposes the rights of transgender people. The LGBT+ Alliance, for example, predominantly targets the rights of trans people, rather than supporting the needs of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. This leads to the next misconception regarding the view that the right of legal gender recognition based on self-determination, would erase women and weaken the fight for equality for women and that concepts, such as “gender identity” and “gender expression” are removing or harming “sex” as a ground for protecting women’s rights. When it, instead, allows accurate categorization within the legal framework. Self-determination promotes bodily autonomy, akin to arguments in pro-abortion and pro-choice movements, where individuals have the right to make decisions about their bodies without state interference.

The trans movement aims to add gender identity and expression to lists of protected grounds, not to remove sex from these lists, in order to address discrimination, violence, and harassment more comprehensively. Individuals, whether cisgender or transgender, possess a gender identity and expression. For instance, one might be a victim of Gender-Based Violence by being perceived as a woman, taking self-identification into account would then improve the accuracy of data on violence against women. Still, there are many arguments against collecting data based on self-identified gender. Filling out national surveys one often marks one's own race, religion, and disability status based on how we perceive ourselves, but this is not yet the reality in regard to gender. In addition, statistical impacts are minimal as the number of people reporting transgender status is 0.8-1.1 percent. Another argument is that men will "abuse women's quotas by pretending to be trans", where Cianán stresses the fact that fraud is still a crime, and the question gets a disproportionately large space in the conversation as there is only one reported case of such an instance.

The next argument by anti-trans actors is that "children are too young to know their gender identity". A cisgender child's gender identity is accepted without question, whereas trans children face resistance. The argument illustrates an underlying bias of the anti-trans movement, which assumes that being trans is inherently negative. This does not need to be the case, with the right support. However, refusing to acknowledge a trans child's pronouns and identity is a form of violence that increases the risk of mental health issues. Research has shown that a single supportive adult can significantly reduce suicidal ideation among trans children.

"Pro-rights movements sometimes make strategic decisions to prioritize certain groups over others, potentially sacrificing the rights of marginalized individuals to gain support for more central or privileged groups /.../ We need to be aware of when and how marginalized groups are sacrificed."

- Cianán B. Russell

The EU's approach to gender equality has led to discussions about whether to focus on equality between women and men or to adopt a more inclusive approach that incorporates all genders. Pro-rights movements sometimes make strategic decisions to prioritize certain groups over others, potentially sacrificing the rights of marginalized individuals to gain support for more central or privileged groups under arguments such as "we might not get a strategy at all if we include the concept of gender". We need to be aware of when and how marginalized groups are sacrificed. We also know that funding flows to anti-trans actors. However, there is an identified gap in the literature, where we require further academic research to explore these connections.

We also see manipulation of the human rights framework, with instances of people talking about "family rights", for example. We therefore need societal education on what actually constitutes human rights. That there would be a "conflict of rights" is a rare situation and a deep misconception and we therefore need longer, nuanced explanations to counteract simplistic slogans. Finally, in countering these arguments it is important to remember that there often is a window between a person being exposed to anti-rights arguments and when they become a lost

cause, emphasizing the importance of engaging with those who are not fully captured by anti-rights narratives, working to change media narratives, and having nuanced conversations. We need to be proactive, even when it means taking individual risks, to know why we hold our position. Ultimately it is a question of humanizing the discussion.



The report "Trans Rights are Human Rights", prepared by GATE, ILGA-Europe, and TGEU, published in July 2021, can be accessed here: <https://www.ilga-europe.org/files/uploads/2022/07/dismantling-misconceptions-about-gender-and-trans-rights.pdf>

IRELAND AND ARGENTINA: MOBILIZATION FOR ABORTION RIGHTS

María Teresa Bosio, Ailbhe Smyth

Maria Teresa Bosio introduces her organization, the Catholic organization for the Right to Decide. They are a group of Catholic women in Argentina and have existed for over 27 years. The fight for abortion rights in Argentina started in 1990 with the autonomous movement of Catholic women and feminists. Maria's organization identifies themselves as Catholic, but dissent from the sexual morality imposed by the Catholic Church and support alternatives to motherhood. They debate the heteronormative notion that families only can consist of a mother and father and support other family constellations.

The strongest component of religions, particularly of the Catholic Church, is patriarchy and all that it entails. For that reason, the group wants to build new ways of thinking, by creating coalitions with other movements, such as the Feminist liberation theological movement, which fights for social justice, the moral validity of decisions regarding a woman's body and her sexuality, and against domestic violence.

This became the framework for the advocacy strategies of the movement, and since 1989, a space for horizontal participation of and for women has been built. Now these meetings are called "Meetings of trans-people, lesbians and women". All these movements have exploded since 2004, where specific public policies that incorporate sexual and non-reproductive rights have been consolidated. This was also a time when the movement became even more consolidated and the green handkerchief as an emblem appeared for the first time.

Over 500 organizations from all over the country participated in the campaign for abortion rights. The campaign was structured under different groups. The first one was the lobbying/political advocacy group. Their mission was to convince the deputies and senators to discuss abortion in spaces of political representation. The second was the articulation group, who drafted the campaign project. The third was the strongest affiliation, and they were formed as a communication group.

One of the first strategies was to build networks and coalition with other movements and organizations, such as "Ni Una Menos!", the women's union movement and the collective of indigenous and peasant women. The idea was to be able to expand the movement to be able to confront the hegemonic apparatus of compulsory maternity. Another strategy was to monitor the state and the media and to occupy the public space by building a green tide.

A network of health professionals was created, as to when the law was approved, there would be access to health services and free clinics that had already been structured during the campaign. Another network of teachers was created to inhabit the debate in schools within the framework of sexual reproduction. Lectures were given at universities to include the subject, especially in careers related to health. Communicators and journalists also made up a network to deliver the narrative for the right to decide in media and social media, spreading the word. Lawyers created an alliance to work on the obstacles in carrying out strategic litigation in sexual and reproductive health, especially before abortion was legalized. There was also a lot of social activism, actresses and writers joined the movement to get abortion out of the closet and into the public space.

The green tide campaign spread to other countries in Latin America; to Chile where the debate for the decriminalization of abortion began, to Mexico where there are some states where abortion is still criminalized, and to Colombia where the court of justice recently decriminalized abortion. The pictures below show one of the heights of the movement in 2018.

On December 31, 2020, after 15 years of campaigning, the law to decriminalize abortion in Argentina was approved. The pandemic did not allow for celebration in the streets, but the results were still very much celebrated! The celebrations spread to all provinces where the mobilization had made the decriminalization possible, and smaller celebrations even took place in provinces with more conservative cultural frameworks. Currently, Argentina has a very progressive legal framework regarding sexual and non-reproductive rights.



Ailbhe Smyth continues the lecture by stating how incredibly important this topic is for us all, in Europe, North America, South America, in the context of an increasingly intensified far-right movement, that targets not just abortion rights but women, and LGBTQI people, in general. Ailbhe has been a campaigner since the late 1970s in the women's- and the LGBTQI movement. The referendum for same-sex marriage in 2015, and all the campaigning before that, opened the ground for the referendum campaign on abortion rights in 2018.

Abortion had been banned in Ireland since 1861. It was then termed a criminal offence punishable by life imprisonment with penal servitude. The criminalization of abortion was a British act when Ireland was still colonized, and it remained prohibited by law until 1983 when a double prohibition occurred by putting a clause into the Constitution which banned abortion constitutionally and in courts. The Eight Amendment, Article 40, section 3, subsection 3 (40.3.3) of the Constitution was inserted to read: "The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right."

The result was stress and suffering for many women, with about 12 women travelling daily to Britain and elsewhere to get an abortion. There were many tragic cases, numerous Irish and international court cases, and condemnations by international bodies. One of the most significant, and the most publicized cases, was that of Savita Halappanavar in 2012. Indian-born Savita Halappanavar, a resident of Ireland, passed away from sepsis after having her request for an abortion denied for legal reasons. Her doctors refused to perform an abortion after she miscarried at 17 weeks, claiming that the legislation prohibited abortion if a fetal heartbeat was present.

Numerous people were outraged by her death, and the case received local and international attention. Following the tragic death of Savita and the circumstances surrounding it, a more intense campaign developed in 2013. A coalition to repeal the 8th Amendment was established, starting with 12 organizations and including over 100 organizations by the time of the referendum. Its primary strategy was to launch massive grassroots campaigns and a cross-sectoral platform for constitutional change.

The coalition's objectives were to establish precise, strategic goals; create a widespread grassroots movement; promote unity of purpose, tone, strategy, and tactics; heave abortion on the political agenda; increase public awareness; develop research and messaging; and ensure feminists' principles and politics.

"The coalitions objectives were to establish precise, strategic goals; create a widespread grassroots movement; promote unity of purpose, tone, strategy, and tactics; heave abortion on the political agenda; increase public awareness; develop research and messaging; and ensure feminists' principles and politics."

- Ailbhe Smyth

The coalition engaged in several peaceful protests, marches, and public meetings around the country, carrying placards with precise messaging such as "Time to repeal the 8th". After that, the Cabinet officially approved the conduct of an abortion referendum in January 2018, which was to take place in the middle of the year. At this point, it became clear that the campaign team needed a more unified front to win. Hence, three organizations formed the "Together For Yes" (TFY) referendum campaign. The three organizations that made up TFY were The National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC), the Abortion Rights Campaign (ARC), and the Coalition to Repeal the 8th Amendment.

The government engaged the coalition in 2018 following numerous discussions, protests, and even a citizen's assembly that unanimously voted to hold a referendum. At last, Ireland recorded a significant victory for reproductive rights in May 2018 with the repeal of the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution, or Article 40.3.3. With a 64.1% turnout, over one million people voted to repeal the Eighth Amendment, while 723,632 people opposed it. The total number of valid ballots on May 25 was over 2 million. With a 66% majority, the repeal was approved.

"Messages were kept precise and straightforward, focusing on abortion as a healthcare need – Care, Compassion, Change"

- Ailbhe Smyth

The importance of messaging, as a campaign strategy was stressed. Throughout the campaign, pro-choice activists' messages were rooted in qualitative research. Their target was not the 20% of the population opposed to abortion; neither did they focus on the 30% favoring abortion. Instead, their target during the campaigns was the 50% in the middle who, according to polls, could go either way. Messages were kept precise and straightforward, focusing on abortion as a healthcare need – "Care, Compassion, Change". The focus was on abortion as a healthcare need for us all, not only for women but for men and everyone who could get pregnant.

A shift in their debates and communication strategy was also instrumental to their success. The subject of abortion was shifted from morality to health needs, from fetal rights to women's rights, from experts to women, and from judgment to compassion. Another strategy that proved to be effective was withdrawn messaging on publicity materials, as opposed to the aggressive posters from the opposition.

Although the war was over, there was still a battle to be fought. An Abortion Working Group (AWG) was established to maintain this victory and oversee the appropriate application of the law. The Abortion Working Group is a collection of civil society organizations and healthcare providers founded in 2019 and led by NWC. The association's goal is to give organizations that are working to guarantee safe access to abortion in Ireland a forum for information exchange and group advocacy. The group will fight to provide a high-quality, all-inclusive abortion care service with safe and adequate access. In essence, the AWG aims to monitor, research and critique the implementation of the abortion law, service, provision and access. AWG and others request significant changes like the abolition of gestational limits, safe access zones, services and refusal

of care clause. The Act permits abortions on demand up to 12 weeks of pregnancy, but only after waiting three days between visiting your doctor and getting the procedure. Hence, because the law is still far from perfect, a governmental review of the legislation is in process.

Since one-third of the population voted against abortion in 2018, the backlash is ongoing, and their opposition is still strong. The anti-abortionists organize demonstrations in opposition to safe access zones outside clinics and medical facilities. Additionally, far-right attacks on social media have become more intense. Still, the government does not seem interested in liberalizing the law. Around 200 women still traveled to the UK for abortions in 2020 because abortion services are still not offered in many medical institutions. Despite the backlash, efforts are still being made to amend the law and provide everyone with equitable access.

In her final analysis, Ailbhe explained how they triumphed. She gave the following reasons for the overwhelming victory:

- Clear goal of the campaign
- Timing, as people vote with their emotions
- Strategic long-term planning (starting from 2013/2014)
- Building coalition, broad-based allies
- Well-researched, evidence-based, moderately toned and conversational messaging
- Reliable, trustworthy messengers – women, doctors and local people
- Shifting the narrative
- Personal stories
- Smart social media
- Brilliant ground campaign
- Fundraising



BELARUS: HOW THE WAR DESTROYED WOMEN'S HOPE FOR PEACEFUL DEMOCRATIC CHANGE AND A MORE EQUAL SOCIETY

Evgenia Ivanova

Evgenia starts by stating that this will be a frank conversation based on her own and her community's experiences. We start with the background of the 2020 presidential elections. What was thought to be an election where there was an alternative to be voted for, changed on the evening of August 8th when the results from the votes were not shared with the public. Many people not understanding what was going on, went to the streets where they were met with brutality and police violence.

Next week, some journalists labeled it "Bloody week", with many people being arrested, beaten, raped and even killed. Many women decided to break the bloody chain, going out to the streets wearing white, with flowers in their hands, and were not met with violence. The next two months would be characterized by an uprising of grassroots organizations organizing weekly and daily peaceful protests. With many men being the first protestors and having been imprisoned or having to flee the country, the leaders of the protests were predominantly women.

Now two years later there are over, thousands of officially recognized prisoners, and hundreds not recognized. They are imprisoned for acts as small as a comment or the wearing of a certain color of clothes. The media and NGO sector is currently not nonexistent in Belarus, with many people having to flee to Poland, Ukraine, and Georgia. All leaders who could have become public figures have fled or been imprisoned.

However, the protests are not dead, they have just moved underground. Many neighborhood communities exist, where the majority is made up of women. Men are also a part and vital in the it-sector where secure chats and other means of communication have been established. The protests are grass-root and peaceful, and the goal is to last long and survive in the current climate.

When Russia attacked Ukraine, the international agenda changed. Belarus was regarded as a co-aggressor. In this scenario, it is important to separate the state from the people, as many people in Belarus have struggled to support Ukraine. A group called the partisans have prevented arms and weapons from going to Ukraine, of which around 30 have been arrested. The war has led to conversations about whether it's possible to become a free and democratic society again in Belarus without arms, a conversation the peaceful community did not want. - "The war is like a black hole, everything it touches it takes with you."

There is a situation of isolation for activists in Belarus and Russia. Double stigmatization is revealed with Ukrainian colleagues refusing to speak Russian, even though they are on the same side,

leading to a fear to speak one's own language. There is also deprivation of those who fled Belarus, with them being refused bank and medical services in the beginning of the war. These new challenges show people's strengths, and that even under such hardships there is the willingness to volunteer to help Ukrainians. There is a feeling that if Ukraine stands, Belarus might too.

It is important to remember that the history of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia is highly intertwined and it's sad to see how these relationships are now being destroyed. There is hope in bringing back a feminist solidarity framework, to build new bridges. Ukraine is currently united on common grounds whereas the people of Belarus and Russia are divided. One might get envious of the unitedness of Ukraine, however, the discourse, also makes it harder to question Ukraine's response. There is hope to be found in the realization that 50 to 100 years ago the situation would be much worse, with Belarus historically having been a battlefield between Russia and Europe. Feminist and humanitarian values make us able to see alternatives to escalating violence. What we as a part of the feminist movement can do is to learn and show our support – "It is important for us that people know".



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING WORDS

We started the final discussion by thanking the people presenting today, expressing how the topics and discussions have been very interesting and inspiring. One participant from Syria could recognize her own experience in many of those conveyed by Evgenia. The fact that we are in a period of Gender Backlash is felt, one participant expressing that it felt like “one step forward, two steps back.”

One participant noted how much ILGA and the Coalition to Repeal the 8th was very good at paying attention to their words and choosing them carefully to communicate effectively in a clear, unified manner. It often feels like the opposition repeats the same things all the time, while our alternative is more complex and nuanced. We nuance, build on, and add to current discussions. As well as many times being afraid to speak on one issue because it might take focus from something else. We need to communicate more effectively, to communicate the reality we want. Maybe not in 10 words, but also not in 3000, maybe something in between.

Our discussion brings us to our current times of increasing militarism and war. We want to bring forward softer values. We see an increased “military masculinity norm” expressed and how the war is resulting in more military spending in Sweden. Where will the money come from? There is a fear that civil society will suffer. Civil society needs more resources, and the politicians need to open to civil society and the experts on these issues. A political representative expressed how it is the NGOs who hold the knowledge.

One participant suggests that the future could include building an intersectional peace movement, where we are able to build alliances and mobilize together so that our “email bombs” to politicians would be impossible to ignore. We need to be outspoken, to engage in conversations. We need to mobilize and work together. One participant expressed their fear of the NATO membership and that we need to “prepare for when it gets worse”. Even if Swedes join NATO, we can still challenge the position.

We conclude that we can challenge the anti-gender, anti-trans and militarist narratives by communicating in a clear, unified manner; by engaging in humanizing conversations; by building alliances; and by building our own and others' confidence for more participation in the movement.



Photo by Linh-Trang Nguyen of GADIPs board and friends of the organization, taken after the conference

Organisers: **GADIP** Gender and Development in Practice

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