

NEWS MAVENS

WOMEN CHOOSE THE NEWS

Roadmap to women's rights in Europe -- by NewsMavens



After two years of exploring the news from the perspective of women journalists across Europe, the NewsMavens experiment is finished. We set out to discover what would happen to the news narrative if only women choose the news [[read our findings here](#)], and to take the temperature of sexism in European media [[read insights from #Fem-facts here](#)]. We close the project now with an overview of women's rights in Europe.

Below is our subjective, editorial assessment of the challenges, champions and stories that are shaping women's lives in every European* country, created by the remarkable team of journalists, fact checkers and editors who have banded together under the NewsMavens brand since 2017 [[read quotes about the project from our team here](#)]. We hope this parting gift will prove a useful resource for equality-sensitive journalists, activists, researchers and concerned citizens.

*The 36 countries in the Roadmap were not selected according to any geopolitical definition of Europe, but rather as the organic result of our existing partnerships. For more information on feminist organizations in Europe, please consult our extended list [here](#).

Editor's note

The most striking difference between women's rights and men's rights is that the first is up for constant renegotiation and the second is not. Whether you are conservative or progressive, men's place at the top of the power pyramid is simply never up for debate. It may be one of the few truly common grounds between people of opposing worldviews. Even fascists are in agreement on this.

Regardless of which party wins the elections in European countries, men's access to vital health care, their right to be safe from abuse, to fair pay and access to business, political and academic opportunities remain unchanged. Not so for women, whose fates are tied to the volatile shifts of politics.

In the roadmap below, the backpedaling of women's rights is clearly in evidence everywhere the Catholic Church has greater sway, and where the political tide has taken a decided turn to the right or veered away from liberal democracy. Though this is clearly a Central and Eastern European phenomena, countries like Italy and the Netherlands are also struggling to keep political changes from yanking rights away from women.

Most worrying, however, is that violence against women is on the rise in every corner of Europe, from Finland to Greece, and Serbia to Switzerland. There is no common political axis or level of economic development among the countries where femicide, rape, and domestic violence top the list of most pressing women's concerns.

What could be the source of this increasing threat to women's life and safety in the Europe of 2019?

As a pan-European trend, it must be something more than local culture and history. Perhaps the fickleness of the emancipation dance itself is to blame. If the right to abortion, for example, can be the object of a constant political tug of war -- alternatively prohibited, allowed, amended with exceptions, and re-negotiated in referendums -- than the issue is never truly decided.

Even in places where the laws on abortion don't change, citizens are aware that in neighboring countries the debate rages on and shifts with surprising frequency. Which makes women's position in society tentative, and grants the opinions of individuals about our roles and responsibilities much more weight. After all, if enough like-minded citizens rally in the next election, their opinion about women might just become law.

It is my firm conviction that this will continue to be the case as long as women are not equally represented in European power structures. All of them.

How do women join men at the top of power structures?

As I look back on what we have learned from NewsMavens in the past two years, a few insights stand out. One is that women pay attention to women and other marginalized groups [more], which means that when women rise, they take their families and communities and other disempowered with them [more]. Another is that protesting in the streets is an important signal to send to power, but it is not the same as having power ourselves [more]. And a third is that giving women moral support is simply not enough [more]. To get past the networked, systemic roadblocks, to get access to power and remain safe and strong enough to retain it we need brains, friends in high places, access to money and strength in numbers.

Thus far the women's movement has been about protecting women from harm, allowing us to better ourselves, and to participate fully in our democracies and economies. Today, perhaps it's time we shift focus to gaining and retaining power. Whether it's money or politics, power is the inner circle that women have infiltrated least in our efforts to balance the gender scales. This is also a source of instability in feminism's progress.

As the political pendulum swings right and Brexit draws near, the future of the European Union is unclear. Above our regional problems, there is also the blanket digital disruption that has upset the balance of power in place since WWII by displacing much money and influence to giant tech companies. The current political order clearly needs a redesign to include technology within a democratic framework and strengthen European integrity. Looking ahead at the emerging future, I see this moment as an opportunity for women to reach in, lead the change and secure the equality that neither empires, nor dictatorships nor communism nor, in the end, democracy has ever fully given us.

One of the key ways we can make this happen is by strengthening our networks and scaling our best practices. NewsMavens has shown that there is an international audience interested and eager to engage with women's issues. It is our sincere hope that bold initiatives and far reaching ideas evolve quickly to tap into this potential, to the benefit of gender balance across Europe.

Thank you for being with us.

Zuzanna Ziomecka, NewsMavens founder and editor in chief

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Albania

Lidija Pisker

Biggest women's rights story?

More than 59 percent of Albanian women have experienced some form of domestic violence in their lifetime, according to a 2013 UNDP survey. Experts warn that gender-based violence in Albania is rooted in traditional and cultural norms such as strong patriarchal customs and strict gender roles.

But what is even more common -- and even more dangerous -- is the normalization of violence against women. The media tends to label murders of women as "crimes of passion," encouraging the public to justify those crimes by blaming the victims.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

Women constitute approximately half of the total population of Albania, but only 28 percent of Albanian parliamentary seats are held by women and only 22.6 percent of women hold managerial positions according to a recent OSCE study. Despite legislative reforms for ensuring gender equality, there are still numerous barriers to women's political participation, including the dominant patriarchal culture.

In one of the UN's studies on political participation of women in Albania, the majority of interviewees noted that women were under-represented in politics and decision-making because of a political environment dominated by aggressive men.

Outstanding feminist voices?

Ermira Danaj is a prominent Albanian feminist who published numerous research papers on gender issues in Albania. In her article "I am not a feminist but...", Danaj examined women's activism in Albania after the fall of the communist regime, arguing that women withdrew from public life with the change of the system thus the process of "installing democracy" was dominated by male forces.

She has recently published a new paper which discusses the experiences of Albanian women migrating to Italy and Greece, including how the mobility of women challenges or reinforces gender equality.

Related NewsMavens content: www.newsmavens.com/topics/albania

Austria

Daria Sukharchuk

Biggest women's rights story?

For an outsider, Austria can seem similar to Germany, “but a Germany where more things went wrong”. This is not necessarily the case with women's rights. On one hand the country does share much with Germany. For many years, it was ruled by a “grand coalition” of conservatives and social democrats. But on the other, many of its laws are more progressive: for example, while Germany never really overturned the abortion ban, and still puts additional hurdles in women's way, like a mandatory conversation with an external consultant, Austria has legalized abortions decades ago. And now women want to go a step further and make sure that all abortions are covered by medical insurance, which is not the case at the moment. The gender pay gap is on the same level as in Germany, and is higher than the EU average.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

Currently, many observers are worried about how much of an impact the continued popularity (and rule) of the far-right Austrian Freedom Party will have on gender equality in Austria. Even after the ruling coalition collapsed at the end of May 2019, it is likely that the biggest winner in the September snap election will be the conservative party, whose leader, the recently ousted chancellor Sebastian Kurz, is still fairly popular, and has clearly demonstrated his far-right leaning, including when it comes to issues affecting women. It is also telling that the current cabinet minister for women, youth and families, has said that she wouldn't sign last year's viral equal rights petition, since it “goes too far”. The current government didn't only oppose that petition, it also cut financial support for feminist organizations. In 2018 and 2019, those cuts amounted to 179,000 and 230,000 euros respectively.

Outstanding feminist voices?

The leftist-feminist art collective Hysteria mocks the structure and traditions of male fraternities, and made headlines in 2018 for its “burial” of patriarchy. Blogger and “fat acceptance” activist Magda Albrecht is an outspoken campaigner against society's unfair expectations of women's bodies. Nils Pickert, columnist of the feminist site dieStandard.com and editor-in-chief of the feminist portal Pinkstinks, urges Austrian men to be more committed to the feminist cause.

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Biggest women's rights story?

Abortion has been a hot topic in Belgium since the first legislative steps towards legalization were taken at the beginning of the nineties. The first law decriminalizing the procedure in some circumstances even led to a one-day abdication from then-king Baudouin, whose Catholic faith prevented him from giving royal approval to the change. He stepped down while the law was passed, and then resumed the throne the following day. In July 2018, Belgium took a major step forward -- abortion will no longer be considered a crime. The Belgian majority parties signed a compromise about removing the subject from the penal code and treating it as a woman's right. The step is important to tackle the taboo that still exists about abortion, however it has been criticized. Conservatives can't approve of abortion being considered as a 'right', while progressive voices denounce the fact that it's still punishable if the conditions are not fulfilled.

The second story that dominated the news in the last years is the battle against sexual harassment and sexual violence. As with many other countries, Belgium also had a wave of #MeToo stories coming out in 2017 and 2018.

Another discussion was prompted by the brutal murder of young student Julie Van Espen (23) when the perpetrator turned out to be a serial rapist who was on conditional release from prison. The story revealed a need to rethink (and strengthen) punishment and treatment for sexual violence

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

Attention to gender equality has grown enormously over the last years but there is still a lot of work to do. Belgium's ranking on the 'Global Gender Gap Index' does not climb due to the persisting 'glass ceiling' and 'sticky floor' phenomena. The number of women in leadership positions, both in business and politics, is still deplorable. Business-wise, Belgium is a slow learner: in 6 of the 20 biggest companies there's no 'womanager' at all. Also, Belgium has never had a female Prime Minister, and women in politics remain underrepresented. Overall, ambitious women are still frowned upon.

The pay gap still exists, and one of its consequences is a significant pension gap. On average, retired women receive a third less than retired men in Belgium. There are also smaller obstacles, old habits like the depiction of traditional gender roles in publicity, children's toys and so on. Female sport is also infinitely less popular than male sport. In Belgium, soccer and cycling are extremely popular but female games and races are hardly broadcast.

Outstanding feminist voices?

Over the past few years Caroline Pauwels, the rector of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) has become an intelligent and reasonable thought leader about female (and human) rights, diversity, language etc... She introduced the slogan 'Speak Freely, Listen Respectfully, Different Opinions Matter' and makes her university an interesting laboratory of innovation in many ways. At VUB, she introduced a quota system that will require one in three professors to be a woman. With 28 % of its professors already female, it has the best female representation of any Flemish university. Pauwels said she felt uncomfortable introducing a quota, but defended it as necessary to achieve more gender equality among the university's professors.

Three women's rights activists went into politics: Assita Kanko for the Flemish nationalists, Petra De Sutter for the greens and Goedele Liekens for the liberal party. Kanko, who has fought for female empowerment since she underwent genital mutilation as a child in Burkina Faso, founded an incubator to get more Belgian women to run for public office and give them the support they need to succeed. De Sutter, an expert in fertility and professor in gynecology at the University of Ghent, was born as a man. She campaigns for minority rights, sexual health, bioethics and the relationship between environment and health. TV host Liekens has been a Goodwill Ambassador for the UN since 1999. In Belgium, she tackled lots of taboos about sexuality, and she fights for birth control rights and sex education and against child marriage so as to allow women to lead healthier and more productive lives.

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Biggest women's rights story?

The announcement of Bosnia's first LGBTI Pride parade caused heated reactions among conservatives and far-right groups. The predominantly Bosniak SDA political party (Democratic Action Party) urged organizers of the Pride March to abandon its plans as it will "only deepen the gap between people of different opinions." An MP belonging to the same political party commented on her Facebook profile that "those people" [LGBTI persons] should be isolated and moved as far as possible from our children and society".

Media organizations such as N1 and Radio Free Europe posted polls asking their audiences if they are for or against the Pride March. More than 91 percent of surveyed audience of N1 said they are against it, while 68 percent of participants to Radio Free Europe's poll said "no" to the March. Social media profiles and pages in Bosnia and Herzegovina were bursting with comments of disapproval with the organization of Pride parade for days. On 5 April 2019, a lesbian couple was attacked in Sarajevo, while the assaulter threatened to attack the forthcoming Pride March.

The organizers of the LGBTI Pride March are mostly women. Women have been the faces of the LGBTI movement in the country ever since its beginnings over a decade ago, which takes a lot of courage in such a conservative society. Because of the hostile atmosphere and the generally low level of trust in public institutions, many fear the attacks might continue, and that violence will become the trademark of the Sarajevo Pride.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

As long as Bosnian media stick to sexist and misogynist reporting -- portraying women as sluts and second-rate citizens -- audiences will not believe they deserve equal rights. Women are often blamed for crimes committed by men, as was the case of the father who murdered his three children before committing suicide. The media criticized the murderer's wife, blaming her for leaving a violent man and even going so far as to frame the killings as a legitimate "revenge against her." Such irresponsible reporting supports the widespread belief that women are to be blamed for the violence they suffer and are themselves indirectly responsible for domestic violence.

Outstanding feminist voices?

Bosnian feminists Masha Durkalić, Hatidža Gušić and Amila Hrustić Batovanja, who co-authored #ŽeneBiH (in English: Women of BiH) project, have shown a tremendous amount of dedication to remind the public in the Western Balkans

that there have been -- and still are -- outstanding Bosnian women who deserve much more recognition than what they were formerly granted.

The book #ŽeneBiH is comprised of biographies of over fifty Bosnian notable women. It all began when Durkalić, Gušić and Hrustić Batovanja launched an online campaign named #ŽeneBiH in March 2018 to teach social media users about Bosnian female writers, artists, journalists and humanitarian workers who contributed to women's emancipation. It soon grew into an illustrated book, which the three activists managed to finance through one of the most successful crowdfunding campaigns in Bosnia.

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BulgariaBulgarian Fund
for Women**Biggest women's rights story?**

In Bulgaria, the biggest woman's rights story over the last three years has been the country's immense problem with violence against women. The year 2018 will remain notable in the country's history because of the massive scandal surrounding the government's refusal to accept the Istanbul Convention.

According to statistics, one out of every 3 murdered women in Bulgaria is killed in their home at the hands of someone close to them. Over the last three years, the number of Bulgarian women murdered by their husbands, partners and close relatives has increased by 50%. During 2016, 22 women were murdered by their relatives, and in 2017 this number increased to 27. Last year (2018), this number reached 33 and reportedly over half of these femicides occurred because of "jealousy". In the first 6 months of 2019, the number of murdered women has already reached 12. To call attention to these murdered women, the Bulgarian Women's Fund (BWF) organized protests against violence against women on November 26, 2018.

The subject of abortions has also dominated the public sphere and was recently cynically exploited in the context of the 2019 European elections for Parliament.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

The lack of working institutions and the absence of any enforcement of existing legislation are the main obstacles to equal rights for women in Bulgaria. Domestic violence only became a criminal offense in Bulgaria during the last days of February 2019, which clearly shows that the legislative framework does not support the needs of the victims. There is also a lack of crisis centers and social centers for support and prevention. The other obstacle is Bulgaria's lack of any substantial feminist movement and the fact that Bulgarian women have never fought for their rights because of the persistent and incorrect belief that we already possess equal rights because of communism.

Outstanding feminist voices?

The mission of the Bulgarian Fund for Women (BFW) is to nurture and develop the feminist movement in Bulgaria. The BFW works to support smaller NGOs working for women's rights and empowerment. In recent years, the initiatives: You are not Alone (Не си сама), Academia Ekaterina Karavelova (Академия Екатерина Каравелова), Dear Mother (Майко Мила), and LevFem (ЛевФем) have been among the most active and visible feminist associations which support various women's causes.

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Biggest women's rights story?

According to European statistics, the pay gap between men and women in Cyprus remains extremely large. The country is well below the respective European average, while the female unemployment rate is still very high. Feminist organizations also point out the need for favorable conditions for the entry, reintegration and retention of women in the labor market.

Cyprus

Dialekti Angeli

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

There is still a long way for Cyprus to achieve full gender equality. The feminist movement works towards this by proposing specific policies but the Cypriot authorities have failed to implement those proposals so far. Women are also notably absent from decision-making environments (their participation averages between 0-20%) thus women's skills and needs remain on the sidelines. This of course leads to a huge loss of human resources and talents.

Outstanding feminist voices?

While the Cypriot government does little to improve gender equality, there are a great number of feminist organizations researching the necessary measures and policy needed to improve the lives of women in Cyprus, for example the [Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies](#), the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family, the Equal Movement Equal Rights -- Equal Responsibilities, and the Women's POGO Movement.

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Biggest women's rights story?

Even though The Czech Republic signed the Istanbul Convention in 2016 and promised to ratify it by the end of 2018, as of mid-2019 it has not done so. We can observe a great reluctance towards the ratification on behalf of the Czech Parliament. Because of rising populism and a growing backlash against women's rights in Central and Eastern Europe, legislators are facing an unfavorable climate to tackle domestic violence.

The Catholic Church has also been contributing to spreading fake news and misinformation about the impact of the Istanbul Convention on Czech society. In 2018, most of the coverage around the convention was published by fake news media. The Istanbul Convention has become a cultural battlefield, and its potential benefits for many women and men is being deliberately overlooked.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

The rise of populism and a strong anti-gender movement that spreads false narratives around "gender ideology" prevents any rational conversation about women's rights and gender equality. As a result, there are regular attempts by politicians to reduce the amount of funding for gender equality and feminist NGOs.

Outstanding feminist voices?

There are many new, young and independent feminist initiatives in Czech Republic. **Konsent** focuses on the prevention of rape and sexual harassment in a very innovative way and successfully reaches young people in Czech Republic. Among other projects, they conducted a fundraising campaign to create a network of clubs and bars with trained staff to deal with sexual harassment so women can feel safer.

It is also worth mentioning the **Czech Women's Lobby**, an umbrella organization which unites 37 organizations that support women.

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Czechia

Diana Gregorová,
Czech Women's
Lobby

Biggest women's rights story?

"I think different women are occupied with different issues," said Rikke Andreassen, a professor at Roskilde University who works on gender equality issues among other subjects. "One of the issues is rape. Amnesty International has made a report documenting rape culture in Denmark and the lack of legal protection for women. a number of women are fighting to change the legal framework in order to get more protection and to change the culture accompanying rape."

Denmark

Rikke Andreassen --
interviewed by
Catherine Edwards

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

"Legally, we have rights," said Andreassen. "One obstacle is that our culture, structures and practices do not follow the legislation. So it is hard fighting for gender equality, as many politicians and others would argue that we already have equality. As elsewhere in the world, women's and minorities rights are under pressure. We have new extreme right-wing politicians who will rule back rights. We also have obstacles in relation to racism, which is related to women's struggles."

Outstanding feminist voices?

Andreassen highlighted the fact there were many diverse feminist voices in Denmark including Sherin Khankan, a female imam and activist on issues such as female integration in Islam.

"We have women of color who are active arguing in favor of feminism and anti-racism; we have queer feminists, and more 'traditional' feminists. So there are many different voices," said Andreassen.

Another example is Emma Holten, editor of the online magazine Friktion and a vocal campaigner against revenge porn as well as cyber-bullying and gender-based violence.

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Biggest women's rights story?

“For the past several years, including the present, focus on equal pay for equal work has dominated women’s rights in Estonia,” Ilvi Jõe-Cannon told NewsMavens. “Abortion is also emerging as a big issue in Estonia. It surfaced for the first time about a dozen or so years ago, but then disappeared as an issue. Since the parliamentary elections in the spring and the new coalition government includes a far-right party, it’s being raised again. The country also has an ultra-conservative NGO that is a very active anti-abortion voice. If LGBT can be considered a feminist issue, then that subject is also “owned” by the ultra-conservative NGO.”

Independent feminist media outlet Feministeerium also raised the issue of gendered violence, saying in a statement to NewsMavens: “The issue of violence against women has received much attention in the past two years. There are many personal stories shared and a lot more media coverage than before. The topic receives a lot of attention on many levels of public administration all the way up to the president of Estonia, so it is less and less [seen as] a pseudo-political topic by politicians, as it was in decades passed.”

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

Feministeerium listed the following issues: “Growing nationalism (at the time of writing, the nationalist-populist party is in the ruling government coalition) and its effect on the public discourse about feminist issues; the prevailing narrative emphasizing women’s role in reproducing for the sake of population growth vs. women’s free choice and support in having and raising children; negative attitudes and socio-economic inequality that contribute to holding up the negative public image of feminism and human rights; the widest gender wage gap in the EU (25.6 percent in 2018 according to Eurostat); project-based and short-period funding opportunities for feminist activities in Estonia which weaken the sustainability of the organizations and slow down long-term strategic work; and negative attitudes toward feminism and activism related to women’s rights.”

For Jõe-Cannon, the obstacles could be summed up in one phrase: patriarchal tradition.

“It permeates such matters as political decision-making, the composition of boards of directors, wages, domestic tranquility, and even non-profit organizations such as Rotary, for example, an organization that in most countries for the past 30 years has shed gender discrimination, but not in Estonia. We have a few clubs, including my own, that do not discriminate and they are among those founded since the country’s restored independence. But single-gender clubs aren’t only all-male, there are some -- two in Tallinn -- that have only female members.”

Estonia

Feministeerium and Ilvi Jõe-Cannon, Project Manager at the Estonian Women’s Studies and Resource Centre -- interviewed by Catherine Edwards

Who are the outstanding feminist voices in Estonia?

In addition to Feministeerium, which aims to give voice to underrepresented and minority groups in Estonia (women, ethnic minorities, LGBT+ people, elderly people, people with disability, etc.), [Ariadne Lõng](#) is the only academic magazine on gender studies.

Feministeerium also suggested the Estonian Facebook group “[Virginia Woolf is not afraid of you!](#)” as “a place where issues related to women’s rights are discussed on a daily basis”, with over 8,000 members.

Jõe-Cannon said it was difficult to name a specific individual. “We have a number of women who address gender issues and human rights, but nobody really stands out,” she said.

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Biggest women's rights story?

The promotion of women's rights by women's organizations has a long history in Finland. A key element in the successful promotion of women's rights has been close cooperation of women's organizations and the female members of the Parliament -- this has taken place ever since women received full political rights in 1906. Women's informal networking both in the Parliament and in the women's movement has promoted women's rights and prevented violence against women. Numerous legislative and policy measures have been achieved through cooperation and networking by active women from different political parties. Women have been united although the official positions of their political parties differ.

The National Council of Women of Finland -- established in 1911 by the first female parliamentarians in the world, gathers together 60 member organizations in which there are 400,000 women members, 20 percent of all women of Finland. 12 of the member organizations have been established more than a hundred years ago and 27 of them more than 75 years ago. The oldest Finnish-speaking member organizations date back to 163 years and many new organizations have been founded in recent years. All women are welcome to join these groups -- and special organizations, for example for migrant or disabled women, are also members of the Council. Strong cooperation exists within the women's movement.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

There are still many obstacles to overcome in Finland in order to reach gender equality. Finland has one of the highest numbers of violence against women in Europe. Violence against women is regarded as the most severe human rights violation in our country. Every third woman has experienced physical and/or sexual violence by her intimate partner. Violence against women causes both human suffering and high economic costs to societies.

For over a century, multiple women's organizations have raised their voices to end violence against women, but it is only in recent years that authorities have begun paying attention to the topic. At the moment, women's rights NGOs work against violence on women on an international, regional and local level in policy and advocacy work, often with a special focus on prevention.

The most important topics in the ongoing negotiations while forming the new government are combating violence against women, the reforms of family leaves and the trans Act, as well as the promotion of Equal Pay.

Finland

Eva Biaudet, President of the National Council of Women in Finland, and Terhi Heinilä, Secretary General of the National Council of Women in Finland -- interviewed by Catherine Edwards

The Finnish criminal code currently defines rape as sexual intercourse that includes the use or threat of violence against the victim, or as sexual intercourse with a person who is unable to defend herself. Women's organizations have lobbied to add lack of consent as a legal characteristic of rape. The objective of the initiative is to re-define rape as non-consensual sexual intercourse.

Outstanding feminist voices?

The women's movement plays a central role in Finnish society. Women's organizations have strong links to decision-makers including the Parliament, the government, ministries, universities and cities. Generally, Finnish women in positions of power are networking in order to promote women's rights and gender equality.

The former President of the Republic Tarja Halonen [NewsMavens interview: [here](#)] proudly calls herself a feminist and inspires others with her example. In the Parliamentary elections in April 2019, many young feminist women with a strong voice were elected to the Parliament. And for the first time in history, there is 47% women in the Parliament, 94 out of 200.

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Biggest women's rights story?

France

Sara Saidi

On November 26, 1974, Simone Veil, health minister under Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's presidency, gave a speech in the National Assembly introducing a law to legalize abortion. At the time, the French National Assembly was composed of a majority of men (95%). Even though the contraceptive pill had been legal since 1967, there were an estimated 300,000 illegal abortions per year at the time. Simone Veil's project led to heated debate in the media and the government, but finally the law passed and became effective in 1975. In 1982, the state health system began to cover the costs of the procedure. There are now approximately 200,000 voluntary interruptions of pregnancy per year, overall fewer than there were when abortion was outlawed -- and in infinitely safer conditions for women.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

The biggest obstacle to women's equal rights is the education system. Male dominant culture can only be dismantled through education, and the gender stereotypes promoted in schools which affect every girl in France. For instance, women are underrepresented in textbooks, and playgrounds are built primarily with boys in mind. But a new awareness of this bias is developing, and changes are slowly starting to happen.

Outstanding feminist voices?

France had many trailblazing feminist icons. Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793), was a playwright known for her Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen (1791). Simone de Beauvoir is often credited for much of the ideology behind second-wave feminism. In 2013, the Minister for Women's Rights, Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, launched a program called "ABCD de l'égalité," which aims to combat sexist stereotypes in school, but the initiative was ultimately cancelled because of pressure from religious and right-wing groups. Today, active voices and groups include **Nous Toutes** -- the anti-sexual violence movement/march, Marlène Schiappa -- the Secretary of Equality between women and men since 2017, and **Moi Aussi Amnésie** -- a resource for victims of sexual violence.

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Biggest women's rights story?

Germany

Germany -- Europe's largest economic power -- still has a sizeable gender pay gap -- 5% if one accounts for all the possible variables. In the last years in Germany has experienced a certain stagnation -- or very slow progress -- in women's rights. This is partly due to the long rule of the conservative Christian Democrats, who have proven lukewarm about a variety of feminist issues, and who will not agree to fully legalize abortion. But the country is gradually abolishing absurd laws like the "abortion advertising ban", which prevents doctors from mentioning they perform abortions on their own websites.

Daria
Sukharchuk

Biggest obstacle to women's equal rights?

Sexual violence. Germany has passed a law that criminalizes sexual assault in 2016 after the infamous **Cologne mass sexual assault** episode. But now, the country's legal system needs to catch up. According to the lawyers like Adelaide Stronk, who work with survivors of sexual violence, courts in big cities like Berlin are overwhelmed by the amount of cases they have to handle, and so is the police -- even though Berlin has a specialized sexual violence unit.

Outstanding feminist voices?

There are different organisations that deal with sexual violence in Germany, but **BFF** is the network that lists all women's counselling centres, and was instrumental in passing the new law criminalizing sexual assault in 2016. The **Deutscher Frauenrat** (National Council of German Women's Organizations) is the biggest Women's Lobby in Germany and campaigns for equal opportunities and equal status for women at home and in politics, business and culture.

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Greece

Dialekti Angeli

Biggest women's rights story?

Last winter the brutal deaths of Eleni Topaloudi and Angelina Petrou brought to light the dark side of Greece's patriarchal society. The figures on domestic violence and rapes are alarming, despite being inaccurately low on account of under-reporting. Moreover, the way the media show these crimes is highly problematic, turning them into press spectacles while blaming the victims and further stigmatizing them. The fact that women are murdered, raped, battered or violated is usually downplayed, unlike the alleged motives of the perpetrators whose violence is framed as "crimes of passion" or "family tragedies". Therefore, the media and society itself mitigate the seriousness of the crimes and perpetuate the macho mentality that stems from a deeply distorted patriarchal logic.

Biggest obstacle to women's equal rights?

Greek courts usually impose soft sentences on the perpetrators of gender-based crimes, or even exonerate them. This leads to a never-ending vicious circle of violence against women. Even though Greece ratified the Istanbul Convention in March 2018, the situation has not changed substantially, and there is still a lot more to be done for its implementation and for improving national legislation. Amnesty International started a campaign to change the legal definition of rape in the Greek Penal Code, in particular Article 336, which defines rape as intercourse resulting from coercion through the use of physical violence or the threat of great and imminent danger, disregarding the fact that rape can occur without these circumstances. This often leads to minimal punishments for perpetrators, who get out of court with the judicial equivalent of a slap on the wrist. This also minimizes the crime in the public's eyes, maintaining stereotypes that stigmatize victims.

Outstanding feminist voices?

Amnesty International, **Kamia Anoxi** (No Tolerance), the **Diotima Center for Women's Studies** and Research, and the General Secretariat for Gender Equality all raise their voices against the crimes discussed above.

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Hungary

Ivett Körösi

Biggest women's rights story?

The #MeToo movement had serious repercussions in Hungary. Like in many other countries, Hungarian women revealed their stories of sexual harassment. Some of them were well-known figures, and on social media large numbers of women shared stories of everyday sexism and sexual misconduct. Suddenly Hungarians were discussing concepts like boundaries, victim blaming and what is acceptable and what isn't. It turned out that beyond what is officially criminalized, there is no widespread consensus on what is permissible -- hence the need for a nationwide debate.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

The rhetoric and the actions of the Hungarian government have pushed the struggle for equal rights back by several decades. According to governing officials, motherhood should be the ultimate goal for all women, and Hungarian mothers should give birth to as many children as possible. Women are treated as if they were responsible for population growth. The right-wing government recently announced a “**family protection action plan**” which offers incentives (e.g. personal income tax exemption, aid for car purchase, etc.) to motivate couples to have 3 or 4 children. Meanwhile it has not made any real effort to address the problem of the gender pay gap, or to ease the burden on working mothers, or to ratify the Istanbul Convention. Women's rights are clearly not a priority for the government, which only has one female member -- a minister without a portfolio. As a champion of “traditional” values the Fidesz-led government has also been waging a war against “the gender ideology” and ultimately **forced universities to shut down gender studies departments**.

Outstanding feminist voices?

Rita Antoni, president of Nőkért Egyesület (In English: Association For Women) has done a tremendous job by drawing attention to women's issues both as a speaker and writer. Rita Perintfalvi, a Catholic theologian has made the feminist scene more colorful by offering insight into the complex relationship between religion and women. Barbara Seres is an activist who tries to raise awareness of domestic violence and the shortcomings of the criminal justice system through her own story. Her previous partner threw their 6-month-old son out of a window and jumped to his own death afterwards.

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Biggest women's rights story?

NewsMavens spoke to Gyða Pétursdóttir, an Icelandic professor and lecturer in Gender Studies, about the state of women's rights in Iceland. She named [the women's strike in 1975](#) and the election of Vigdís Finnbogadóttir as president -- the world's first democratically directly elected female president in 1980 -- as the two biggest women's rights stories in recent history. On October 24th, 1975, thousands of Icelandic women went on strike from work to demonstrate the importance of female labour and demand equal working conditions, which led the government to pass a law requiring equal pay the following year. The strike has inspired similar protests by women around the world, and women still take part in it each October, demonstrating the commitment to continuing the fight for equality.

Iceland

Gyða Pétursdóttir
-- interviewed by
Catherine Edwards

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

Pétursdóttir states that gender-based violence remains a huge obstacle. Though the country is often near the top of rankings based on women's rights and quality of life for women due to high levels of political representation and strong legislation on equality, violence has proved harder to tackle, with one in four Icelandic women suffering rape or attempted rape during their lifetime (<http://afallasaga.is/en/>). Many politicians and campaign groups are working to raise awareness of the problem and introduce measures aimed at reducing this kind of violence in Iceland, from discussions on gender in school to support for refuges.

Outstanding feminist voices?

Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir is a proud feminist who has made it a priority to improve the country's already high level of gender equality. Heiða Björg Hilmisdóttir, city councillor and vice chairman of the Alliance Party, created the closed Facebook group *Í skugga valdsins* (In the shadow of power) where women share experiences of sexual harassment. Hanna Björg Vilhjalmsdóttir is a pioneering teacher who set up Iceland's first secondary school course on gender studies, now taught in 27 of Iceland's 33 secondary schools. And Pétursdóttir named women's rights campaigner Hildur Lilliendahl as another prominent feminist voice.

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Biggest women's rights story?

It's been a whole year since the Republic of Ireland voted overwhelmingly in favour of overturning its historic abortion ban by 66.4% to 33.6% -- a landslide result. While abortion wasn't made available straight away and not every county has a service provider yet, the legalization of abortion in the state was, and still is, a huge moment for women's rights in the Catholic country.

Ireland

Lydia Morrish

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

One of the biggest obstacles to women's rights in Ireland is stark underrepresentation in the Oireachtas (Irish parliament). Only a fifth of national lawmakers and local councils there are female, which is far behind many other countries in Europe, including neighbour United Kingdom, which has one-third (32%) female politicians. While Ireland has countless brilliant women's rights and equality activists who were majorly to thank for the outcome of the country's abortion vote, underrepresentation in politics can lead to policy that doesn't consider the female perspective let alone prioritize it.

Outstanding feminist voices?

There are too many to list. But just a few are: Ailbhe Smyth, activist and former co-director of the Together For Yes campaign to repeal the Eighth Amendment and legalise abortion; Emma Dabiri, author of *Don't Touch My Hair* and broadcaster; Louise Kenny, former professor of obstetrics and gynaecology at University College Cork, Ireland (now executive pro-vice chancellor of Liverpool University's Faculty of Health and Life Sciences), who along with other obstetricians was pivotal in overturning Ireland's ban on abortion in the 2018 referendum.

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Biggest women's rights story?

Italy

There are several fundamental issues regarding women's rights in Italy. The first is undoubtedly reproductive rights, in particular the very high numbers of conscientious objection which, especially in some areas of the country, hinder women's access to voluntary interruption of pregnancy and complicate the work of non-objecting doctors who abide by the current abortion law.

Cinzia Sciuto
& Ingrid
Colanicchia

Also, women's lives continue to be an obstacle course between work and family: one in five women leave the labor market within two years of having a child; women continue to do most of the domestic work and earn less than men for the same job.

Gender-based violence also deserves a mention. Approximately 31.5% of women between 16 and 70 (6 million 788,000) suffer some form of physical or sexual violence during their lives and there are about 150 feminicides every year. Roughly every two days a woman is killed by a male relative or partner because she challenged his role in the relationship or in the family.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

There are several factors that hinder the achievement of gender equality in Italy. The most concerning, in our opinion, is the alliance between neo-fascist and far-right movements (starting with the governing Lega party) with the most fundamentalist fringes of Catholicism. This connection was especially visible in Verona, at the last World Congress of Families, and is at the center of the movement defending the "traditional family," which translates into policies encroaching upon women's rights. For example there are several Italian municipalities, like Verona, that support -- often financially -- anti-abortion associations.

Outstanding feminist voices?

In recent years, several women have brought media attention to the issue of gender equality and women's rights. The best known are Asia Argento, one of the faces of the #MeToo movement; the former president of the Chamber of Deputies, Laura Boldrini, who campaigned for inclusive language and against hate speech; and Lucia Annibali, who is at the forefront in the fight against gender violence since she was left disfigured after her boyfriend threw acid at her in 2013. But the most important and strongest voice is certainly that of the organization Non Una di Meno, which in recent years has worked at the local and national level to draft a National Plan against gender violence and has taken on more and more relevance, managing to bring hundreds of thousands of women

to the streets, so much so that it could be argued that they are the only viable civic movement in Italy today.

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Biggest women's rights story?

Kosovo

Lidija Pisker

Kosovo journalist Laura Kryeziu made headlines when she revealed her experience of domestic violence on the TV show "Jeta ne Kosove" in December 2018. Saying she didn't react in time in her own defence, she urged other women to promptly report all cases of violence. She said she hoped her testimony would have an impact on other victims, who often feel too ashamed to report abuse.

Besides victim shaming, there's a widespread social -- and even institutional -- habit of "reconciling" wives with their abusive husbands, even when crimes have been committed, according to the Kosovo Women's Network's report. Several victims of continuous domestic violence have been murdered by their husbands. Civil society activists have protested the negligence of Kosovo institutions on several occasions in the last two years.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

Even with legislative instruments for tackling domestic violence in place, many Kosovo women experience violence at home. According to 2015 research by the Kosovo Women's Network, 68% of Kosovo women have experienced domestic violence in their lifetime.

Last year's analysis of institutional response to gender-based violence conducted by the same network -- entitled "From Words to Action?" -- stated that victims are offered insufficient confidentiality, and that victim blaming remains prevalent in Kosovo.

In January last year, the majority of NGO-run shelters for women and children in Kosovo had to temporarily close down due to delays in financial support from the government.

Outstanding feminist voices?

The **Haveit Collective**, four Kosovo female artists, has been criticizing discrimination against women and LGBTQ+ citizens in Kosovo since its establishment in 2011. It became famous for putting up three red billboards near the police headquarters in the capital city of Pristina last year as a response to the murders of Diana Kastrati and Zejnepe Bytyqi, Kosovo women murdered by their husbands. The artists said they received over one hundred death threats after the performance of "The Kiss" on Valentine's Day of 2014 (when the four of them kissed in the center of Pristina).

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Biggest women's rights story?

Latvia

Latvia has quietly climbed to the top of EU rankings in terms of women's access to economic power. According to the World Bank, it is among the six economies -- the only Central and Eastern European country among them -- with a perfect score in equal rights when it comes to several work related indicators. "[Equal opportunities are] one of the key tasks for a growth-oriented economy, as well as the key prerequisite for a wealthy and successful society," Minister for Finance Jānis Reirs said when this was announced. The share of women in decision-making positions in publicly listed companies was the highest in the EU in 2014. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality, Latvia has progressed in all equality domains over the recent years -- often faster than others. Even the division of care activities is the second most equal in the EU (40% of women and 38% of men spend at least an hour per day on care for family members). Latvian parents enjoy generous state-funded parental leave.

Daiva
Repečkaitė

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

EIGE's index shows that Latvian women are far from equal when it comes to money and education. The economic situation has stagnated for both genders since 2005, and the gap in full-time employment is nowhere near closing among young people, especially with lower levels of education, and for couples with children. Full-time employment rate is 69% for mothers and 87% for fathers. According to Iveta Kelle of Papardes Zieds, a family-planning NGO, there is a huge gap between the poorest and the rest of society: "There are groups of women which would require specially designed programs to reach them and assist them in the best way, e.g. women who are drug addicts [or] women with disabilities."

Despite having recently celebrated 100 years of suffrage, women are also poorly represented in the national parliament -- they make up a mere fifth of MPs. According to FPRI, a US think tank, the Progressives and Latvian Russian Union have balanced electoral lists, but the leftist party For an Alternative only managed to reach 20% of women. Women are underrepresented in high-prestige economic areas, such as technology and engineering. According to EIGE, women only make up 7% of board members in publicly owned broadcasting organizations, and one in four women is at risk of poverty, compared to one in five men. The gap is particularly acute for single women -- with or without children. Gender violence also remains a concern -- two in five women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15. Latvia has not ratified the Istanbul Convention, but an integrated approach to domestic violence was launched in 2015. Despite these concerns, there is a constant risk of a political backlash against women's rights from right-wing movements. According to Kelle, there

is not a single political party that is very focused on women's issues, such as access to reproductive rights.

Outstanding feminist voices?

Latvia has an umbrella network to represent women -- the [Women's NGOs Cooperation Network of Latvia](#), established in 2003. With 37 NGOs and 7000 individual members, it is also a member of the European Women's Lobby.

[Papardes Zieds](#), or the Family Planning and Sexual Health Association of Latvia, conducts research and advocacy for reproductive rights in Latvia.

The University of Latvia has a feminist research centre, Feministica Lettica. It publishes an almanac, and its editor [Ausma Cimdina](#) regularly publishes on women in Latvian culture.

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Lithuania

Daiva
Repečkaitė**Biggest women's rights story?**

2019 has been a good year for Lithuanian women. Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, music director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, soared to the top of **Classic FM's best living female conductors**, Asmik Grigorian was named the world's **best female opera singer**, and an all-female creative team won the top prize at the **Venice Biennale**. But while women demonstrated growing leadership in various fields, the government became all-male. The news made numerous headlines, since no EU country has had an all-male government in recent years. Despite claims that women are represented in the government even when they aren't ministers, when one looks closely, it is clear that **the higher the rank, the fewer women there are**. President Grybauskaitė, who is number 63 on **Forbes's Power Women 2018** list, finishes her term in 2019, and two female candidates, Gitanas Nausėda and **Ingrida Šimonytė**, competed in the elections -- but ultimately lost to male candidate Gitanas Nausėda.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

Despite successfully striving for leadership and prominence, many Lithuanian women are still held back by violent men in their surroundings. #MeToo has exposed the extent of sexual harassment in the world of arts and culture, and although some of the accused have lost their jobs, women who spoke out were vilified and often ostracized, while some of the men accused of systematic abuse are **still in positions of power and prestige**. Even EIGE, the Vilnius-based EU agency in charge of researching gender inequalities and formulating recommendations to tackle them, was **hit with allegations of sexual harassment**, allegedly perpetrated by men in power positions against women in precarious jobs. **According to Viktorija Kolbešnikova**, self-employed women driving taxis or serving in tip-based service jobs are particularly vulnerable to unwelcome attention and sexual harassment. The **murder of Dovilė Didžiūnaitytė in 2017**, still unresolved, reminds of the perils young models face as they navigate the world of influencers and socialites, defined and ruled by powerful men. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality, 32% of women aged 15 or over have experienced physical and/or sexual violence. Lithuania has not ratified the **Istanbul Convention**.

Outstanding feminist voices?

Manoteises.lt, a news site focused on human rights, has consistently served as a source of debate and robust arguments for discussing women's rights. The Center for Equality Advancement, known for promoting equality and challenging gender roles, received an award this year for a project entitled "Women who

built the Lithuanian state”, which uses illustrations to showcase the contributions of prominent women at vital stages of Lithuania’s development. Motery Informacijos Centras is a non-profit women’s organization focused on gender equality and combating violence against women, and Women’s Issues Information Centre organizes to prevent violence against women and sex trafficking through judicial support.

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Malta

Daiva
Repečkaitė**Biggest women's rights story?**

After the Irish referendum, Malta found itself in the spotlight as the only EU country with a total abortion ban. The fact that Maltese women nonetheless access abortions abroad is increasingly recognized, prompting an unprecedented discussion at the political level. It started with the **Women's Rights Foundation asking** for the state to stop forcing women to carry their rapist's or close relative's fetus, or a fetus that has no chance of survival. The proposal faced a backlash from Malta's two major political parties, and WRF's activists were subject to bullying and threats. Next, a **theater play called for dialogue on the matter** by portraying a conversation among several characters, including women who have had an abortion, partners who encouraged it, and activists on both sides. Later an **Irish charity** that guides women in their reproductive choices established a branch in Malta, and MEP candidate Mina Tolu risked losing votes when they -- Mina Tolu's preferred pronoun -- came out in favor of a respectful discussion on abortion in a society where most conservatives believe there is nothing to discuss. The **Doctors for Choice** association also declared itself to be in favor of liberalizing abortion law. Fearful of being charged with assisting abortion, doctors refrain from offering advice and information to women struggling with unwanted pregnancies or fetal abnormalities, the organization said.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

Women in Malta are still under-represented when it comes to positions of power. **Malta ranks 23rd** out of 28 countries in the ranking of the European Institute for Gender Equality. EIGE's scores suggest that women's political and economic power is in fact regressing. After the immensely popular president Marie Louise Coleiro Preca finished her term, the post went to a man again, and the most visible members of the executive branch are all male. Female Maltese MEPs **outperform their male counterparts**, yet there are only nine women among the **41 candidates** competing for the six seats Malta holds in the European Parliament. (One candidate is non-binary.) The percentage of women running publicly listed companies is still in the single digits, according to EIGE. In the media, women tend to **disappear in their thirties**. Only one in four men spend at least an hour per day caring for relatives, and only a third of them spend an hour on cooking and housework, leaving women with a substantial burden. Local businesses **vehemently oppose** expanding paternity leave, even after the cause was championed by a Maltese MEP at the EU level.

Outstanding feminist voices?

Despite occasional disagreements regarding gender quotas or reproductive rights,

feminists in Malta are in dialogue across ideological lines and united over issues such as **combating domestic violence**. Women for Women, a popular discussion forum on Facebook for all kinds of issues faced by persons identifying as women in Malta, won the **best online community award**. Earlier this year, the group's co-founder Francesca Fenech Conti teamed up with lifestyle blogger Line Young Peteri, co-owner of the Roccamore fashion brand, to launch the **Francesca boot** as part of their #inhershoes campaign to raise funds for the Women's Rights Foundation, who informs and empowers women about their legal rights. Fenech Conti is advocating for improved sex education (it is not uncommon for nuns to teach these lessons in Malta), free contraception and other reproductive rights.

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Netherlands

Lara Bullens

Biggest women's rights story?

Because of its colonial past, the Netherlands has struggled to deconstruct and come to terms with its racist roots. That underlying tension can be seen in the debate and policy surrounding women's rights. There is an urgent need for an inclusive, intersectional feminism that takes into account women of different social classes, religious beliefs, and ethnicities in order to decolonize Dutch feminism. Ethnic minority women are faced with a broad variety of discrimination in the Netherlands.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

At the moment there is a lot of discussion about full-time employment and creating a more inclusive feminism. Although full-time employment, gender-based violence and representation among executives are high on women's agenda in the country, there is a Dutch habit of emphasizing the difference between "liberated" Dutch women of colour and "oppressed" immigrant women that needs to be tackled. Stereotypes around gender roles are alive and well and need to be de-racialized.

Outstanding feminist voices?

Sylvana Simons is a left-wing politician and former TV presenter who founded the party Bij 1. She focuses on combating racism and discrimination, and actively attempts to decolonize the women's movement in the country. Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a Dutch-American activist and former politician. She has stirred up controversy in the past, but in the Netherlands she is the main voice of the campaign against FGM, forced marriage, honor violence and killings, and depriving girls of education.

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What is the biggest women's rights story in this country?

Norway

"The huge mobilization for the March 8th demonstration was very inspiring," Gunhild Ørstavik from the Norwegian NGO FOKUS (Forum for Women and Development) says. "It was the largest March 8 manifestation ever in Norway, with lots of young people. It was probably a response to the right-wing government's attempts to limit the abortion laws (again)."

Gunhild Ørstavik, Karin Maria Bruzelius -- interviewed by Catherine Edwards

Karin Maria Bruzelius, President of the Norwegian Association for Women's Rights, names these proposed law changes -- which would allow abortion after 12 weeks if the child was 'seriously ill', and abortion of twins if only one of the two was seriously ill -- as the biggest story. "This is an attack on the right Norwegian women have had since 1978/75. In 1978 women were granted a legal right of abortion until expiry of the 12th week of the pregnancy. The proposed change to the abortion statute was a tradeoff in discussions to widen the parliamentary basis of the present government," says Bruzelius.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

"We see several obstacles and find it difficult to prioritize," FOKUS said. "One is the conservative direction of the Christian Democratic party, which after an internal struggle decided to join the government in January with a promise that they would restrict the legislation on abortion.

"Another is the large segment of women with an immigrant/refugee backgrounds living isolated from Norwegian society. The government's cash for care benefit keeps them from entering the labour market or education." Bruzelius agreed that there were several obstacles, the biggest in her opinion was "a belief that we already have achieved equality and that boys and men should be given more attention."

Outstanding feminist voices?

FOKUS highlighted two groups: 'De skamløse jentene' (The shameless girls', a group set up by young girls with minority backgrounds to share their experiences, and Bunadsgeriljaen (Bunad guerillas), a group of women who dress in the traditional Norwegian bunad to raise awareness of the need for good maternity care in Norway. FOKUS also pointed to Line Oma, who was the first person to openly accuse former deputy leader of the Norwegian Labour Party Trond Giske of sexual harassment, who in 2018 left his job over the multiple allegations. And FOKUS also praised comedian and author Sigrid Bonde Tusvik.

Bruzelius also named Berit Ås, a 91-year-old former politician and leader of the Socialist Left Party, and longstanding feminist.

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Poland

Ada Petriczko

Biggest women's rights story?

Since the conservative PiS party rose to power three years ago, the debate on women's reproductive rights has heated up. In a country where secular and religious forces are dangerously intertwined, finding common definitions of dignity and individual freedom can be extremely difficult.

Polish abortion law is already among the strictest in the world, allowing women to terminate pregnancy only in three cases: if it results from rape, when the woman's life is in jeopardy or if the fetus is irreparably damaged/suffers from a congenital disease. However, in the fall of 2016, the parliament took steps to further curb this legislation.

For this reason, on October 3, 2016, hundreds of thousands of Polish women left their workplaces and homes to march the streets wearing black, mourning the potential loss of their fundamental rights. The so-called Black Protest took place in 147 locations across the country -- from metropolitan cities to small towns, where the bravest solo protesters shouted slogans such as: "My body, my choice", "I think, I feel, I choose" or "No woman, no kraj" ("kraj" meaning "country" in Polish). Their images circulated in international media. The force of the Black Protest took the politicians by surprise and forced them to temporarily withdraw the proposal of the bill.

Two Black Protests and countless parliamentary discussions later, the problem is far from solved, but the women's strike changed public opinion for good. In a recent poll commissioned by "Gazeta Wyborcza", 58% of respondents supported the right to abortion on demand until the 12th week of pregnancy.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

The combination of deeply ingrained patriarchal attitudes and economic inequality. Although Poland underwent a dynamic transformation over the past 30 years, traditional mentality is still alive in a substantial part of society. Influenced largely by the Catholic Church, it strengthens gender segregation. Some activities, jobs and sectors (eg. health, education, social work) are thus seen as more appropriate for women, while others (technology, science, engineering and mathematics) -- for men.

The Church is demonizing the word "gender" as a vague concept signifying all the evils of the modern world. The close ties of the state and the Church are doubtless another obstacle to women's equal rights. In Poland, faith is not a private but a public matter. For example, under the so-called "conscience clause", a gynecologist may refuse to perform a legal abortion on the grounds of their religious beliefs.

Feminists are seen as difficult, angry, irrational troublemakers who stand in the way of what is “normal” and “natural”. The “I’m not a feminist, but I support gender equality” attitude is common among women and progressive men. In a 2018 poll ordered by “Wysokie Obcasy” women’s weekly magazine, only 9% of women respondents defined themselves as “feminists”, although many more supported their demands.

As for economic inequality, women in Poland spend on average almost two and a half hours per day on unpaid work more than men, according to the OECD. Moreover, 90% of single parents in Poland are women. In the majority of cases, women are also the sole caregivers for disabled children and the elderly, with little support from the state. The gender pay gap is 7,2%, which is below EU average. However, only 43% of women work full time, in comparison to 60% of men. Mothers are also the predominant users of parental leave: less than 3% of fathers take it. The 2018 Global Gender Gap report placed Poland on the 41st rank, between Colombia and Uganda, identifying the country’s strongest field as educational attainment (13th in the world) and its weakest -- political empowerment (58th).

Outstanding feminist voices?

Politicians Barbara Nowacka and Joanna Scheuring-Wielgus fearlessly face taboos and fight for abortion on demand and against child abuse in the Church respectively. Monika Tutak-Goll, Paulina Reiter and the other editors of “Wysokie Obcasy” -- an iconic feminist magazine, on the market since 1999 enlarge the understanding and compassion of readers. Marta Lempart and the other leaders of the Black Protests keep the flame of dissent alive. Natalia Przybysz -- a singer and the first Polish celebrity who publicly shared the story of her abortion inspire other women to speak out. Iwona Hartwig -- a mother who led the 2018 protest of parents of children with disabilities in the parliament shows us that mothers’ matter. Marta Frej -- a feminist illustrator and author of viral memes whose weapon of choice is humour keeps us laughing through our tears. And last but not least, Anja Rubik, model, feminist activist who wrote a bestselling sex education textbook “#Sexedpl” -- an alternative to the public one, which is more about religion than sexual health.

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Portugal

Cátia Bruno

Biggest women's rights story?

The judicial system and how it perceives female crime victims. Many sentences in cases of rape and domestic violence made headlines because of the way judges treat women -- as if men were entitled to rape them because they had been drinking, or that domestic violence was somehow forgivable because the woman had cheated on her husband. The outrage these sentences provoked show Portuguese society is fighting back prejudice and refusing to tolerate certain ideas and behaviors anymore. There is still a long way to go -- particularly in the legal field -- but some steps are being made in the right direction.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

Workplace inequality, particularly the wage gap between men and women, is still a major issue. According to the government, Portuguese women earn 16,7% less than men. But a recent study of the International Labor Organization puts that figure at 22.1% and points to Portugal as a bad example. Furthermore, maternity is still a hindrance to women's careers, making them progress much slower than men.

Outstanding feminist voices?

Paula Cosme Pinto, a feminist activist, writes a weekly column about gender equality in Expresso -- one of the most respected media organizations in the country. She also authored a book on the sexuality of women and is often speaks about women's equality at different events.

Sara Falcão Casaca has a background in sociology but has been working as a professor in economy and management with a particular focus on gender and labor. She was president of the Commission for Equality and also works as an investigator, studying how gender affects Portuguese companies and work environments.

Maria Teresa Horta became an icon as one of the "Three Marias", the authors put on trial for writing "As Novas Cartas Portuguesas" about the female condition in the 1970's. She was an MP for the Communist Party for many years and even though she is now retired, she keeps up with politics -- a few years ago she rejected a literary prize because it would be given by Prime Minister Pedro Passos Coelho, whose politics she disliked.

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Biggest women's rights story?

Romania

On March 8, 2019, feminist activists protested in front of the court of Bucharest -- journalist investigations had revealed several cases of sexual violence against girls of 11-14 where judges lowered penalties for their adult attackers because they were "provoked to sexual intercourse." The proof of this "provocation" was the way the girls were dressed and their lack of struggle when raped.

Anabella
Costache

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

For Romanian women, the biggest problem is limited access to reproductive health and rights. With more and more powerful conservative groups in Europe, which are attacking the Istanbul Convention and women's right to decide about their own bodies, we can see that limited access to sexual education, contraceptives or abortions on request is not a coincidence.

There is no sex education in Romanian schools and in the last two years family doctors have not been able to provide contraceptives for free. We top EU rankings for teenage pregnancies, and 5 out of 10 teenage mothers does not see a doctor before giving birth. Also, many public hospitals in Romania will not perform abortions on request during religious fasts, or will not perform them at all. Women in rural areas also lack access to medical care since the closure of many local clinics. Regional hospitals can be up to 60km away, which strongly affects their ability to provide care, especially during pregnancy.

Outstanding feminist voices?

This is the third year when feminist activists have joined forces under the hashtag #multumescpentrufiori / #thankyoufortheflowers (but I want respect!) and held different public actions/protests. **FILIA** is a nonprofit, apolitical and feminist organization that fights against gender inequality through activism, advocacy and research. They have recently been focusing their efforts in rural communities, facilitating midwifery workshops for women.

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Biggest women's rights story?

Russia

After the fall of the monarchy, Russia was one of the first countries in Europe to give women what was then called full emancipation: the right to vote, to work, and to study. However, a century later, Russian laws have not caught up with women's demands and do not adequately protect their rights. Today, Russia is the only country in Europe that doesn't have a law against domestic violence (yes, that's right, even Belarus, Europe's "last dictatorship," has one). In fact, the country's parliament decriminalized domestic abuse in recent years, meaning that men are fined rather than arrested for abusing a spouse. Scratching your neighbour's new car can now result in a larger fine than beating a member of your household. This type of legislation results in horrific stories, like in 2018 when three young girls **killed their own abusive father**, who beat and raped them for years.

Daria
Sukharchuk

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

Domestic violence, as well as the lack of official support for women's rights organizations, means that women must rely on themselves to protect and help one another in difficult or dangerous situations. Over the last years, several women's help centers (or crisis centers, as they're called in Russia), have been created, which not only run shelters, but also offer free counselling to those who have encountered domestic and sexual violence. They have also set up a website that allows victims of domestic violence to write an official complaint to the police, if she wishes to prosecute her offender, and an app that finds the nearest shelter in the area.

In a way, this growing interest in women's help centers has coincided with a boom in charity in Russia. As unexpected as it sounds, there are now many new, often local, or highly specialized organisations being set up to cater to people's most urgent needs in cases where the state can not be relied on.

Outstanding feminist voices?

Women like Anna Rivina and Marie Davtyan, who created **Nasiliu.net** -- a map that shows the location of domestic violence shelters (at least those that do not conceal their locations). They also authored guidelines to help women get away from abusive partners. No account of Russian feminism would be complete without mentioning "**Eve's Ribs**" -- a feminist project from St. Petersburg, created by Leda Garina, a theater director and artist, which, among other things, runs free help groups for women, including women with cancer, and is probably the best-known feminist voice in the country.

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Biggest women's rights story?

Serbia

Lidija Pisker

#MeToo was without a doubt the story of the year in Serbia, more specifically the case of Marija Lukić, who exposed Milutin Jeličić Jutka, the (now former) mayor of the Serbian town of Brus, a member of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and close collaborator of Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić.

Lukić reported that Jutka had **sexually assaulted and harassed her for two years**. Among other evidence, she publicly revealed hundreds of obscene text messages she received from him. After Lukić's testimony, several other female employees of the municipality of Brus came out saying that they had also been similarly victimized by the mayor.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

Domestic violence is widespread in Serbia, experts say. Between 2010 and 2017, **251 women were killed** by partners or their families, according to the Women Against Violence coalition of civil society organizations.

The Center for Investigative Reporting of Serbia (CINS) reports that legal punishments for domestic violence are too lenient, which leads to the normalization of violence in Serbian society. To name only one example, a man convicted of domestic violence killed his wife on the premises of one of Belgrade's Centers for Social Work, while on probation. He had previously used his probation time to intimidate his wife, according to CINS.

Outstanding feminist voices?

Marija Lukić has become a hero for many women in Serbia after speaking out about the harassment she suffered. She received death threats but refused to be silenced and kept fighting for justice -- and ultimately became even more popular after her aggressor stepped down from his position of mayor in March 2019.

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Slovakia

Ria Gehrerová

Biggest women's rights story?

In Europe, and more specifically in Central and Eastern Europe, it is still rare for a woman to reach the highest spheres of power, but Slovakia has already had a female prime minister and has also recently elected a woman as president -- Zuzana Čaputová.

This victory is not only about smashing the glass ceiling, which is still thick for too many Slovak women, but also brings hope for more feminist legislation, since Čaputová openly talks about the rights of women and the numerous injustices they face.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

Despite its new president, Slovakia remains a relatively conservative country, where Christian leaders have considerable influence on every sphere of life, including politics. Conservative Christian politicians and activists are currently rallying to fight what they call "gender ideology", leading to the rejection of the Istanbul Convention by the constitutional majority of MPs in the Slovak parliament -- because the document uses the word "gender". These MPs were from coalition and opposition parties across the political spectrum. Furthermore, the neo-Nazi party of right-wing politician Marian Kotleba is on the rise, and its vision of women's role is firmly stuck in the past.

Outstanding feminist voices?

The most influential feminist voice in Slovakia is the organization **Aspekt**. It was founded in 1990s, when they started to translate feminist literature into Slovak and openly discuss feminist issues. Many of today's young feminists were "formed" there and now work in the public, private and academic sectors.

The Slovak media could also be considered an influential feminist voice. Despite lasting patriarchal bias, on the whole Slovak media are consistently liberal when it comes to human rights, including LGBT and women's rights.

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Slovenia

Julija Ovsec

Biggest women's rights story?

In the early 1990s, shortly after the independence of Slovenia, right-wingers filed a ban on abortion. Women from all sides of the political spectrum joined forces at the time and created sufficient pressure to have the bill rejected. Subsequently, there were motions to introduce fees for interrupting a pregnancy, but again, public backlash was significant enough to prevent the legislation from going through. As a result, abortion is a constitutional right in Slovenia, and its costs are covered by health insurance.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

The greatest obstacle to achieving equality in Slovenia is the strong Christian tradition and the rise of right-wing politics. In recent years there has been a return to traditionalism and an increase in hate speech and fake news, which most often rely on pseudoscience about biological determinism. The transition to neoliberal capitalism has also affected the weakest segments of society -- thus disproportionately affecting women -- driving the marginalized even further from mainstream society.

Outstanding feminist voices?

There are several Slovenian associations and organizations fighting for women's rights and addressing women's issues. Among them, I would like to highlight the Women's Center of the Peace Institute, Iskra organization, Institute 8th of March, the Red Dawn Festival, SOS telephone and web portal Spol.si. Dr. Liliana Burcar, Dr. Maca Jogan, Dr. Darja Zaviršek, Dr. Metka Mencin Čeplak, Dr. Svetlana Slapšak, Dr. Eva D. Bahovec and Dr. Milica Antić Gaber are noteworthy academics. Sonja Lokar, Nika Kovač, Mojca Žerak, Tonja Jerele, Maiken Kores, Urška Fišter are all outstanding activists.

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Biggest women's rights story?

Spain

Tonina Alomar

A few years ago, a heated public debate on the issue of consent erupted when 5 men raped an 18-year-old woman in the north of Spain. A court charged the five men for continued sexual abuse, although they did not find them guilty of sexual aggression (which would have implied a higher penalty). In Spain, like in several other European countries, the crime of sexual aggression requires there to have been physical violence and/or intimidation involved, not just lack of consent.

Cases of gender violence happen far too often in Spain (at the time of writing, more than 990 women have been killed by men since 2003, when recording began). Currently, there is talk of reforming the criminal code and criminal procedures so that lack of explicit consent becomes sufficient to find perpetrators guilty of sexual crimes, therefore limiting the interpretation of judges.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

The lack of education and information about feminism makes it impossible to have a comprehensive and holistic discussion of how we want to improve our society. There is confusion about what feminism is, there are different interpretations of equality and no understanding of intersectionality... Literature on feminism, albeit copious, is not widely available to the public and is usually limited to academic or specialized circles. This often leads to dichotomous, simplistic and confrontational discussions, preventing society from having a much-needed conversation on feminism which would allow us to be better equipped to solve issues such as the pay gap or gender violence. Without this basis, the eradication of injustices is highly difficult.

Outstanding feminist voices?

Spain has a long tradition of outstanding feminist voices. Women such as Clara Campoamor, Dolores Ibarruri, Margarita Nelken or Victoria Kent still influence much of today's discourse. Currently, there is a plethora of significant and critical literature written by scholars such as Celia Amorós, Amelia Valcárcel or Ana de Miguel, who shape much of the current debate on feminism. Part of the discourse is also carried out at the forefront of politics, with politicians such as socialists Carmen Calvo and Soledad Murillo or left-wing Irene Montero being especially vocal.

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Biggest women's rights story?

Sweden

The #MeToo movement, while global, had a particularly strong impact in Sweden, which regularly tops rankings based on gender equality legislation. The biggest story here was the accusation which resulted in prominent cultural figure Jean-Claude Arnault being jailed for rape, causing a crisis in the Swedish Academy.

Catherine
Edwards

But the real story of #MeToo in Sweden is no single predator, but the widespread collaboration between activists and the shift in culture this caused. Women from different industries or demographics joined together to publish anonymous accounts of their experiences and focused on demands for specific changes rather than naming individuals. This led to new guidelines and structures in many workplaces, including Swedish theaters, universities, and the care sector. While many in the movement have said the changes have not been as dramatic as hoped for, the issue has been put on the agenda and many campaigners report increased openness in discussing gender equality and harassment in Sweden.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

Gender-based violence remains a problem in Sweden -- around one third of young women report being victims of a sexual crime, and 22 women killed by a current or former partner in 2018 alone.

In a country where the gaps between the best- and worst-off people in society have traditionally been small, growing social inequality also disproportionately affects women, and particularly foreign-born women or those from lower-income backgrounds. Combating racism and other forms of discrimination goes hand-in-hand with combating sexism in Sweden.

Outstanding feminist voices?

There are many notable Swedish feminists, both groups and individuals, including the groups behind the #MeToo initiatives mentioned above, the Swedish Women's Lobby, and the NGO Män which focuses on engaging men in discussions on gender equality and combating gender violence. Politicians such as Foreign Minister Margot Wallström, former Culture Minister Alice Bah Kuhnke and Deputy Prime Minister Isabella Lövin regularly speak up for women's rights, as do young singers Zara Larsson, Tove Lo, and First Aid Kit.

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Biggest women's rights story?

On 14 June 2019, hundreds of thousands of women took to the streets to demand higher pay and equal rights. It will go down as the largest political demonstration in Switzerland's recent history. The strike came exactly 28 years after the first ever nationwide women's strike in 1991.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

There is no such thing as one main obstacle to women's rights in Switzerland. Each setback affects every individual differently. But there are areas where Switzerland most clearly needs improvement.

Women only got the right to vote in 1971, making Switzerland one of the last European countries to enshrine universal suffrage in the legal code. Up until 1985, women needed approval from a male relative to open bank accounts or work. Progress towards equal rights at home and in the public sphere is a slow, uphill battle in this country. It was only in 2005 that women were legally entitled to paid maternity leave. Women earn 19% less than their male counterparts on average. Every two weeks, a woman is killed as a result of domestic violence. The fact that hundreds of thousands of women protested in a country of about 8.5 million inhabitants is colossal, but given how much the country lags when it comes to equal rights, it is also unsurprising.

If we trace these obstacles back to their source, representation in government plays a huge role for a direct democracy like Switzerland. Women only make up 33% of MPs and 15.2% of senators. There is no official quota for female representation for the seven members of the federal government. While equal salary is a legal requirement for companies with over one hundred employees, only 1% of Swiss employees work for companies this large.

Outstanding feminist voices?

At the moment, Flavia Kleiner is making Swiss and European headlines. Along with a few friends, she spearheaded a democratic movement called Operation Libero. Their main goal is to fight right-wing populists in Switzerland. Tackling the rise of the SVP/UDC, the anti-immigrant, anti-EU party and largest political force in the country that won a majority of votes in the 2015 Swiss federal election, is one of Operation Libero's top priorities. Kleiner is also fighting for equal representation and equal rights, not only for women but for minorities from all walks of life. This is the kind of intersectional feminism that Switzerland will need to defeat the SVP in the federal elections in October 2019.

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UkraineDaria
Sukharchuk**Biggest women's rights story?**

Ukraine, despite having shared most of its history with Russia, is on a path of its own when it comes to women's rights progress. The latter is largely defined by two processes: post-Maidan development, the so-called "dignity revolution", which, for many people, means a more open society and a rejection of the outdated rules that were inherited from the Soviet Union. One example is a list of approximately 400 professions forbidden to women (like train conductor or ship captain), which was abolished in 2017 but still exists in Russia. Another significant event in recent years was a 2016 social media flash mob under the hashtag "Я не боюсь сказать" (I am not afraid to say it), with which women shared their experiences of sexual violence -- from sexual harassment in the street to domestic violence and rape -- and which spread far beyond Ukrainian social media, and into the Russian-speaking sphere, ultimately encompassing all the former USSR republics. The second defining characteristic of this process is the ongoing war with Russia-backed separatists in the east of the country.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

The separatist movement has propelled many nationalist groups, who often espouse far-right views, into the limelight. They have attempted to monopolize the Ukrainian national idea, and proclaim that everybody who criticizes them -- or Ukrainian history, for that matter -- is an enemy of the nation, much like Russia alleges. Thanks to their war hero ethos, these right-wing groups are often allowed to attack feminist and LGBT+ groups without repercussions. This has impacted public discourse, and many feminist initiatives are confronted with the question whether Ukraine, a country at war, can really afford to concern itself with such "minor" matters. However, as many Ukrainian feminists point out, 56% of the country's population is female -- which means that women's rights cannot possibly be branded as minor. The gender pay gap has stalled at 25%, and there are several million single mothers in the country.

Outstanding feminist voices?

Authors like **Tamara Martseniuk**, a sociologist from Kyiv, who recently published a book entitled "Why you shouldn't be afraid of feminists" are a must read for a comprehensive overview of feminism in Ukraine. The **Gender museum** in Kharkiv also shows different aspects of Ukrainian history (like World War 2 and the Nazi occupation) through the eyes of women.

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Biggest women's rights story?

Abortion is legal in most circumstances in the United Kingdom, but due to devolved powers the law doesn't extend to Northern Ireland. Instead, women there either carry out an unwanted pregnancy, or travel overseas to have the procedure. But since voters in the Republic of Ireland decided to legalize abortion in a referendum in May 2018, and Northern Ireland's High Court ruled that the country's law is not compatible with the EU Convention of Human Rights, MPs in Westminster are seeking to reform the law to allow Northern Irish women to terminate pregnancies on home soil. It's not only symbolic that women across the same nation have access to the same laws -- lives depend on it.

Biggest obstacle to equal rights for women?

It's a widespread belief that women already have ultimate equal rights in the U.K. It may be true -- on paper. We have equal pay laws, anti-discrimination laws and a government **funding free sanitary products** in schools. But with so far left to go to have a level playing field for parenting, in the workplace and in protecting women from domestic violence (two women are killed each week by a current or former partner in England and Wales), it's this belief that holds us back.

Outstanding feminist voices?

There are too many outstanding feminist voices in Britain to write in one paragraph. But to put in writing just a few: Otegha K. Uwagba, writer and founder of **Women Who**; Gina Martin, who successfully campaigned to get upskirting to be a criminal offence; Dr Charlotte Proudman, a game-changing lawyer representing everybody from FGM survivors to sexual harassment claimants; author and activist Charlie Craggs; journalist and author Charlie Brinkhurst-Cuff; the brilliant late Northern Irish journalist Lyra McKee.

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