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EUROPEAN SOCIAL CHARTER **OF 1961**

Comments from the Latvian LGBT Network and ILGA Europe
on the
8th Report by Latvia on the implementation
of the European Social Charter of 1961
(RAP/Cha/LVA/8(2013))

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European Social Charter

Submission by Mozaika¹, Transgender Europe² and ILGA-Europe³ on the 8th report by Latvia on the implementation of the European Social Charter 1961

Article 11 -- The right to protection of health

- (i) Medical treatment as compulsory requirement for legal gender recognition
- (ii) Access by transgender persons to gender reassignment treatment

1. Introduction

Two of the processes associated with the reassignment of a person's gender are a legal process, in which a person's recorded sex and first name are changed in identity and other documents ("legal gender recognition"), and a medical process, in which the individual's physical characteristics may be brought in line with their preferred gender ("gender reassignment treatment"). Human rights principles require that the two processes should be completely separate and that the extent of the medical process should be determined by the needs and wishes of the individual. It can range from little or no medical intervention, through to extensive gender reassignment surgery.

In many Council of Europe member states these two processes are mixed together, with legal gender recognition being made conditional on a medical diagnosis and medical treatment. While medical treatment is often desired by transgender persons, this is by no means always the case, resulting in a situation where some individuals are faced with the choice of undergoing medical treatment (including in many member states, sterilisation) they do not need or wish, or being unable to obtain legal gender recognition.

Where transgendered persons do wish to undergo medical treatment, they face significant obstacles in obtaining such treatment in many Council of Europe member states. These obstacles fall into three broad categories:

¹ Association of LGBT and their friends Mozaika, established in 2006, is the only NGO in Latvia working with LGBT issues. Mozaika is the member organisation of ILGA-Europe.

² Transgender Europe - TGEU, a not-for-profit umbrella organisation working for the full equality of trans persons in Europe, has 64 member organisations in 36 countries, enjoys participatory status to the [Fundamental Rights Platform](#) and is elected member of the [Platform of European Social NGOs Social Platform](#). TGEU is in the process of applying for participative status at the [Council of Europe](#).

³ ILGA-Europe, the European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, enjoys consultative status at [Economic and Social Council of the United Nations \(ECOSOC\)](#) and participative status at the [Council of Europe](#). ILGA-Europe has more than 391 national and local lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) member organisations in 45 European countries.

- failure of health services to provide necessary treatment, and where it is provided, failure, often, to provide treatment of an acceptable quality
- imposition of arbitrary requirements, including a diagnosis of mental disorder for accessing transgender health care
- failure to cover expenses for medically necessary treatment

The human rights situation of transgender persons in general, and the above questions in particular, have been extensively researched in recent years by the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, and documented in an Issue Paper, *Human Rights and Gender Identity* and a report, *Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Europe*. Relevant extracts regarding the obligation to undergo medical treatment prior to obtaining legal gender recognition are set out in Appendices I and II; those relating to the difficulties faced by transgender persons seeking gender reassignment treatment are set out in Appendices V and VI.

Some key points are as follows:

1.1 Medical treatment as a compulsory requirement for legal gender recognition

Human Rights and Gender Identity notes that conditions for legal gender recognition vary widely across Europe. While a small number of member states require no medical treatment, most require that the individual has followed a medically supervised process of gender reassignment, has been rendered surgically irreversibly infertile, and/or has undergone other medical procedures, such as hormonal treatment. The paper notes that "such requirements clearly run counter to respect for the physical integrity of the person surgery of this type is not always medically possible, available, or affordable without health insurance funding. The treatment may not be in accordance with the wishes and needs of the patient, nor prescribed by his/her medical specialist..... It is of great concern that transgender people appear to be the only group in Europe subject to legally prescribed, state enforced sterilisation."

Discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity in Europe points out that "surgery leading to sterilisation has been identified as a requirement [for legal gender recognition] in 29 member states." It adds that in two other member states, Austria and Germany, the sterilisation requirement has been found unconstitutional, while in four no requirements of sterilisation are enforced. In the remaining 11 states there was either no legislation regulating legal gender recognition, or the situation regarding the sterilisation requirement was unclear.

In 2010 the World Professional Association for Transgender Health issued the following statement:

"No person should have to undergo surgery or accept sterilization as a condition of identity recognition. If a sex marker is required on an identity document, that marker could recognize the person's lived gender, regardless of reproductive capacity. The WPATH Board of Directors urges governments and other authoritative bodies to move to eliminate requirements for identity recognition that require surgical procedures."⁴

On December 19 2012 the Administrative Court of Appeals in Stockholm, Sweden followed the example of courts in Austria and Germany in finding the sterilisation requirement unconstitutional.⁵

1.2 Access by transgender persons to gender reassignment treatment

⁴ <http://www.wpath.org/documents/Identity%20Recognition%20Statement%206-6-10%20on%20letterhead.pdf>

⁵ The text of the ruling is available from ILGA-Europe

In *Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Europe* it is reported that:

(i) in 13 member states no facilities needed for gender reassignment treatments were identified, while even in the 28 member states where some facilities were identified, some countries did not make all necessary treatments available.

(ii) in 16 countries access to health insurance to cover these treatments was "highly problematic", while in some others provision was minimal, or provided only to some transgender persons.

Human Rights and Gender Identity observes that "The results of the problems transgender persons encounter in accessing their right to health care are reflected in health statistics. Several studies referenced in the FRA study show that a quarter to one third of transgender people surveyed had attempted suicide."⁶

2 Medical treatment as compulsory requirement for legal gender recognition

2.1 Specific Council of Europe human rights standards

The Committee of Ministers, in its *Recommendation to member states on measures to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity*, recommended that member states should review prior requirements for legal gender recognition, including changes of a physical nature, in order to remove those which are "abusive". It also recommended that member states should make possible the change of name and gender in official documents in "a quick, transparent and accessible way", a requirement which rules out the lengthy procedures associated with gender reassignment treatment. The Recommendation's Explanatory Memorandum expanded on the above, noting that in some countries access to gender reassignment services is conditional upon procedures such as irreversible sterilisation, hormonal treatment, preliminary surgical procedures etc, and adding that existing requirements should be reviewed in order to remove those which are "disproportionate". Similar considerations applied with respect to prior requirements for legal recognition of a gender reassignment.⁷

While the Committee of Ministers stopped short of recommending an end to sterilisation and other medical treatment as prior requirements for legal recognition, its statement that such requirements were potentially abusive and to be reviewed was a significant step, given that the great majority of member states currently require such procedures.

In 2010 the Parliamentary Assembly called on member states to ensure that transgender persons are able to obtain legal gender recognition "without any prior obligation to undergo sterilisation or other medical procedures such as sex reassignment surgery and hormonal therapy".⁸

The Human Rights Commissioner has likewise called for the abolition of "sterilisation and other compulsory treatment as necessary requirements for the legal recognition of a transgender person's preferred gender."⁹

2.2 The situation in Latvia regarding medical treatment as a compulsory requirement for legal gender recognition

⁶ see Appendix V - extracts from *Human Rights and Gender Identity – Issue Paper* by the Commissioner for Human Rights

⁷ see Appendix III for further details

⁸ see Appendix III for further details

⁹ see Appendix II for further details

A co-author of this report, Mozaika, provides the following information:

Although gender reassignment and legal gender recognition are permitted, there are no laws, regulations or guidelines on how these processes should be conducted. Thus, the procedure for changing legal gender is not determined, the kind of documentation to be presented as proof for change of a person's gender is not specified, there are no published criteria for establishing that a change of gender has taken place legally, and it is not stated which authority shall take a decision to change a person's gender in the birth register.

In practice, civil registrars take the decision to make the relevant changes in the register of births primarily on the basis of a report from the medical institution supervising the gender reassignment process.

It is believed that prior to 2008 sterilisation was generally required. In that year the Supreme Court overruled the refusal of the civil registrars to register the change of gender of a transgender person whose medical report failed to specify that the gender reassignment process had been completed.¹⁰ It is unclear whether the reported failure to complete the gender reassignment process arose because the individual had not been sterilised.

In overruling the civil registrars, the Supreme Court argued that there was no doubt that the individual in question wanted to change gender (biologically and socially), and had carried out actions to ensure that; and that, where an individual faces difficulties or even the impossibility of undergoing complete gender reassignment, that should not restrict their right to belong to the social group to which they felt they belonged.

The Supreme Court's ruling leaves a situation where medical treatment, whether or not involving sterilisation, is still required for legal gender recognition. This was confirmed in a telephone conversation in January 2012 between Mozaika and the Head of the Civil Registers Department of the Ministry of Justice. Mozaika was advised that since the Supreme Court decision of 2008 the relevant authorities evaluate individually each case where the medical report indicates that the gender reassignment process has not been completed. All the information presented (opinions of doctors (psychiatrists, surgeons), person's social behaviour, appearance etc) are evaluated in their entirety, and one specific matter (for example, sterilisation) is not taken as decisive.

In 2009 the Ministry of Justice elaborated amendments to the Civil Status Document Law and Sexual and Reproductive Health Law which set out criteria for legal recognition of gender reassignment and specified the process of gender reassignment respectively. Sterilisation was among the criteria for legal recognition of gender reassignment. However, the amendments to these laws have not been adopted.

It is clear that medical treatment, even if not necessarily involving sterilisation, is still compulsory for legal gender reassignment. Further, that, if the draft legislation were to be adopted, sterilisation would again become compulsory.

The 8th Report by Latvia on the implementation of the European Social Charter makes no reference to this question.

¹⁰ V.L. vs Riga City Council's Riga city Registry Office. For more details of the case, see: *Legal Study on Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation* – Ilvija Puce - Riga, Latvia - February 2008
Latvian Centre for Human Rights - February 2010 – p. 49 – available at:
http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/1361-LGBT-2010_thematic-study_LV.pdf

2.3 The obligations of Contracting Parties

Article 11 of the European Social Charter requires the Parties to take appropriate measures designed "to remove as far as possible the causes of ill-health." Relevant supporting principles established in the case law of the European Committee for Social Rights ("the Committee") are as follows:

- The applicable definition of "health" is that set out in the Constitution of the World Health Organisation: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."
- With regard to the right to the highest possible standard of health: "The health system must be able to respond appropriately to avoidable health risks, that is ones that can be controlled by human action".¹¹

Requiring some individuals to undergo unwanted and unnecessary medical treatment, including possibly sterilisation, as a prior condition for legal gender recognition is in direct conflict with the above. Far from acting to "remove as far as possible the causes of ill health", the state both prejudices the attainment of "complete physical, mental and social well-being" and indeed acts in a manner which puts the health of individuals at risk unnecessarily.

While the Committee has not yet had the opportunity to address this issue specifically, international and comparative human rights standards leave no doubt that it amounts to a serious violation of the right to health. The relevant standards with regard to sterilisation are set out in Appendix IV. They lead to the following general conclusions:

- Full and informed consent is required for any medical intervention. This applies particularly to sterilisation, a point which has been emphasised in the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). But it would apply equally to any other seriously invasive treatment.
- Making legal gender recognition contingent on medical treatment fatally undermines consent, giving rise to what amounts to forced medical treatment.
- Forced medical treatment interferes not only with the right to health, but may also qualify as inhuman and degrading treatment.

3. Access by transgender persons to gender reassignment treatment

3.1 Relevant Council of Europe human rights standards

Appendix VII sets out the relevant Council of Europe human rights standards. In addition to the jurisprudence of the ECtHR, both the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly have made recommendations in this field. The former, in its *Recommendation on measures to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity*, has required that "transgender persons have effective access to appropriate gender reassignment services", and that "any decisions limiting the costs covered by health insurance for gender reassignment procedures should be lawful, objective and proportionate." The Explanatory Memorandum adds that "such coverage should .. be ensured in a reasonable, non-arbitrary and non-discriminatory manner". The Parliamentary

¹¹ FORM for the reports to be submitted in pursuance of the European Social Charter (revised) - adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 26 March 2008 - Article 11 – Scope of the provisions as interpreted by the ECSR; http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monit_slip_a_job_oring/socialcharter/ReportForms/FormRESC2008_en.pdf

Assembly has called on member states to "ensure in legislation and in practice [the right of transgender persons] ... to access gender reassignment treatment....".

3.2 The situation in Latvia regarding access by transgender persons to gender reassignment treatment

The co-author of this report, Mozaika, provides the following information:

So far as medical facilities for gender reassignment treatment are concerned, these are only available through private clinics.

So far as coverage of costs of gender reassignment treatment is concerned, these are not covered at all by public health insurance. However, where an individual incurs such costs in relation to surgery (but not hormone treatment), an income tax refund calculated on the basis of the medical expenses incurred is paid to the individual.

The 8th Report by Latvia on the implementation of the European Social Charter makes no reference to this question.

3.3 The obligations of Contracting Parties

Article 11 of the European Social Charter requires the Parties to take appropriate measures designed "to remove as far as possible the causes of ill-health." Relevant supporting principles established in the case law of the Committee are as follows:

- The applicable definition of "health" is that set out in the Constitution of the World Health Organisation: "Health is a state of **complete physical, mental and social well-being** and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."¹²
- With regard to the right to the **highest possible standard of health**: "The health system must be able to respond appropriately to avoidable health risks, that is ones that can be controlled by human action".¹³
- With regard to the right of **access to health care**: "The health care system must be accessible to everyone... Restrictions on the application of Article 11 may not be interpreted in such a way as to impede disadvantaged groups' exercise of their rights to health. This interpretation is the logical consequence of the non-discrimination provision in Article E of the Charter."¹⁴
- With regard to costs: "The right of access to health care requires that the cost of health care should be borne, at least in part, by the community as a whole."¹⁵ This also requires that the cost of health care must not represent an excessively heavy burden for the individual. Steps must therefore be taken to reduce the financial burden on patients, in particular those from the most disadvantaged sections of the community."¹⁶

The Committee specifically addressed the question of access to health care by transgender persons in its Conclusions on the 2nd report by Malta:

¹² Conclusions 2005, Statement of Interpretation on Article 11§5

¹³ Conclusions XV-2, Denmark, pp. 126-129

¹⁴ Digest of the case law of the European Committee of Social Rights – 1 September 2008. Article 11, right of access to healthcare – page 82

¹⁵ Conclusions I, Statement of Interpretation on Article 11; Conclusions XV-2, Cyprus

¹⁶ Conclusions XVII-2, Portugal

"According to another source, the Maltese authorities do not offer the possibility of hormone therapy or sex change surgery, some health professionals know nothing about the specific health issues faced by transgender persons thus jeopardising the quality of the care provided in this sphere and discrimination has been experienced by transgender people when attempting to access routine health care. The Committee refers to Committee of Ministers Recommendation Rec(2001)12 to member states on "the adaptation of health services to the demand for health care and health care services of people in marginal situations" and asks for the next report to describe the situation as regards access to health care for all people in marginal situations, particularly transgender people."

4. Conclusions

The practice of requiring transgender persons to undergo medical treatment as a condition of legal gender recognition is incompatible with Article 11 of the European Social Charter (see paragraph 2.2 above). Furthermore, it is of concern that proposed legislation in this field would add sterilisation as a condition of legal gender recognition. Accordingly, we respectfully request that the Committee return a finding of non-conformity with Article 11 of the Social Charter.

The failure of the Latvian authorities to provide adequate medical facilities for gender reassignment treatment (or the alternative of such treatment abroad), and to ensure that medical insurance covers, or contributes to the coverage of important elements of such medically necessary treatment, on a non-discriminatory basis, are evidence that Latvia does not meet the requirement to provide effective access to health care for all, without discrimination (see paragraph 3.2 above).

Accordingly, we respectfully request that the Committee return a finding of non-conformity with Article 11 of the Social Charter with regard to effective access to health care.

18 January 2013

Human Rights and Gender Identity - Issue Paper by the Commissioner for Human Rights**Relevant extracts on the imposition of medical procedures, including sterilisation, as a condition for the change of sex and name****Conditions for the change of sex and name**

Access to procedures to change one's sex and one's first name in identity documents is vital for a transgender person to live in accordance with one's preferred gender identity. Indeed, the ability to live in the preferred gender and be legally recognised as such is preconditioned by identity papers that are used to conduct everyday life, for example when using a health insurance card, a driving licence or an educational certificate during a job application process. The often lengthy and bureaucratic processes for the recognition of sex and name change result in the inability to travel with valid documents, even to visit relatives in a neighbouring country for a weekend. It could also lead to restrictions on participation in education or employment wherever birth certificates are necessary or sex is indicated on national identity cards. It can mean that transgender people without the correct documentation are effectively hindered from meaningful participation in the labour market, leading to unemployment.

There is a need to distinguish between procedures for the change of first name and those for the change of sex. However, both processes frequently require that the individual concerned must first be considered eligible for the procedure by the medical profession.

It should be stressed that the eligibility conditions for the change of sex in documents vary widely across Europe. It is possible to roughly distinguish three categories of countries. In the first category, no provision at all is made for official recognition. As pointed out above, this is in clear breach of established jurisprudence of the ECtHR. In the second and smaller category of countries, there is no requirement to undergo hormonal treatment or surgery of any kind in order to obtain official recognition of the preferred gender. Legal gender recognition is possible by bringing evidence of gender dysphoria before a competent authority, such as experts from the Ministry of Health (in Hungary), the Gender Reassignment Panel (in the UK) or a doctor or clinical psychologist. In the third category of countries, comprising most Council of Europe member states, the individual has to demonstrate:

1. that (s)he has followed a medically supervised process of gender reassignment – often restricted to certain state appointed doctors or institutions;
2. that (s)he has been rendered surgically irreversibly infertile (sterilisation), and/or
3. that (s)he has undergone other medical procedures, such as hormonal treatment.

Such requirements clearly run counter to the respect for the physical integrity of the person. To require sterilisation or other surgery as a prerequisite to enjoy legal recognition of one's preferred gender ignores the fact that while such operations are often desired by transgender persons, this is not always the case. Moreover, surgery of this type is not always medically possible, available, or affordable without health insurance funding. The treatment may not be in accordance with the wishes and needs of the patient, nor prescribed by his/her medical specialist. Yet the legal recognition of the person's preferred gender identity is rendered impossible without these treatments, putting the transgender person in a limbo without any apparent exit. It is of great concern that transgender people appear to be the only group in Europe subject to legally prescribed, state-enforced sterilisation.

It needs to be noted that many transgender people, and probably most transsexual persons among them, choose to undergo this treatment, often including the elimination of procreative organs. The treatment is often desired as a basic necessity by this group. However, medical treatment must always be administered in the best interests of the individual and adjusted to her/his specific needs and situation. It is disproportionate for the state to prescribe treatment in a “one size fits all” manner. The basic human rights concern here is to what extent such a strong interference by the state in the private lives of individuals can be justified and whether sterilisation or other medical interventions are required to classify someone as being of the one sex or the other.

Two important national court rulings support this view. On 27 February 2009, the Austrian Administrative High Court ruled that mandatory surgery was not a prerequisite for gender (and name) change. A transgender woman, who underwent all changes apart from the genital surgery and lived as a woman in all social relations, could establish to the court that her particular employment situation would not be conducive to the several months’ sick leave needed for the operation and that she could not leave her family financially uncared for. This led the court to point out that the legislator had to abolish the original requirement since the court was not able to establish any need for this specific requirement pertaining to transsexual women. In Germany, the Federal Supreme Court has indicated in a judgment that “an operative intervention as a precondition for the change of gender is increasingly regarded as problematic or no longer tenable among experts”.

The key point here is that there is no inherent need to enforce one set of specific surgical measures for the classification of an individual to be eligible for changing sex. Similar reasoning lies behind the Spanish Ley de Identidad de Género and the British Gender Recognition Act. Both laws have recognised that the protection of the majority’s assumed unease with the procreation of transgender people – which is, due to hormonal treatment and the wishes of most concerned individuals, extremely rare – does not justify a state’s disregard of their obligation to safeguard every individual’s physical integrity. States which impose intrusive physical procedures on transgender persons effectively undermine their right to found a family.

Regarding conditions to be eligible for the change of first name, there is a similar pattern to some of the procedures for change of gender described above. The process can be easy or require lengthy and/or costly procedures and medical interventions, or it can be denied entirely. In some countries names can only be changed upon medical testimony that the (full) gender reassignment has taken place, including genital surgeries which are not accessible or wished for by persons for a number of different reasons. In other countries such proof is not necessary but instead, or in addition, people need to have a gender dysphoria diagnosis and two years of hormonal treatment to qualify for the name change.

Report of the Human Rights Commissioner *Discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity in Europe*

Extracts addressing the imposition of medical procedures, including sterilisation, as a condition for the change of sex and name

Recommendations

5. Privacy: gender recognition and family life

2) Abolish sterilisation and other compulsory medical treatment which may seriously impair the autonomy, health or well-being of the individual, as necessary requirements for the legal recognition of a transgender person's preferred gender.

Chapter 5 Privacy: gender recognition and family life

Surgery leading to sterilisation as a requirement for legal gender recognition

Some countries require surgery leading to sterilisation before they legally recognise the new gender. It should be stressed that this requirement would also apply in the absence of a medical necessity or the applicant's wish for such surgery. Surgery leading to sterilisation has been identified as a requirement in 29 member states (Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and Ukraine). In two member states, Austria and Germany, the "sterilisation requirement" has been declared unconstitutional by their respective constitutional courts, but no new legislation has been proposed or adopted. In four member states – Hungary (administrative practice), Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom (by law) – no requirements of sterilisation are enforced. In the Russian Federation there is also no legal basis for sterilisation, though some civil registry offices or courts have reportedly required sterilisation in order to recognise the new gender. In the remaining 11 member states there is either no legislation regulating legal gender recognition or the situation regarding the sterilisation requirement is unclear.

Specific Council of Europe human rights standards on sterilisation and other compulsory medical treatment as requirement for legal gender recognition

I. Committee of Ministers

Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on measures to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity¹⁷

20. Prior requirements, including changes of a physical nature, for legal recognition of a gender reassignment, should be regularly reviewed in order to remove abusive requirements.

21. Member states should take appropriate measures to guarantee the full legal recognition of a person's gender reassignment in all areas of life, in particular by making possible the change of name and gender in official documents in a quick, transparent and accessible way; member states should also ensure, where appropriate, the corresponding recognition and changes by non-state actors with respect to key documents, such as educational or work certificates.

35. Member states should take appropriate measures to ensure that transgender persons have effective access to appropriate gender reassignment services, including psychological, endocrinological and surgical expertise in the field of transgender health care, without being subject to unreasonable requirements; no person should be subjected to gender reassignment procedures without his or her consent.

Explanatory Memorandum to the Recommendation

20-21. [...]

As affirmed in Committee of Ministers Recommendation Rec(2007) 17 on gender equality standards and mechanisms, "both women and men must have a non-negotiable right to decide over their own body, including sexual and reproductive matters. Such acknowledgement must be reflected in the development, implementation, access to, monitoring and evaluation of health-care services and in research priorities."

In some countries access to gender reassignment services is conditional upon procedures such as irreversible sterilisation, hormonal treatment, preliminary surgical procedures and sometimes also proof of the person's ability to live for a long period of time in the new gender (the so called "real life experience"). In this respect, existing requirements and procedures should be reviewed in order to remove those requirements which are disproportionate. It should be noted, in particular, that for some persons it may not be possible, for health reasons, to complete every hormonal and/or surgical step required. Similar considerations apply with respect to the legal recognition of a gender reassignment, which can be conditional to a number of procedures and prior requirements, including changes of a physical nature.

35-36 [.....]

¹⁷ Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 31 March 2010 at the 1081st meeting of the Ministers' Deputies

Concerning the conditions governing gender reassignment procedures, international human rights law provides that no one may be subjected to treatment or a medical experiment without his or her consent. Hormonal or surgical treatments as preconditions for legal recognition of a gender change (see §19 above) should therefore be limited to those which are strictly necessary, and with the consent of the person concerned.

II. Parliamentary Assembly

Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity - Resolution 1728 (2010)

16.11. address the specific discrimination and human rights violations faced by transgender persons and, in particular, ensure in legislation and in practice their right to:

16.11.1. [.....]

16.11.2. documents that reflect an individual's preferred gender identity, without any prior obligation to undergo sterilisation or other medical procedures such as sex reassignment surgery and hormonal therapy;

International Human Rights Standards on Forced Sterilisation of Transgender Persons¹⁸

National legislation and/or practice making legal gender recognition contingent on the individual concerned undergoing medical procedures resulting in their sterility are in breach of Article 11 of the Social Charter on the right to the protection of health. Although the Committee has not yet had the opportunity to address this issue specifically, this conclusion may be derived from international and comparative standards on the right to health more generally. In interpreting the provisions of the Social Charter, the Committee takes into account “the principles established in the case-law of other human rights supervisory bodies”¹⁹, and in particular the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights.²⁰ Since the Social Charter is “a living instrument”, it “must be interpreted in light of developments in the national law of member states of the Council of Europe as well as relevant international instruments.”²¹

Forced sterilisation is a blatant breach of the right to bodily integrity and of reproductive rights. UN Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures have repeatedly affirmed that the right to health comprised the right of individuals to retain control and sovereignty over their bodies. For example, the ESCR Committee stated that “[t]he right to health contains both freedoms and entitlements, including the right to control one’s health and body, [...] the right to be free from interference, such as the right to be free from torture, non-consensual medical treatment and experimentation”.²² The right to health also protects an individual’s “sexual and reproductive health”.²³

The prohibition of forced sterilization is firmly entrenched in international law. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights affirmed that the right to health included the “right to be free from [...] forced sterilization.”²⁴ The CEDAW Committee similarly stated that “[c]ompulsory sterilization...adversely affects women's physical and mental health, and infringes the right of women to decide on the number and spacing of their children.”²⁵ In addition to interfering with the

¹⁸ The authors of this submission are indebted to the International Centre for the Legal Protection of Human Rights (INTERIGHTS) for permission to use their research material in the preparation of this Appendix.

¹⁹ See for example Complaint No. 30/2005, *Marangopoulos Foundation for Human Rights (MFHR) v. Greece*, 6 December 2006, at para. 196.

²⁰ For example, the Committee stated that the right to protection of health guaranteed under Article 11 should be read in conjunction with the standards developed under Articles 2 and 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, (Conclusions XVII-2 and Conclusions 2005, Statement of Interpretation on Article 11§5).

²¹ Complaint No. 18/2003, *World Organisation against Torture (OMCT) v. Ireland*, Decision on the merits, 7 December 2004, at para. 63.

²² ESCR Committee, General Comment No 14, E/C.12/2000/4 (2000) at para 8. See also Report of the Special Rapporteur on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *The right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health*, E/CN.4/2003/58 (13 February 2003) at para 24.

²³ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to health, *Right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health*, A/66/254 (3 August 2011), at para 6 accessible at <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/443/58/PDF/N1144358.pdf>; Also see Article 16§1(e) of the CEDAW, which provides that states must protect the individuals’ right to “decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children”. Similarly, the ESCR Committee stated that reproductive health entailed the freedom to “decide if and when to reproduce”, ESCR Committee, General Comment No 14, E/C.2./2000/4, (2000) footnote 12.

²⁴ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and World Health Organisation, *The Right to Health*, Fact Sheet No. 31 (2008) Geneva, available at <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/Factsheet31.pdf>.

²⁵ Comm. on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (“CEDAW”), General Recommendation No.19 *Violence against women*, U.N. Doc. A/47/38 (1993) at 22. See also CEDAW, General Recommendation No. 24, *Women and health*, U.N. Doc. A/54/38 (1999) at 22: “acceptable services are those that are delivered in a way that ensures that a woman gives her fully informed consent, respects her dignity, guarantees her confidentiality and is sensitive to her needs and perspectives.” Human Rights Committee in its Concluding Observations on Slovakia, U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/SVK/CO/3 (2011) at para 13: “While welcoming the investigation into the forced sterilization of Roma women and the adoption of

right to health, forced sterilization may amount to inhuman and degrading treatment.²⁶ Sterilisations performed on various groups including women,²⁷ persons with disabilities,²⁸ and intersex people²⁹ have been condemned on a number of occasions. The International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have also condemned the practice of forced sterilisation,³⁰ as well as the World Medical Association (WMA) and IFHHRO – International Federation of Health and Human Rights Organizations, the latter with specific reference to transgender persons.³¹

Any medical intervention, including sterilisation, requires the full and informed consent of the individual in question. Making legal gender recognition contingent on forced sterilisation fatally undermines consent. The European Court has had the opportunity to rule on the issue of informed consent in a case concerning the sterilisation performed on a Roma woman immediately after giving birth.³² Although the applicant formally consented to the operation, the Court held that consent was invalid. This was because the applicant gave consent during labour, while at the same time she lacked the information necessary to make an informed decision. Echoing this position, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health highlighted the fact that informed consent should not be confused with “mere acceptance of a medical intervention, but a voluntary and sufficiently informed decision, protecting the right to be involved in decision-making”.³³ Best practices and medical literature on the issue of informed consent share the same position.³⁴ An individual should be able to refuse a medical procedure “without losing rights to other medical health or other services or benefits”.³⁵ The European Court of Human Rights has defined the right to refuse medical treatment as a component of an individual’s “inalienable right to self-determination”.³⁶

Act No. 576/2004 Coll. on health care and services, which introduces the notion of informed consent, the Committee is concerned at the narrow focus of the investigation and the lack of information on concrete measures to eliminate forced sterilization, which, allegedly, continues to take place (arts. 7 and 26).”

²⁶ Committee against Torture (“CAT”), Concluding Observations on Czech Republic, CAT/C/CR/32/2 (2004), at para 5(k) regarding the forced sterilization of Roma women. See also CAT, Concluding Observations on Slovakia, CAT/C/SVK/CO/2 (2009) at para 14 as well as the Concluding Observations on Peru, CAT/C/PER/CO/4 (2006) at para 23; European Court of Human Rights, *V.C. v. Slovakia*, Application No 18968/07, Judgment of 8 November 2011 (Violation of article 3, sterilization without valid consent of a woman of Roma origin). See also *María Mamérita Mestanza Chávez v. Peru*, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Case 12.191, Report 71/03, Friendly Settlement Agreement (2003) available at <https://www.cidh.oas.org/annualrep/2003eng/Peru.12191.htm>.

²⁷ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), *A.S. v. Hungary*, Communication No. 4/2004, CEDAW/C/36/D/4/2004, (29 August 2006) available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4fdb288e2.html>; *V.C. v. Slovakia* (2011) *supra* FN8.

²⁸ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on Australia, CRC/C/15/Add268 (2005) at para 46(e). See also, ESC, General Comment No. 5, U.N. Doc E/1995/22 (1995) at para 31 (infringe article 10 (2) of the ICESCR, “Special protection should be accorded to mothers during a reasonable period before and after childbirth.”) and CERD, Sessional/Annual Report of Committee, UN Doc A/59/18(SUPP) (2004) at para 389.

²⁹ Committee against Torture (“CAT”), Concluding Observations on Germany, CAT/C/DEU/CO/5 (2011) at para 20.

³⁰ WHO, *Declaration on the Promotion of Patients’ Rights in Europe*, EUR/ICP/HLE (1994) (informed consent is a prerequisite to medical intervention); FIGO new guidelines on “Female Contraceptive Sterilization”, at para 2 and 6 (2011) available at http://www.stoptortureinhealthcare.org/sites/default/files/figo-sterilization-guidelines_0.pdf.

³¹ World Medical Association and International Federation of Health and Human Rights Organisations, “Global Bodies call for end to Forced Sterilisation” (Media Release, 5 September 2011) available at http://www.wma.net/en/40news/20archives/2011/2011_17/index.html.

³² *V.C. v. Slovakia*, at 118-119 (2011) *supra* FN8.

³³ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to health, *Right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health*, UN Doc A/64/272 (10 August 2009).

³⁴ See FIGO new guidelines on “Female Contraceptive Sterilization”, para 7, available at <http://www.figo.org/files/figo-corp/FIGO%20-%20Female%20contraceptive%20sterilization.pdf> and FIGO Committee, *FIGO Ethical Issues in Obstetrics and Gynaecology for the Study of Ethical Aspects of Human Reproduction and Women’s Health* (2009) on page 14, accessible at <http://www.figo.org/files/figo-corp/Ethical%20Issues%20-%20English.pdf> as well as American Medical Association (AMA) position on informed consent, available at <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/physician-resources/legal-topics/patient-physician-relationship-topics/informed-consent.page>.

³⁵ World Health Organisation (Hatcher, R.A. and others), *The Essentials of Contraceptive Technology*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Population Information

Human Rights and Gender Identity – Issue Paper by the Commissioner for Human Rights³⁷**Relevant extracts on access to health care***3.3 Access to health care*

The right to the highest attainable standard of health is guaranteed by several treaties, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the European Social Charter. However, transgender persons suffer from several problems in achieving this standard. The Transgender EuroStudy sheds an alarming light on the experiences of transgender people in relation to inequality and discrimination in accessing healthcare in Europe.....

The European Court of Human Rights has established as a positive duty that states provide for the possibility of undergoing surgery leading to full gender-reassignment. Depending on an individual transgender person's wishes and needs, the person thus has to have access to hormone treatment, gender reassignment surgery or other medical interventions, such as lasting hair removal and voice training. It is important to recognise that for most people concerned treatment is a medical necessity to make meaningful life possible. Treatment must be adapted to the individual's needs in order to have successful results.

The case law of the European Court of Human Rights clearly requires states not only to provide for the possibility to undergo surgery leading to full gender-reassignment, but also that insurance plans should cover "medically necessary" treatment in general, which gender reassignment surgery is part of. [.....]. This standard should be implemented in all Council of Europe member states. However, the Transgender EuroStudy surveying the healthcare experience of transgender persons in the EU found that 80% of transgender people in the EU are refused state funding for hormone treatments, and 86% of transgender persons in the EU are refused state funding for surgery to change their sex. As a result, over 50% of transgender persons undergoing surgery to change their birth sex pay entirely for the procedures on their own. [.....]

Some countries only allow one clinic in the whole country to provide treatment, sometimes hampering new research and, potentially, the quality of care. The right to access gender reassignment treatment should include a reasonable choice of available treatment centres and treatment expenses should be reimbursed according to the national health care rules. The quality of transgender-related treatment often does not even come close to the 'highest attainable standard of health', sometimes resulting in life-long bodily harm. Many transgender persons who opt for gender reassignment surgery are forced to go abroad, facing great difficulty in reimbursing their expenses. Overall, the situation creates inequalities in access to healthcare within a country and between countries.....

The results of the problems transgender persons encounter in accessing their right to health care are reflected in health statistics. Several studies referenced in the FRA study show that a quarter to one third of transgender people surveyed had attempted suicide. In research carried out in Ireland 26% of transgender persons had attempted suicide at least once and half of the transgender respondents

Program, (1997) at page 9/10-1, available at http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2003/1885960018_eng_part2.pdf

³⁶ European Court of Human Rights, *Pleso v Hungary*, Application No 41242/08, Judgment of 2 October 2012, para 66.

³⁷ <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1476365>

in a large-scale study into the health situation for LGBT people in Sweden had at one point or another in their lives considered taking their own life - 21% had actually tried to do this.

Commissioner for Human Rights report on *Discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity in Europe* - 2nd edition:

Extracts relating to access to health for transgender persons

Recommendations - 6. Access to health care, education and employment

2) Review any requirements of a diagnosis of mental disorder for accessing transgender health care in view of eliminating obstacles to the effective enjoyment, by transgender persons, of the rights to self-determination and the highest attainable standard of health.

4) Make gender reassignment procedures, such as hormone treatment, surgery and psychological support, accessible to transgender persons subject to informed consent and ensure that they are reimbursed by health insurance.

Chapter 6 – access to healthcare, education and employment

Specific obstacles for transgender persons when accessing health services

Transgender persons who wish to undergo gender reassignment treatment can face a range of obstacles when trying to access health services. The European Court of Human Rights has established that states have a positive duty to provide for the possibility to undergo gender reassignment as “medically necessary” treatment, which should be covered by insurance schemes. Failure to provide this places a disproportionate burden on a person “in one of the most intimate areas of private life”, according to a groundbreaking ruling in 2003. The Court restated this in another case in 2007.

Twenty-eight member states offer full or partial gender reassignment treatment to transgender persons (Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Hungary, Greece, Georgia, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom and Ukraine). The differences between these 28 member states are significant, ranging from member states where quality expertise centres are available and those where some but not all necessary treatment is available. In Malta and Ireland, for example, hormonal treatment is available, but no surgery. In yet other member states services are only available in one city.

In 13 member states (Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro and San Marino) no facilities needed for gender reassignment treatments were identified. Transgender persons from these 13 countries wishing to undergo gender reassignment would then have to go abroad (they are explicitly advised to do so in some member states). For the remaining six member states information on availability of health facilities is unclear.

A person who wants to access gender reassignment treatment must usually meet a strict and unified “one size fits all” list of requirements. Such requirements may be based on legislation or regulations, though often this is rather a matter of custom and practice. Generally requirements include medical and psychological assessments of the applicant and/or the diagnosis of gender dysphoria or gender

identity disorder (following the WHO classification). Yet other member states require applicants to undergo a “real-life experience” (RLE) by living in the preferred gender for a specified length of time, which varies by state. Doctors may assess the “success” of such RLE on the basis of the person’s clothing taste and gender-normative behaviour. According to transgender persons, they have to perform in a highly stereotypical way, often going to the extremes in their preferred gender to fit the eligibility criteria. Other requirements include the risk of suicide of the client, absence of “homosexual inclinations”, or vague concepts such as “no serious flaws in the ability for social adaptation”. Concerns have also been raised by transgender persons in relation to medical professionals who have large decision-making powers over their access to treatment.

Financial obstacles to accessing gender reassignment treatment

The European Court of Human Rights has required states to provide insurance to cover expenses for “medically necessary” treatment, which gender reassignment surgery is a part of. However, research for this report shows that access to health care insurance is highly problematic in at least 16 countries (Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Georgia, Lithuania, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia and Turkey). In these countries transgender persons claim that they must bear the financial burden of medically necessary health care themselves.

In the remaining 31 member states, research for this report shows that there is partial or full reimbursement. In Germany, Portugal, Sweden and Italy public health insurance covers most if not all expenses related to a person’s gender reassignment treatment. In Greece, Iceland and Ireland, payment by public health insurance for treatment abroad has been reported, though not confirmed as a general rule. In San Marino, since gender reassignment facilities are not available in the country, transgender persons may have the costs of surgeries performed abroad reimbursed by the national health fund. Hungary’s health insurance cover for gender reassignment treatment is 10% of the total costs. In the Netherlands, not all surgery is covered, and some surgery is covered only partially. Malta covers only hormone treatment. Norway covers costs for some but not all transgender persons, depending on the particular diagnosis of the person. In Switzerland private health insurance companies have in the past refused transgender people. In the judgment *Schlumpf v. Switzerland* the European Court of Human Rights found that the refusal of the insurance company to cover the costs of the applicant’s gender reassignment surgery due to non-compliance with the requirement to complete two years of observation in order to ascertain the existence of “true transsexualism” was in violation of Article 8. In the UK around 86% of transgender respondents claimed that they were refused state funding for surgery and more than 80% claimed they were refused funding for hormone treatment. Over half of transgender respondents said they had funded their own treatment. Coverage of public health insurance is unclear in the countries not mentioned above.

Council of Europe standards – transgender access to health

I. Jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights

In *van Kück v. Germany*, the ECtHR found that the burden on the applicant to prove the medical necessity of gender reassignment and the genuine nature of her transsexualism during court proceedings was unreasonable. The ECtHR held that

- "the very essence of the Convention being respect for human dignity and human freedom, protection is given to the right of transsexuals to personal development and to physical and moral security"
- "the civil court proceedings touched upon the applicant's freedom to define herself as a female person, one of the most basic essentials of self-determination"³⁸

L v. Lithuania involved the case of a transgender person who could not complete full gender-reassignment surgery owing to the absence of legal provisions regulating such surgery. The ECtHR found that the circumstances of the case left "the applicant in a situation of distressing uncertainty *vis-à-vis* his private life and the recognition of his true identity", and that there had been a violation of Article 8. It ruled that if the necessary legal provisions could not be implemented within three months, the State must pay the applicant €40,000 as an alternative, to enable him to have the final stages of the necessary surgery performed abroad.³⁹

II. Committee of Ministers

Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on measures to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity⁴⁰

"35. Member states should take appropriate measures to ensure that transgender persons have effective access to appropriate gender reassignment services, including psychological, endocrinological and surgical expertise in the field of transgender health care, without being subject to unreasonable requirements; no person should be subjected to gender reassignment procedures without his or her consent.

36. Member states should take appropriate legislative and other measures to ensure that any decisions limiting the costs covered by health insurance for gender reassignment procedures should be lawful, objective and proportionate."

Explanatory memorandum to the Recommendation

"35-36. The Court's case-law considers the right to sexual self-determination as one of the aspects of the right to respect for one's private life guaranteed by Article 8 of the Convention and requires Contracting States to provide for the possibility to undergo surgery leading to full gender-reassignment, but also that insurance plans should cover "medically necessary" treatment in general, which gender reassignment surgery may be part of.⁹¹ Where legislation provides for

³⁸ *van Kück v. Germany* (Application no. 35968/07) - paragraphs 47, 73 and 82.

³⁹ *L. v. Lithuania* (Application no. 27527/03) - paragraphs 59 and 74

⁴⁰ Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 31 March 2010 at the 1081st meeting of the Ministers' Deputies

coverage of necessary health care costs by public or private social insurance systems, such coverage should then be ensured in a reasonable, non-arbitrary and non-discriminatory manner,⁹² taking into account also the availability of resources.

Concerning the conditions governing gender reassignment procedures, international human rights law provides that no one may be subjected to treatment or a medical experiment without his or her consent. Hormonal or surgical treatments as preconditions for legal recognition of a gender change (see §19 above) should therefore be limited to those which are strictly necessary, and with the consent of the person concerned. ...”

III Parliamentary Assembly

Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity

Resolution 1728 (2010)¹

“16.11. address the specific discrimination and human rights violations faced by transgender persons and, in particular, ensure in legislation and in practice their right to:

[16.11.1. -2.]

16.11.3. access to gender reassignment treatment and equal treatment in health care areas;”