



# The upcoming Presidencies: An opportunity to advance gender equality and SRHR

May 2026

Over the last few years, the EU has been facing many challenges in the realisation of its core values: the rule of law, democracy, human rights, and equality, especially gender equality. Women’s rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) have come under increasing pressure, both within and outside the EU. The upcoming period is an opportunity for the EU to reflect on the direction it wants to take, the values it should stand for, and what more it can do to defend them.

The EU should strive towards a world where everyone can enjoy the same rights and lead free and safe lives, free from discrimination, coercion, and violence. In this crossroads moment, the upcoming three Council of the EU Presidencies – Ireland, Lithuania, and Greece – have a critical role to play to uphold EU values. We call on them to **adopt a feminist approach** and show strong leadership to further advance gender equality and women’s rights, including SRHR, in the EU and beyond.

### SRHR under threat: the urgency to act

SRHR are a precondition for achieving gender equality and democracy, yet they are far from being realised. According to the [2025 EIGE Gender Equality Index](#), full gender equality in the EU is still at least 50 years away. Due to a wide range of legal, policy, practical, economic, social, and cultural barriers, **access to SRHR varies widely** within and between Member States and remains inaccessible or heavily restricted in several contexts. The current global context is marked by a **renewed backlash against gender equality**, driven by transnational anti-gender movements targeting women’s rights, LGBTIQ people’s rights, reproductive freedom, democracy, and the EU itself.

Reports highlight the growing influence of these actors across political, religious, and civil society spaces, and increased funding to anti-gender actors in Europe. At the same time, the increasing rollback of rights in the United States, including drastic cuts to development assistance, together with a shift within the EU towards security, trade and competitiveness priorities, is reshaping political and budgetary priorities. In this context, it is essential that EU commitments to gender equality and SRHR are preserved and strengthened, including through sustained and adequate funding. Investing in women’s rights and gender equality is not only a matter of fundamental rights, but also for fostering peace, social cohesion, and sustainable development.



Anina Takeeff for IPPF x Fine Acts

# IPPF EN recommendations to the next Presidencies to lead the EU on a feminist path

## 1. Adopt a feminist EU political agenda

### Strong political leadership for gender equality

The Council should build on the commitments of previous Presidencies to advance gender equality and should explicitly recognise advancing SRHR as a core component of these efforts. The Council's working structure should reflect these commitments to ensure a strong institutional backing for these objectives. **The upcoming presidencies must:**

- **Institutionalise a Council Working Party dedicated to Equality**, including Gender Equality, or at least officially include Equality in the Employment, Social Policy, Health, and Consumer Affairs (EPSCO) Working Party;
- **Organise regular meetings of Equality Ministers**, to discuss gender equality issues, including SRHR.

### Feminist policy-making

Feminism should be at the heart of the EU political agenda, both in EU's domestic and external action. **The upcoming Presidencies must:**

- Adopt a **feminist and intersectional approach to EU policymaking** by showing political willingness to make gender equality and SRHR a key priority in all EU policies, actions, and funding instruments; mainstreaming them in all relevant Council work, and ensuring visibility, including through high-level Presidency events;
- **Take an intersectional approach** to address the specific vulnerabilities of LGBTIQ people, racialised, Muslim and Roma women, undocumented migrant women, women with precarious or dependent residence status, women with disabilities, sex workers, and other groups at heightened risk;
- Adopt strong **political declarations** reaffirming support for SRHR, building on the joint Ministerial Declaration on the guarantee of SRHR in the EU issued under the Spanish Presidency, the 2024 Joint Letter to the European Commission by 17 Member States on the continuation and strengthening of gender and LGBTIQ equality in the European Union, and the letter of support for My Voice My Choice.

Carolyn Taylor for CoGenerate x Fine Acts



## Counter opposition in the Council

Implementing feminist policy-making also means countering opposition to gender equality. The backlash on women’s rights has already strongly impacted the Council of the EU’s work:

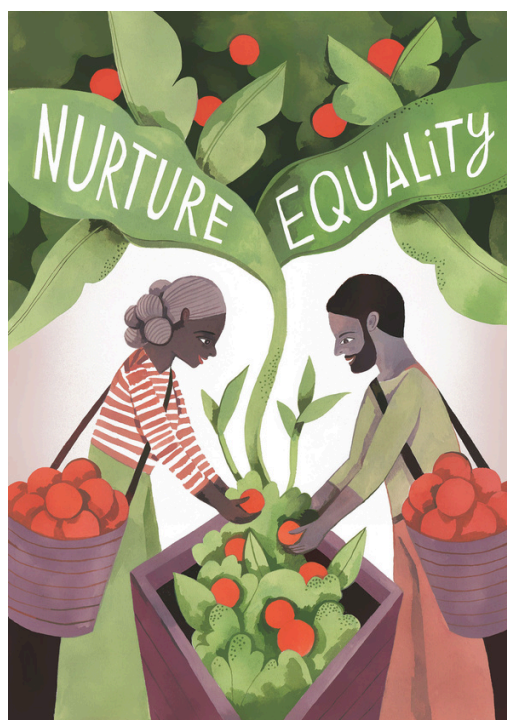
EU Member States have been divided, with some countries actively preventing the adoption of Council Conclusions because of references to gender equality or SRHR. This dangerous strategy, carried out by a minority of Member States, weakens the Council’s cohesion and undermines the EU’s capacity to advance gender equality. **The upcoming Presidencies must:**

- Ensure that gender equality and SRHR remain **non-negotiable priorities** for the EU and its Member States, and engage with all Member States to build consensus and progress on these questions;
- **Monitor and condemn**, at the highest political level, any retrogressive measures affecting gender equality and SRHR in EU Member States and in partner countries.

## Work with and support civil society organisations

Civil society organisations (CSOs) working on gender equality and SRHR have a unique role to play in promoting these issues, through their outreach to local communities and their advocacy. They are on the front line in countering the backlash against fundamental rights, including SRHR. However, many CSOs, including local and grassroots organisations, lack adequate resources and support to carry out their work and, in some contexts, face direct attacks. Women’s rights and SRHR organisations (WROs) and women human rights defenders (WHRDs) face even higher levels of hostility and repression, including from governments. particularly women, of basic rights, undermining inclusive democratic participation. **The upcoming Presidencies must:**

- **Support, protect, consult, and give visibility** to diverse civil society actors defending gender equality and SRHR, particularly those representing marginalised communities;
- **Work with CSOs** to actively counter the opposition to gender equality and SRHR, and the shrinking civic space.



Luisa Rivera for Fine Acts

## 2. Support the adoption of policies advancing gender equality and SRHR

On top of strong political leadership, Presidencies need to advance ambitious policies in favour of gender equality and SRHR. Several EU policy areas are particularly relevant for the promotion of SRHR within the EU, including fundamental rights, democracy, civic space, and the rule of law, health, gender equality and combating gender-based violence. The next Presidencies must also promote gender equality and SRHR in third countries through its external action, through international cooperation, human rights promotion, neighbourhood, trade, and climate policies. Finally, to ensure effective implementation, the three next Presidencies must ensure that adequate financial resources are allocated to gender equality and SRHR in both the EU's internal and external funding instruments.

### EU domestic action

*Fundamental rights, democracy, civic space, and the rule of law*

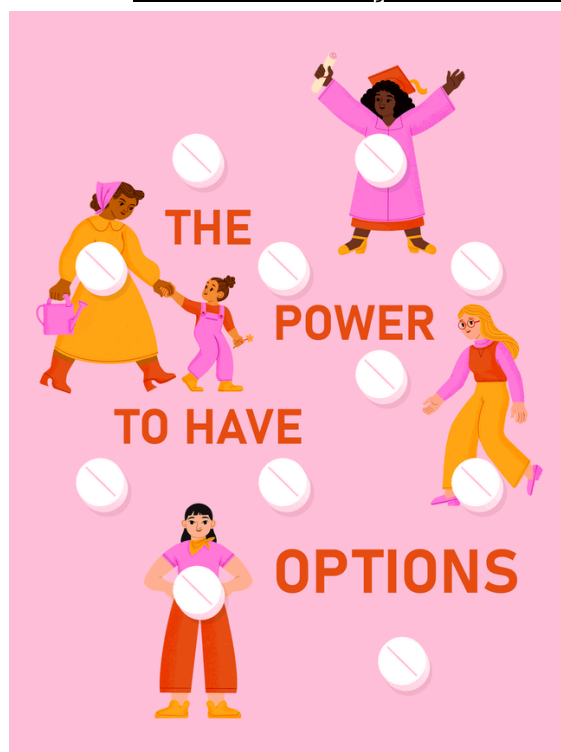
SRHR are human rights and should be defended as EU values. Their protection depends on respect for the rule of law, as SRHR are among the first rights to be undermined when the rule of law collapses. CSOs and WHRDs protecting SRHR are increasingly under attack as well, facing threats, intimidation, and violence, from both state and non-state actors. **The upcoming Presidencies must:**

- Ensure an **enabling civic space**, support the implementation of the EU Civil Society Strategy, including the creation of a Civil Dialogue Platform, with particular attention paid to those who defend SRHR, women's rights, gender equality, and LGBTIQ people's rights;
- Ensure particular attention to combating anti-gender and gendered disinformation in the implementation of the Democracy Shield;
- Work towards the inclusion of the right to abortion and bodily autonomy in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, and SRHR in the EU Treaties;
- Use all the tools at their disposal to **ensure respect for EU values and apply sanctions whenever necessary, including:**
  - Monitor and **condemn any negative development** pertaining to women's rights in EU Member States; and broader EU values of fundamental rights, the rule of law, and democracy, including shrinking of the civic space, notably through so-called 'foreign agents' laws;
  - Address **breaches of the rule of law**, and related human rights violations, through the Rule of Law mechanism and infringement procedures;
  - Support the broadening of the **conditionality regime** to all EU funds, based on respect for the rule of law and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, and block EU funds going to Member States and organisations that do not respect these values, including gender equality and women's rights.

### Health

The Presidencies should aim to reduce gender and intersecting health inequalities; promote equal access to health care, including sexual and reproductive health care, in particular for vulnerable groups; address the specific health needs of key populations; and strengthen preventive measures, through health information and comprehensive sexuality education. **The upcoming Presidencies must:**

- Ensure that **essential sexual and reproductive health medicines** are included in the EU’s Critical Medicines List, including abortion medication, contraception, HIV antiretroviral medicines, and hormones necessary for gender-affirming therapy, in line with the WHO Essential Medicines List;
- Include **SRHR in upcoming Council Conclusions**, building on the example of EPSCO Council Conclusions on improving women’s and girls’ mental health by promoting gender equality, recognizing access to SRHR as essential in achieving the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health;
- Adopt EPSCO Council Conclusions on HIV prevention, testing and treatment, and revisit the 2004 Irish Declaration to reaffirm HIV/AIDS as a political priority;
- Advance and support the Commission’s initiative with the World Health Organisation to support Member States’ health action regarding SRHR by mapping practices and international frameworks.



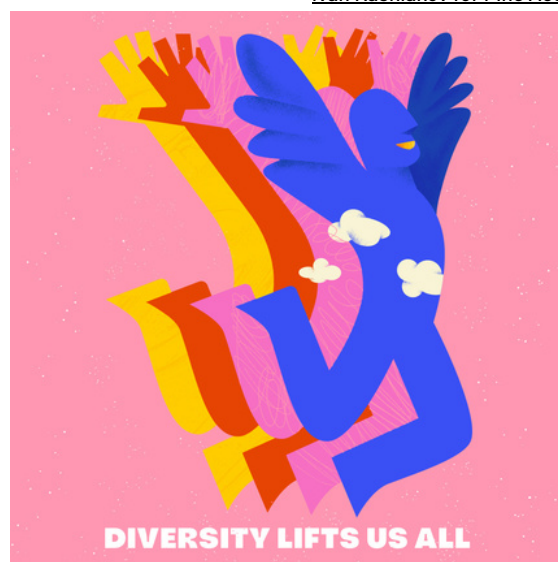
### Gender equality and gender-based violence

The EU is committed to improving gender equality and tackling gender-based violence, with SRHR being an integral component of both. Equality must remain at the center of the political agenda in this new mandate.

To progress towards gender equality, **the upcoming Presidencies must:**

- Adopt an ambitious **Trio Declaration on Gender Equality** – with commitments on SRHR;
- Implement the **EU Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030**, including exchanges on best practices and international standards on SRHR; and the **LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2026–2030**; Adopt Council Conclusions to fully endorse these strategies; and adopt national gender equality strategies by 2027 and national action plans to combat violence against women by 2029;

- **Implement the European Commission’s response to the “European Citizens’ Initiative My Voice My Choice: For Safe and Legal Abortion”** with a dedicated budget line under the ESF+ in the current and future MFF;
- Adopt Council Recommendations and/or encourage the European Commission to publish **Recommendations to Member States on SRHR**, comprehensive sexuality education, and the combating of obstetric and gynecological violence.



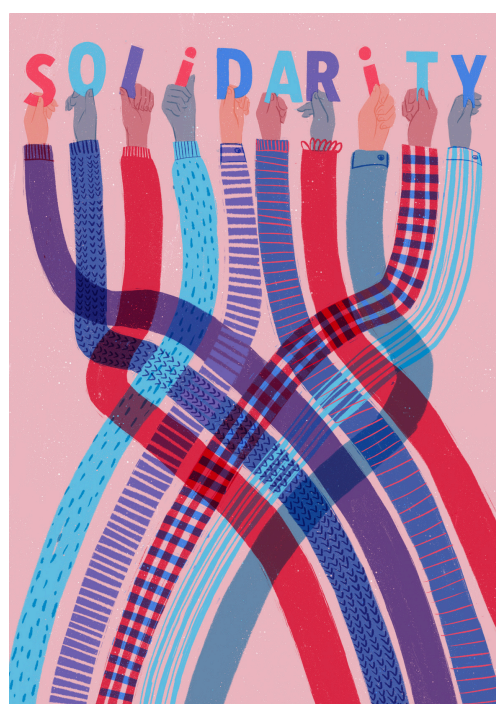
To tackle gender-based violence, **the upcoming Presidencies must:**

- **Implement the Directive on combating violence against women** by June 2027. Actively engage in implementation workshops and exchanges of best practices, aligning with inputs from civil society and international standards on comprehensive sexuality and consent education and access to SRH for victims;
- **Implement the revised EU Directive on victims’ rights** and support the **renewal of the EU Victims’ Rights Strategy**, with specific attention to SRH for victims;
- **Finalise the revision of the EU Directive on combating Child Sexual Abuse**, with a comprehensive definition of consent, the inclusion of comprehensive sexuality education, and access to SRHR for child victims, in line with the European Parliament’s position;
- Ensure that **the denial of SRHR, including safe and legal abortion, is recognised and addressed as a form of gender-based violence and a violation of fundamental rights**;
- Support an **EU-wide consent-based definition of rape**, in line with the Istanbul Convention, by encouraging the remaining five Member States to ratify it and urging those still relying on violence-based definitions to revise their legislation.

### EU external action

The EU has strong policy frameworks and funding to advance gender equality and SRHR, including the current EU Gender Action Plan III and the upcoming EU Gender Action Plan IV (GAP IV), the Global Health Strategy, and the new EU Global Health Resilience Initiative. SRHR are a core humanitarian need, including in armed conflicts, and must be adequately prioritised and resourced. Humanitarian responses should be inclusive and systematically engage and fund local women-led, girl-led, youth-led, SRHR and LGBTIQ organisations through flexible and long-term funding. Therefore, the next Presidencies must also ensure that gender equality and SRHR are protected in fragile and conflict-affected settings, including through the renewed EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security and through Global Gateway investments. **To do so, the upcoming Presidencies must:**

- **Adopt and implement an EU-wide intersectional feminist foreign policy**, applying a gender-transformative, intersectional, and decolonial approach across all areas of EU external action: human rights promotion, international cooperation, humanitarian aid, enlargement, migration, security, climate, trade, and economic policies, prioritising sustainable development over short-term political interests;
- **Monitor the implementation of key EU policy frameworks for SRHR**, including GAP III and GAP IV – due for adoption in Q2 2027, the Global Health Strategy, the fourth Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, and Global Gateway, while holding the Commission accountable for its commitments on SRHR through both political support and funding;
- **Ensure that GAP IV maintains the core principles of GAP III** – intersectionality, a human rights-based approach, and a gender-transformative approach – while strengthening SRHR through monitoring tools, and close consultation with civil society, including women’s rights organisations and feminist movements in partner countries. This should happen not only by **reaffirming SRHR as a standalone pillar** as it is now in GAP III, but also by **explicitly adopting the Guttmacher-Lancet definition of SRHR** to guarantee support to the full spectrum of SRHR services and rights<sup>2</sup>;
- Call for the **renewal of the fifth EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy and the second Youth Action Plan**, as these frameworks are essential for defining the EU’s priorities on democracy, human rights, SRHR, LGBTIQ rights, civil society and youth engagement;
- In humanitarian crises, ensure systematic integration of, and sufficient funding for SRHR, access to the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP), and strengthened prevention and response to gender-based violence, through the new **EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security**, and the ‘**SHIELD**’ flagship initiative under the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030;
- Strengthen political accountability for the **implementation of the EU Global Health Strategy** by adopting Council Conclusions that recognise SRHR as essential to achieving Universal Health Coverage, addressing persistent inequalities in access particularly for marginalised and vulnerable groups;
- Ensure that the **EU Global Health Resilience Initiative mainstreams SRHR** across preparedness, response, and health systems strengthening, including access to essential services in crisis and emergency settings.



Erica Borgato

### **Prioritise gender equality and SRHR in EU relations with partner countries:**

- **Prioritise human rights, gender equality and SRHR in all political dialogues** with partner regions, as in the EU–AU political dialogues – building on the [20th Human Rights Dialogue](#), and reinforcing implementation of the Maputo Protocol, and the AU Convention on Ending Violence against Women, in the context of the growing backlash, recognising that non-discrimination is a precondition for the enjoyment of all rights;
- **Strengthen oversight** of EU regional partnerships (Samoa Agreement, EU–Africa, AU–EU, ASEAN–EU, EU–CELAC) to ensure delivery on gender and SRHR commitments;
- **Monitor the [Pact for the Mediterranean](#)** to ensure alignment with human rights, gender equality, and non-discrimination;
- **Institutionalise youth and civil society participation** by integrating their inputs into bi-regional and multilateral processes through a permanent multi-stakeholder mechanism – in line with the EU–LAC CSOs [recommendations](#).

## **3. Adopt a feminist EU budget**

During the next Trio, the Council will continue negotiations on the new EU long-term budget Multiannual Financial Framework 2028–2034, while monitoring the implementation of the current MFF. In this context, it is essential to mainstream gender equality across all EU funding instruments and ensure sufficient, targeted, and predictable funding, to advance gender equality, women’s rights and SRHR, both within and outside the EU. This requires funding that is both predictable and accountable. While flexibility can support responsiveness to emerging challenges, it should not come at the expense of predictability, democratic oversight, and accountability, which are essential to ensure long-term impact. Moreover, access to funding for civil society organisations must be ensured, including for grassroots, community-based organisations and informal movements, in particular WROs and feminist and youth-led movements. **The upcoming Presidencies must:**

### **EU domestic funding**

- Adopt a strong **Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV+)** strand of the AgoraEU Programme, with a budget at least as high as the amount proposed by the European Commission; safeguarding budget lines and dedicated funding for equality, LGBTI people’s rights, gender equality and women’s rights including SRHR, and combating gender-based violence, and supporting CSOs including their advocacy activities.





- **Consider maintaining stand-alone programmes on health** (continuation of the EU4Health Programme) **and social inclusion** (continuation of the European Social Fund+). If merged into the European Competitiveness Fund, at least earmark funding for the pillars on health and social inclusion, to reduce health inequalities and improve access to sexual and reproductive health care, including dedicated funding for My Voice My Choice.

### EU external funding

- **Ensure that the forthcoming GAP IV includes binding financial commitments** for gender equality and SRHR, with adequate and earmarked funding implemented in full respect of fundamental rights, equality, non-discrimination, and gender mainstreaming, and with strong accountability across programming, implementation, and monitoring;
- Ensure that the **Global Europe Instrument** remains aligned with the EU Treaties and the European Consensus on Development, prioritising poverty eradication and the reduction of inequalities, while safeguarding the proposed EUR 200 billion allocation and the EU commitment to spend 0.7% of their gross national income (GNI) on official development assistance (ODA), as currently included in the proposal; Maintain and strengthen the ODA target within the instrument, increasing it to 93% in line with the NDICI regulation, and ensure appropriate oversight by the co-legislators on any adjustments to ODA targets;
- Guarantee predictability of funding by **reinstating spending targets** as in the NDICI regulation, and ring-fenced amounts for programmable and non-programmable envelopes should be established to balance predictability with flexibility. We

recommend that 70% of the Global Europe Instrument go to programmable envelopes and 30% to non-programmable envelopes;

- Make funding available through concrete targets, which are currently missing:
  - **Dedicate 85% of all EU ODA to programmes that have gender equality as one of their objectives** (OECD marker G1 or G2);
  - **Dedicate 20% of ODA to gender-targeted projects** (OECD marker G2);
  - **Dedicate at least 5% of ODA to supporting women’s rights organisations**, as local WROs and feminist movements are critical actors to change harmful gender and social norms, protect rights, uphold democracy, and achieve gender equality and sustainable development, yet remain critically underfunded with less than 1% of ODA directed to them (OECD);
- On top of the spending targets on gender equality, include a **human development target** in the Global Europe Instrument. The EU should scale up ambitions and commit to a target of 50% of ODA that should contribute to social inclusion and human development, including basic social services, such as health and SRHR.
- **Strengthen support to the UNFPA Supplies Partnership and the Team Europe Initiative** on SRHR in Sub-Saharan Africa as key instruments to advance access to SRHR, ensuring continuity post-2027 and building on the achievements in a Team Europe approach.

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