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Reproductive rights in peripheral regions of Lithuania: the case of teenage motherhood

Adolescent fertility rate (AFR) in Lithuania is 2-4 times higher than AFR in the countries of Northern and Western Europe. Furthermore, there is a high degree of regional differentiation within the country – AFR is significantly higher in peripheral rural regions and lower in the municipalities of major cities. In this paper we aim to investigate the reasons behind the spatial differentiation of adolescent fertility and explore subjective experiences of teenage motherhood in peripheral regions of Lithuania. Following recent literature about the determinants of adolescent fertility (Lindberg et al. 2012; Santelli et al. 2017) we focus on the effect of structural socio-economic inequalities and sexuality education. Additionally, we examine the role men play in this process. We employ a mixed methods approach. Firstly, we apply mathematical-statistical geo-analysis on fertility data (vital statistics on births to mothers aged 15-19). Secondly, we analyse semi-structured interviews conducted in districts with high AFR: 20 interviews with girls who had their child(ren) in adolescence and 24

interviews with social workers, schools' representatives, public health specialists. Our analysis indicates that the state "fails" to ensure reproductive rights and to an extent – basic human rights of Lithuanian teenage girls in rural areas at every step of their transition to adulthood and motherhood: social and economic security of children is not insured (most teenage mothers come from socially and economically deprived families); sexuality education in schools is inadequate, often focused on engraining negative attitudes towards abortion; there is no special provision or support for teenage mothers after the child is born. Research project Spatial differentiation of adolescent fertility in Lithuania: socioeconomic environment, the role of sexual education and individual experiences (financed by the Lithuanian Research Council, contract No. S-MIP-17-115).

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