



EFECW

ECUMENICAL FORUM OF EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN WOMEN
FORUM OECUMENIQUE DE FEMMES CHRETIENNES D'EUROPE
ÖKUMENISCHES FORUM CHRISTLICHER FRAUEN IN EUROPA

NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2025

Dear Sisters

We bring to you the Winter edition of the Forum Newsletter. 2025 has begun as a year of challenges, global, European, national and local. We are faced with climate crises, war, injustice the rise of populism in many of our countries, the 'othering' of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and violence against women and girls. As women of faith, forum members are both impacted by, and engaged with, all these issues. We can sustain each other in our striving for justice and peace, rooted the gospels, and nourished by learning shared through our different traditions.

We have contributions from three of our national forums, The Women's Empowerment Project in Armenia (p.9), reporting from the General Assembly of the German Forum (p.10) and The Greek Forum's work on gender-based violence and child abuse (p.8), demonstrating significant work of our forums at a national level. The issue of gender-based violence runs throughout this newsletter (p.7 & p.13). A global contribution to raising awareness was made by Hannah and Carin leading the first of the WCC prayers for the 16 days of activism (p.5).

In news, Hannah Wehner participated, in the preparatory meeting for a study session to be held by WSCF (World Student Christian Federation) in March in Budapest (p.12), we sent a response to the CEC consultation on the 'Charta Oecumenica' (p.14), and recommendations have been sent to UN Women Youth Engagement on behalf of the young women of EFECW (p.11).

We are grateful for the sharing of our young women's Open Space sessions, where issues and approaches can be found that will have resonance for all of us whatever our age. We are reminded of 'period poverty', a global issue and one that will be present in all our countries, I don't remember this being ever discussed in a church setting, despite Jesus' awareness of women bleeding (Mark 5: 24-34). At a time when women' reproductive rights are being eroded we need have open conversations about this, remembering that churches take different positions and women's voices are often left out of any debates.

Anthea Sully, EFECW CC member

Photo: Maria Koutatzi, (Sofia, Bulgaria, January 2025)

YOUNG WOMEN OPEN SPACE DISCUSSION

“Contraception and STDs”

October 2024

Our Open Space Session in October featured the topic Contraception. Another of Jelena’s and Hannah’s Ice Breakers focussing on places we perceive as safe or unsafe got us started and then we listened to the presentation.

Contraception is an integral part when it comes to sexual education, reproductive health and reproductive rights. To make it clear in advance: In terms of contraception, it is crucial to speak to specialists in order to make safe and informed choices. Therefore, the presentation ran us over the most important information concerning the goals and methods of contraception.



Photo: slide from PPT created by Hannah Wehner

To understand different methods of Contraception one has to consider how the menstrual or fertility cycle works, at which times one can conceive and how the cycle then is – or is not – affected through contraceptive methods. In our later discussion we were quickly focussing on the mysteries, myths and facts as well as our experiences as menstruating persons and decided to dedicate our next session to this topic!



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There is more than one reason to use contraception. The first is to prevent unwanted pregnancies. Another very important reason is prevention of infection with sexually transmitted diseases/infections (STIs/STDs).

In general – and sadly – there are far more methods for women than for men. One needs to differentiate between hormonal and non-hormonal methods as well as methods that need to be actively remembered every time and others that require attention more seldomly (for prevention of pregnancy only!). Many are commonly known: pill, condom, IUD, implant, diaphragm, to name a few.

To prevent sexually transmitted diseases contraception mainly in form of condoms is important during every sexual encounter, no matter which gender the persons involved have or whether other contraception methods (i.e. pill) are in use. The presentation closed with an overview over the most common infections and their typical symptoms (pain, unusual discharge or bleeding and others) which should alarm us as urgent treatment is crucial.



Photo: [World Health Organisation - Sexual health is much more than physical.](#)

The discussion after the presentation was as always very lively. We shared not only on the topic of menstruation but also our concerns about further restrictions on reproductive rights that are threatened by many right-wing parties throughout Europe.

Hannah Kehrein



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“Menstruation”

26 January 2025



„A simple act of revolution is to learn about your body, to get to know the terrain of your cycle, and to take charge of your own health. (...) Our bodies have long been weaponised against us and used to keep us out of positions of influence and power, but the red tide is turning and it’s time for us to take advantage of what our hormones can do for us.“ (Maisie Hill, *Period Power: Harnessing the Power of the Menstrual Cycle*, p. 8).

Gathered as always around very attractive topics, this January 26 we discussed the challenges we face during menstrual period. As we know menstruation is very often considered unpleasant, therefore it is important to talk about it openly and often. What is a constant concern for all of us globally is that menstruation is stigmatized all over the world regardless of the fact that menstruation is a completely normal and healthy part of women’s lives. At the very beginning of the session, we talked about New Year’s resolutions, which were very brave and inspiring on the part of participants. After that we analyzed interesting thoughts about menstruation such as: „All females deserve menstrual well – being, and that includes knowledge and reassurance about her body from the earliest possible age.“ – Nikki Tajiri

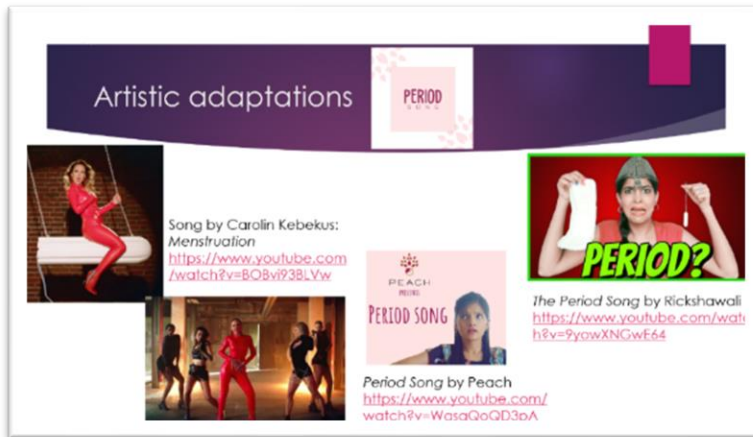


Photo: slide from PPT created by Hannah Wehner

After that we discussed the menstrual cycle, period tracking and period products, toxic shock syndrome, menstrual hygiene, PMS & cramps. Since the beginning of time, women have had to find ways to manage their periods. The changing journey of period products and menstrual products is a testament to human ingenuity and evolving attitudes towards menstruation.

Our discussion about menstruation as our superpower in relation with artistic adaptations were very fruitful at the very end of our virtual meeting. It is simply interesting to think about that nobody teaches us that our body has a secret internal clock which guides us every month. That clock influences our emotions, our energy and our productivity. In our moments to turn to ourselves and devote ourselves to our bodies is our biggest feminine superpower.

For you who are reading this text, and who are loved and accepted, please remember that: *menstruation is a time of renewal and regeneration, a time to rest and recharge*. Therefore, bravely welcome your upcoming period and be aware of the beauty and sensitivity of your female body.

Jelena Ljubenović, EFECW CC member



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REFLECTIONS

Women and Poverty

25 November 2024, EFECW morning prayer

In the context of the international campaign “16 Days of Activism to end violence against women”, Hannah Wehner and Carin Gardbring, prepared the morning prayer of Day 1 on behalf of EFECW and shared the following reflection on the theme of “Women and Poverty” after the Bible reading from Mark 5:24-34.

Jesus was in a hurry on his way through a crowd of people to the synagogue leader Jairus’ house.

In the crowd is a marginalised, sick, poor, woman without a name. She had been bleeding for twelve years. Impure and invisible in the society she had spent all what she had to be healed. We don’t know much about her. She had heard about Jesus and decides to approach Jesus with the conviction that she would be healed. She, an anonymous stranger doesn’t dare to raise her voice in the crowd. But she touched his cloak and was immediately healed. In that moment she is no longer anonymous. Jesus felt that someone had touched him and asked who? The disciples rejected her, but Jesus kept looking around. The woman knew what she had done and what had happened. She had the courage to tell Jesus the truth. Instead of asking her why, he only said *Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.*



What does this meeting with the woman mean to us and how Jesus met her? We can only receive the gospel in relation to the crises and problems of our time. Our faith in the future concerns our own common future.

This is how Jesus would have acted in his time. He took an interest in people he met and the lives they lived. He interpreted his faith and the tradition so it could promote life right then and there. He met the woman, confirmed her as a person and liberated her.

We can define poverty in different ways: lack of money, lack of material, lack of opportunities and power to take own decisions, lack of affection and respect etc. The woman we meet in the text was poor,



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marginalised, and outcast in her society. She had the courage and took the decision to touch Jesus. Even though her sickness had made her an outcast, she didn't let it define her. In faith she took her fate in her own hands and acted. And Jesus received her, called her daughter, an expression of affection and respect. This is how the love of God works: it includes all, but to be universal, he must devote more care to the poor.

According to the UN, one out of ten women in the world live in extreme poverty. Extreme poverty is living below 2.15 USD (per day & per person.)

The number of women and girls living in conflict areas has doubled since 2017 and amounts to 614 million. They are almost eight times more likely than men to live in poverty.

By 2030, 236 million women are estimated to be living in hunger due to climate change; i.e. twice the number of men.

Women have chronically less power and less opportunities available to them than men.



Access to appropriate health care and hygienic products is still a lack for many women worldwide and period poverty a serious issue. If men were to bleed, resources would be invested to solve the issue on a large scale.

Jesus demands action. It is only through action that the heart has truly spoken. It is the love of one's neighbour that shows how much you love God. And your neighbour is everyone who needs you now.

The poor- marginalised, voiceless, disadvantaged members of our society- will always be among us. "You always have the poor with you" (John 12:8) This means that we have an obligation to be in solidarity with the poor and provoke change through clear actions. We all have the choice to make a difference every day and work towards the creation of more just communities.

Carin Gardbring, EFECW Co-President and Hannah Wehner, EFECW CC member



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WOMEN IN FAITH

St. Laura Vicuña¹

A victim of domestic abuse



Laura was born in Santiago, Chile, in 1891. Her father was a soldier. When civil war broke out, her father took Laura and her mother to another town across the mountains in Argentina so that they would be safe. Laura's father died when she was only two years old.

Laura's mother, Mercedes, had to find some way to support Laura and her new baby sister. After working as a cook for several years, she met a wealthy ranch owner named Manuel Mora. Mora promised Mercedes that if she came to live with him, he would send Laura to a boarding school taught by nuns. Mora did not promise to marry Laura's mother.

Laura loved school. She was smart and did well. She loved learning about her faith and spent a great deal of time in prayer. On the day of her First Communion, she wrote, "Oh, my God, I want to love and serve you all my life" in her notebook. Some of her classmates shunned her for her piety.

But her happiness at school turned to worry when she returned home for a visit. Her mother and Mora were living as a married couple. Laura knew that this was a sin. She prayed that her mother would leave Mora and begin to live God's Commandments again.

Mora stopped paying for her education, but given a scholarship, Laura returned to school. She told a priest that she wanted permission to join the convent. Although the priest believed the girl had a true calling from God, he told her that she was too young and would have to wait until she was older to make such an important decision.

As Laura grew older, Mora turned his attention from Mercedes to her. Laura refused his advances and angered, Mora beat her badly in 1904. Weakened from the beating and already in frail health, she died just a week later at the age of 13. Seemingly in answer to Laura's prayer to God, her mother returned to the Church when her daughter died.

On 3rd September 1988, Laura del Carmen Vicuña Pino was beatified by Pope John Paul II. Her feast day is January 22.

Marianna Apresyan, EFECW Co-President

Photo: [Unknown author](#)

¹ <http://www.saintsresource.com/laura-vicuna>



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NEWS FROM THE MEMBERS

Gender violence and child abuse

“Damaris the Athenian”, Ecumenical of Christian Women in Greece

The Greek forum "Damaris the Athenian" decided to work on gender violence and child abuse, about three years ago. Up to this date, two international conferences have been organised, in the first of which Hannah Wehner (EFECW CC member) and Eleonora Papaleontiou-Louca (member of EFECW of Cyprus) took part, on the topic of domestic violence and child abuse.

We believe that society today experiences situations of violence that are inevitably transferred to families, to school and in general to the environments that children and teenagers live in every day, which results to increasing incidents of abuse of children by adults and by their peers. We consider this phenomenon, which tends to reach pandemic proportions in Greece, to be a disgrace to a privileged state that respects human rights and Christian values, so that is why, as Christian women and mothers, we took action to prevent and deal with this serious scourge.

Thus, in parallel with the conferences, we organised experiential workshops with psychologists, teachers, theatre teachers, representatives of the Greek Police, for high school children, attended by more than 600 children from many schools of Athens and the countryside. A repetition of these workshops for schools that did not manage to register for participation, has already been planned for January 2025 as well as the organisation of a student festival for elementary, middle and high school students which will take place in the spring of 2025.

Our valuable partners, by virtue of the signed memorandum of cooperation, are on one hand the General Secretariat of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Education and on the other hand the Initiative for the Prevention of Domestic Violence of the Holy Archdiocese of Athens.

The Greek Forum asks for the support and prayers of the members of the EFECW Coordinating Committee (CC) as well as all our sisters from all the local Forums.

Photos and Text: The Board of Damaris





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“Improve yourself - improve the world”

Women’s Empowerment Project, Armenia

The Armenian Forum implements a women’s empowerment project dedicated to the empowerment of young women living in the border provinces of Armenia. As part of our previous work experience with different social and aged groups of women in different regions of Armenia, we found out that the majority of women are not well-informed and lack the education and basic skills.



The project activities are organised on three pillars: social, educational, and psychological. It includes raising awareness about human rights and in specifically, focussing on the fact that women are not biologically the same as men but they have the same and equal rights with men, and they deserve equal chances to develop themselves and strive for a better future.

The project aims in creating a safe and special space and presenting entrepreneurship opportunities for women through personal growth and professional skills development, for example, basic knowledge to write a business plan or do simple bookkeeping. To raise the self-esteem and self-confidence of women in Armenia to become more successful in their personal lives and professional careers.

The project will promote leadership trainings, English language learning, and professional development.

Text and photo: Marianna Apresyan, EFECW Co-President



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General Assembly of ÖFCFE²

25-26 October 2024, Erfurt, Germany

In October 2024, the General Assembly of the German Forum (ÖFCFE) took place. Individual members as well as association members came together in Erfurt to hold their annual meeting that was prepared already one day in advance by the German Coordinating Committee as well as Gabi and myself from the European Coordinating Committee. Gabi and I presented the European level by providing an insight into the Forum's history, the organisational structures, the Young Women's Strategy with the Open Space discussions and the podcast #femalevoices, and the European newsletters and website. The interest in the room was high and we answered questions especially about the young women and their activities.

Further programme points were the World Café to develop and discuss future ideas and potential activities as well as the standard procedures of elections and other requirements for associations. We also had time for joyful get togethers in the evening that were marked by laughter and funny stories. The assembly finished with a service and the taking of a group picture.



Photo: slide from PPT created by Hannah Wehner



Photo: Gerhard Stimmeder-Kienesberger

My wishes for the German Forum are a positive continuation of their work in a respectful and supportive environment as well as the achievement of the set goals and ambitions.

Hannah Wehner,
EFECW CC member

² More info here: <https://www.oekumeneforum.de/aktuelles/mitgliederversammlungen/>



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NEWS FROM INTERNATIONAL & ECUMENICAL PARTNERS

Beijing +30

Global Youth and Adolescents Recommendations

On behalf of the young women of EFECW, I submitted concrete recommendations and political agendas to UN Women Youth Engagement. Over 16000 voices worldwide contributed to the final outcome which covers aspects as fighting poverty, achieving universal access to education and health care, championing human rights, and centring meaningful youth leadership among many other aspects. The full list of recommendations can be viewed here: [Beijing+30 Global Youth and Adolescents Recommendations](#). A summary is available here: [Beijing+30 Global Youth and Adolescents Priorities Document](#).



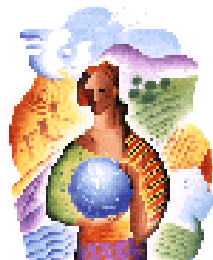
The 30 recommendations were put together with the aim to have an impact at the 69th session ([CSW69](#)) on the [Commission on the Status of Women](#) that will take place at the UN Headquarters in New York from 10 to 21 March 2025.

In 2025, the global community will mark the thirtieth anniversary of the [Fourth World Conference on Women](#) and adoption of the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action \(1995\)](#).

I am delighted that we were given the opportunity to support the initiative and contribute to it. My hope is that the recommendations will have real impact.

Hannah Wehner, EFECW CC member

*UN Women: Logo Fourth
World Conference on Women*





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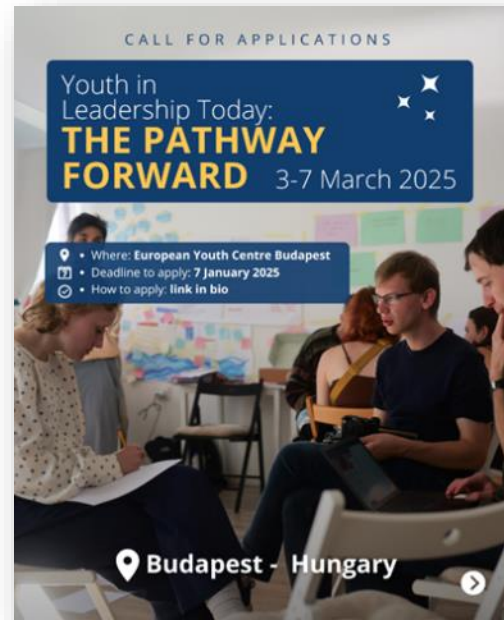
“Youth in Leadership Today: The Pathway Forward”

Preparatory meeting, 23-24 January 2025, Budapest

As part of the preparatory team for a study session held by WSCF (World Student Christian Federation) in March at the European Youth Centre in Budapest, I had the opportunity to participate in the preparatory meeting 23-24 January 2025 in Budapest.

The study session will be held 3-7 March 2025 to the topic ‘Youth in Leadership Today: The Pathway Forward’. Study sessions are held regularly at the European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest as part of the Council of Europe youth programme. Hence, the Youth Department of the Council of Europe provides organisational, educational, and financial support to International Youth NGOs

EFECW will hold a study session under the title ‘Faith in Action: Addressing Climate Change and Strengthening Democracy Through Christian Youth Movements’ from 1-5 September 2025 in cooperation with EYCE (Ecumenical



Youth Council in Europe). With our own study session coming up, it was a great occasion for me to already familiarise myself with the procedures involved in holding a study session. I am also very grateful for the opportunity to expand our collaboration with other youth organisations and to get to know wonderful team members with whom I shared very effective and satisfactory working days in Budapest.

In this sense, I look strongly forward to the study sessions to come.

Hannah Wehner, EFECW CC member

Poster & Photo: WSCF



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Signs of Hope Campaign Dublin Rape Crisis Centre



Billboard Campaign, photo credit: Hannah

Dublin Rape Crisis Centre •
21. Oktober 2024 •

When you're ready to talk, we're ready to listen.

Blathnaid and Hannah spoke to Kitty Holland last week, discussing their messages of hope to survivors of sexual violence. The 'Signs of Hope' written by eight survivors encourage those who have not reached out for support to call the National 24-hour Helpline.

If you are thinking about calling, know that you will be heard and believed ❤️

You can read all the messages at www.drcc.ie/signsofhope

National Helpline 1800 77 8888
webchat available at drcc.ie

Read the full article: <http://www.irishtimes.com/.../dublin-rape-crisis-centre.../>

THE IRISH TIMES
Dublin Rape Crisis Centre launches billboard campaign to raise awareness
Signs of Hope campaign contains messages from eight survivors who have benefited from the centre's services

After waiving her anonymity, Ms Raleigh said many people reached out to her on social media to share their experiences.

"During and after the trial of the man who raped me, I was struck by the number of people who contacted me to share what had happened to them. Many of them said that they didn't feel they could speak to friends or family and this really resonated with me because for a while during my own journey I wasn't able to talk to about what was happening," she added. "It can be a very lonely place and it can feel like you have to carry so much on your own."

Hannah (28), endured child sex abuse and marital rape. It was only when she could not bear the pain she carried any longer that she contacted the DRCC last year. "I did not fully recognise what had happened to me was abuse. I did not know what consent was.

"But with support I learned to recognise what my own experiences were, and even more and to name them. I learned to be in tune with my body and reconnect with it, to be able to recognise and name emotions and regulate them."

When you're ready to talk,
we're ready to listen
National 24 Hour Helpline
1800 77 8888
drcc.ie/signsofhope

Screenshots of Post of Dublin Rape Crisis Centre on Facebook

The Dublin Rape Crisis Centre ran a campaign www.drcc.ie/signsofhope in collaboration with the advertising company Publicis Dublin to encourage sexual violence survivors to come forward and seek support. The campaign focused on statements of sexual violence survivors that shared their messages of strength, hope, and support. A billboard campaign, a broad social media presence, a diverse media coverage including print and online media, TV interviews, and radio advertisements, as well as video messages were realised and released over several weeks between October and December 2024.

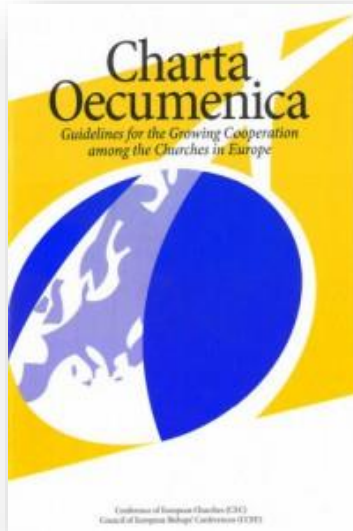
Hannah Wehner,
EFECW CC member



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Launch of the revised Charta Oecumenica



The revised and decided document will be presented on April 26 and 27, 2025 in Vilnius, Lithuania.

EFECW through the Coordination Committee sent its contribution of observations and suggestions to the consultation process just before Christmas in December 2024. Thank you all for your suggestions and recommendations!

The Charta Oecumenica is guidelines for the growing cooperation among churches in Europe, published in April 2001 in Strasbourg by the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Catholic Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE).

In 2022 CEC and CCEE decided to revise the document and a joint CEC-CCEE Working Group has since then been working on updating the document. In 2024 the working group presented the first draft and opened a consultation process that was closed on December 31, 2024.

For more info, visit <https://ceceurope.org/events/launch-of-the-revised-charta-oecumenica>

Carin Gardbring, EFECW Co-President

Please support:

The **Ruth-Epting Fund** (www.efecw.net) - which is essential for supporting financially the participation of women in EFECW events!

and **The Fellowship of the Least Coin** (<http://www.flc.net.ph>)

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