

Advance sexual and reproductive freedom as an MEP!



What do we mean by sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)?

SRHR encompass all rights related to sexuality and parenthood. When SRHR are realised, people are free and able to decide if, when and with whom to have sex; they have safe, healthy, consensual, pleasurable relationships; they have the means to decide whether and when to become pregnant, continue a pregnancy, become parents, and have the number of children they want; free from discrimination, coercion and violence. The realisation of these rights depends on legislation and access to essential information and healthcare services, from comprehensive sexuality education, sexual health services, contraception and abortion care, to healthcare services related to fertility, pregnancy and childbirth (see the Guttmacher-Lancet Commission's [definition](#) of SRHR).

Why do SRHR matter?

SRHR are human rights, and essential to leading a free, safe and healthy life. SRHR are critical to achieving gender equality, as they are a precondition to women and men having equal control over their bodies and lives, and equal access to opportunities in all areas of life. SRHR are also intrinsically linked to the fight against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Nobody should be coerced to have sex without their consent or to continue pregnancies against their will.

Why is access to SRHR unequal?

SRHR are far from universally accessible. Throughout the world, and even within Europe, access to abortion and other reproductive rights vary greatly, and can be restricted by legislation, policy and administrative barriers, insufficient public spending, a lack of political will, stigma and the influence of anti-choice movements, etc. (see [Abortion Atlas](#)).

Access is even harder for populations, who suffer from systemic and intersecting discrimination and inequalities. Situations of armed conflicts, humanitarian crises and environmental disasters also disrupt the provision of SRH services and increase the prevalence of SGBV.

Why are SRHR under threat?

The rise of ultra-conservative, illiberal political actors and movements poses a direct threat to gender equality, women's and LGBTIQ+ rights. SRHR are often the first rights to be attacked by authoritarian, coercive, misogynistic forces, who not only restrict reproductive rights such as abortion, but also attack the civil society organisations (CSOs) and (women) human rights defenders ((W)HRDs) who defend them.

What can you do?

The European Parliament (EP) has historically been the EU institution that stood up the most for SRHR (see [Matić Report](#)), and this needs to continue. The EP has a lot of power, from exercising scrutiny over the executive; holding budgetary power; legislative and political power, proposing and voting progressive legislation and bringing important issues into the limelight through reports, resolutions, hearings, events, studies; to meaningfully engaging with, supporting, and showing solidarity with diverse civil society representatives.

As an MEP, you can take many actions in a wide range of policy areas of EU competences, to advance SRHR in the next five years. We count on your support.

Prioritise gender equality in the next EU institutions

The level of prioritisation of gender equality and SRHR in the next legislature will depend on the way EU institutions are structured.

- **European Parliament:** Support the renewal and strengthening of the FEMM Committee, the re-appointment of Gender Focal Points responsible for gender mainstreaming in every Committee, and get involved in relevant intergroups and informal cross-party networks to champion SRHR, LGBTIQ+ rights and gender equality.
- **European Commission:** Support the renewal of the mandate of a European Commissioner dedicated to (Gender) Equality and ensure all appointed Commissioners support gender equality and SRHR. Support the renewal of the mandate of a European Commissioner dedicated to international partnerships, and avoid merging it with any other portfolios.
- **Council of the EU:** Support the creation of a Council Working Party dedicated to (Gender) Equality, or at least the strengthening of an Equality Council within EPSCO, while ensuring gender mainstreaming throughout all Council configurations.

Adopt an EU budget that advances SRHR

During your mandate, you will decide on the EU long-term budget (Multiannual Financial Framework 2028–2034) and vote on Annual Budgets. It will be crucial to **mainstream a gender perspective** across all EU funding instruments, and to guarantee sufficient **targeted funding** to advance gender equality, women's rights and SRHR.

- **Ensure smaller, grassroots, community-based, and more informal CSOs and movements have equal access to funding opportunities.** The EU should provide core, long-term, flexible funding to women's rights organisations, feminist and youth-led movements in and outside of the EU.
- Through the **Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)** amended (or new) regulation: **ensure an increased focus on human development, health, SRHR and gender equality**, with increased and targeted funding for those issues. Safeguard international cooperation principles and avoid diverting international cooperation from its original objectives, to focus almost exclusively on self-serving interests.
- Through the **Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV)** new regulation: **ensure sufficient financial support for CSOs and (women) human rights defenders ((W)HRDs)**, who advance women's rights and SRHR.
- Through the **EU4Health** and **European Social Fund +** new regulations: **ensure funding to reduce health inequalities and improve access to SRHR.**

Defend SRHR as EU values

EU founding values include human rights, democracy and the rule of law. However, the rise of authoritarian, coercive and misogynistic movements and governments in Europe threatens these values and results in attacks on women's and LGBTIQ+ people's rights, as well as those who defend them.

- Firmly **condemn any attacks on EU values**, including on women's rights, SRHR and bodily autonomy. Closely monitor and **counter the rising anti-gender and anti-choice backlash and disinformation** in the EU – online and offline. Ensure that the EU does not fund any anti-gender and anti-choice actors.
- Call on the EU to **protect its values holistically**, and strengthen existing mechanisms to ensure Member States comply with the rule of law, fundamental rights, and civic space.
- Ensure that the EU guarantees an enabling **civic space** and supports CSOs and (W)HRDs, including those advancing women's rights, through the adoption of a Civil Society Strategy, a Protection Mechanism for HRDs in the EU, adequate funding, and political support to (W)HRDs under attack.
- Hold the Council of the EU accountable to build up on the **Ministerial Declaration** on the guarantee of SRHR in the EU; and to **amend the EU Treaties** according to the European Parliament **proposals**, to strengthen EU competences on SRHR and GBV, and enshrine the right to abortion in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Advance gender equality and combat sexual and gender-based violence

Equality between men and women is a core EU value. The EU has committed to promote gender equality in all its policies through gender mainstreaming; and to combat sexual and gender-based violence, which disproportionately affect women and gender-diverse people. The EU funds organisations promoting gender equality and combating SGBV in Europe.

- Call for the **renewal of a comprehensive EU Gender Equality Strategy**, with a **stand-alone pillar on SRHR**. The Strategy should contain strong commitments, clear indicators, and hold all EU institutions and Member States accountable.
- Call on the European Commission to continue **exchanges of best practices on SRHR** between Member States and civil society (see **Mutual Learning Seminar**); and to issue Recommendations to Member States on the provision of SRHR and CSE.
- Ensure the full implementation of the **Directive on violence against women and domestic violence**, including its provisions on SRH for victims, and awareness-raising on consent; and plan for its revision to **criminalise rape with a consent-based definition**, and other forms of SGBV, and **provide comprehensive sexuality education** as a key prevention measure. Call on the European Commission and Council of the EU to prevent and **combat all forms of SGBV, including violations of women's SRHR**, gynaecological and obstetric violence and the denial of abortion care; and to implement the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention.

Guarantee inclusion and non-discrimination for specific groups

The principle of non-discrimination applies to all EU policies. The EU should address the needs of all people without discrimination¹, paying particular attention to those affected by intersecting forms of discrimination. Tailored actions are needed to guarantee access to SRHR for specific population groups, such as women, young people, LGBTIQ+ people, people living with disabilities or HIV, sex workers, Roma people and other ethnic minorities, migrant people, among others.

- Meaningfully **engage with diverse civil society representatives**, involve the people concerned and consult with community-based organisations in decision-making processes.
- Call for the **renewal of all other EU Strategies linked to the Union of Equality Agenda**, i.e. the LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy, the Youth Strategy, the Roma Strategy, the Anti-Racism Strategy, etc. All these strategies should also **address the specific challenges that each group may face regarding the realisation of their SRHR**.
- **Guarantee the SRHR of undocumented migrants, refugees and displaced persons** within EU migration and humanitarian policies, assess gender-based violence in asylum claims, and ensure the safe reporting of crimes and access to support services for undocumented migrants.

Guarantee the SRHR of young people

The EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 focuses specifically on youth at risk of marginalisation and discrimination and mentions the need for guidance and support on health and relationships. **Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is critical** for children and young people's physical and mental well-being, to form healthy relationships based on respect, consent, and equality, free from harmful social norms and SGBV.

- Call on the European Commission to **renew the EU Youth Strategy** and ensure it promotes comprehensive sexuality education; to issue Recommendations to Member States on the provision of CSE; and support CSOs providing it.

Reduce gender-based inequalities in healthcare and social policies

Health, including sexual and reproductive health (SRH), is a fundamental right essential to people's well-being. The EU can complement and support national health policies, focusing on **improving public health, preventing diseases, and reducing health inequalities**, giving equal access to high-quality healthcare for all Europeans, especially the most affected by systemic inequalities. **Through its social and care policies, the EU can play a crucial role in advancing reproductive justice**, to ensure that all people can have the number of children they want and have the means to raise them in good conditions.

- Call for the development of an **EU Health Strategy** that prioritises improving access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services, preventing STIs/HIV through CSE, and reducing health inequalities related to gender and other social determinants of health, including migration status.
- Support initiatives aiming at **harmonising and improving access to SRHR across the EU**.
- Hold the EU accountable to fully implement its **European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, European Care Strategy** and other relevant commitments, promoting gender equality, work-life balance, childcare and support to children, and long-term care.



1. On grounds of sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, sexual characteristics, ethnic, religious or socio-economic background, age, disability, health status, or any other grounds

Connect environmental and social justice in EU climate action

The climate crisis is caused by **unequitable power systems**, and disproportionately impacts women and communities marginalised by intersecting systems of oppression. The EU must consider and tackle both these aspects throughout its climate action.

- Ensure EU responses to the climate crisis are grounded in, and **prioritise, human rights and gender equality, including access to SRHR**, and seek to alleviate rather than reinforce existing inequalities. Mainstream gender equality across all efforts to address the climate crisis.
- Renew **European Parliament's support for decisive steps to reduce EU's greenhouse gas emissions, protect the planet and preserve its resources**, and call on the EU and its Member States to assist low- and middle-income countries in responding and adapting to the climate crisis.

Advance the universal realisation of SRHR through global and external policies

Through its external policies and funding instruments, the EU committed to promote and protect human rights and democracy, and provide international cooperation and humanitarian aid. However, in the past years, EU external action has been more and more diverted from its original objectives to focus almost exclusively on security and borders, and more recently on infrastructures, trade and opening opportunities for the European private sector. Support from MEPs will be important to ensure that the EU lives up to its values:

- **Support the adoption of a fully-fledged EU intersectional Feminist Foreign Policy**, applying a gender-transformative, intersectional and decolonial approach to all areas of EU external action: human

rights, international cooperation, humanitarian aid, but also accession, migration, security, climate, trade, economic policies, etc. As a first necessary step towards a fully-fledged EU intersectional Feminist Foreign Policy, **the current Gender Action Plan (III) should be renewed (GAP IV) and expanded upon, and adequate resources should be allocated** to its implementation. To ensure this renewal and expansion, MEPs could work on an own-initiative report on the GAP, ahead of the end of GAP III in 2027.

- **Support the renewal of the Youth Action Plan, and the Human Rights and Democracy Action Plan**, with for the latter a better inclusion of SRHR, LGBTIQ+ rights, women's rights and gender equality in those frameworks. Call on the European Commission and Council of the EU to continue **to protect and support (W)HRDs and CSOs** promoting human rights, gender equality, SRHR, and combating SGBV in third countries.
- **Monitor the implementation of the Global Health Strategy** in relation to SRHR, including through an own-initiative report around its mid-term implementation in 2026.
- **Urge the EU to work towards the universal realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, including SDGs 3.7 and 5.6 focused on SRHR; and leverage the momentum of the 30th anniversaries of the **International Conference on Population and Development** and the **Beijing Platform for Action** to push for universal recognition of and respect for SRHR.



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About IPPF EN: The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) is a global healthcare provider and a leading advocate of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for all. IPPF European Network is one of IPPF's six regional networks. IPPF EN works with its members and partners in over 40 countries across Europe and Central Asia. IPPF EN cares for all people across Europe, especially the most socially excluded, and recognises their right to lead free and safe sexual and reproductive lives, free from harm and discrimination.