



TIME TO ACT

OPPORTUNITIES FOR AN EU FEMINIST
FOREIGN POLICY THAT CHAMPIONS SEXUAL
AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS



IPPF International
Planned Parenthood
Federation
European Network

rfsu



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Access to and respect for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are critical for a range of other human rights and for sustainable development in all regions of the world. The EU has the power to contribute to positive development by being a strong global voice for SRHR and by allocating much needed funding to the SRHR sector globally.

This report seeks to build upon and further expand on the SRHR aspects of CONCORD Sweden's report '**The Game Changer: How a feminist foreign policy can transform societies**'.¹ This publication elaborates on four approaches that we believe have to be central in a feminist foreign policy that centres on SRHR:

- ➔ **The transformative approach - looking at root causes:**
A feminist foreign policy that puts SRHR at the centre needs to analyse and tackle the gender stereotypes and restrictive social norms around femininity, masculinity and sexuality that directly limit and violate individuals' SRHR.¹
- ➔ **The intersectional approach - Leaving No One Behind:**
Girls, women and LGBTQI+ persons are often regarded and treated as homogeneous groups, which is far from reality. For the fulfilment of SRHR, an intersectional approach that analyses and reveals how multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination interact is needed.
- ➔ **The holistic approach - health system strengthening:**
The poor access to, and quality of health services, remains a key obstacle for SRHR, especially when it comes to discriminated groups. SRH services and information must be systematically integrated into health systems and UHC frameworks.
- ➔ **The rights-holder approach - civil society as critical contributors to change:** A feminist foreign policy approach for SRHR should support and engage with a broad range of actors, including SRHR and human rights defenders, feminist, women's, girls' and LGBTQI+ activists, and progressive faith-based actors.

This report also puts forward concrete recommendations to the EU Commission, the Council of the EU and the European Parliament on how these institutions can strengthen and advance SRHR in EU's external relations. **The report recommends that all EU institutions should:**

- ➔ **Be strong global voices for SRHR**, including the most contested areas, such as safe abortion, comprehensive sexuality education, and LGBTQI+ rights.
- ➔ **Monitor the implementation of the NDICI** – instrument and funding allocations to gender equality and SRHR, using tools like joint programming and Team Europe Initiatives.
- ➔ **Commit to and monitor the implementation of the Gender Action Plan (GAP III).**

1. INTRODUCTION

អ្វីជាគោលដៅនៃការអប់រំ?

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1. INTRODUCTION

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are part of individual freedoms and a prerequisite for all of us to live healthy lives, free from coercion and violence. They are therefore critical to uphold democracy and EU values. The EU should strive towards a world where everyone can enjoy the same rights, and lead free and safe private and family lives, free from sexism, coercion, and violence.

When people have access to contraceptives, comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), safe abortion, and the power to decide over their own lives and bodies, only then can they actively participate in the social, economic and political developments of their communities. Hence, access to and respect for SRHR are a precondition for a range of other human rights and for sustainable development in all regions of the world.

The EU has the power to contribute to a positive development by allocating much needed funding to the SRHR sector globally, and by being a strong global voice for SRHR, including for the most contested SRHR areas.

This report takes its starting point in CONCORD Sweden's report 'The Game Changer: How a feminist foreign policy can transform societies'¹ published in March 2023, to which RFSU contributed. CONCORD Sweden's report seeks to encourage a dialogue between policymakers and civil society on how the EU can step up the work on gender equality globally. RFSU's report seeks to build upon and expand on the SRHR aspects of the CONCORD Sweden report and provide concrete suggestions for how the EU can be a more progressive global leader for SRHR. More specifically, with this report, RFSU would like to:

- 1. Further define the approaches and aspects of a feminist foreign policy*, that RFSU believes are key for the fulfilment of SRHR.**
- 2. Showcase how SRHR could be prioritised in EU financing and programming by providing concrete examples.**
- 3. Provide recommendations on how EU institutions can become stronger and more progressive global leaders and funders of SRHR.**

These concrete recommendations to the EU institutions in section 5 of the report, have been developed in close dialog with the International Planned Parenthood (IPPF) European Network, the consortium Countdown2030 and Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung (DSW).

In this publication, we sometimes refer to women and girls, or women, girls and LGBTQI+ persons, or women and girls in all their diversity – remaining mindful, however, that gender is a constructed, non-static concept, and always recognising that intersecting factors other than gender also matter.

* There is no agreed upon or standardised format that outlines what a feminist foreign and development policy should look like, and the differences between existing policies are plenty. In this report, we make use of the suggestion provided by CONCORD Sweden's Game Changer report, where it is suggested that a true feminist foreign and development policy is: 1) gender-transformative, 2) intersectional, 3) grounded in a human rights-based approach, 4) strengthens local leadership, and 5) dependent on strong global leadership.

2. WHY DO WE NEED AN EU FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY THAT SUPPORTS SRHR?



2. WHY DO WE NEED AN EU FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY THAT SUPPORTS SRHR?

SRHR are part of the values on which the EU is founded. As long as women and girls do not decide if or when to have children, are married off or suffer severe injuries due to childbirth, their participation in society will remain limited. By investing in SRHR, the EU will contribute to people being able to live healthier lives and actively contribute to gender equality and a democratic and economic development.²

Ensuring a strong voice and support from the EU and its Member States on SRHR has never been more critical. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and fragilized access to healthcare, including SRH services. Today, we see an articulated opposition to gender equality, SRHR, and the rights of LGBTQI+ people, Europe is no exception. Trends of de-democratisation have emerged along with threats to previous gender equality policy achievements, including in SRHR.³ The hard-won gains for women's rights and LGBTQI+ people are currently under attack in fields as diverse as political participation, the labour market and care work.³

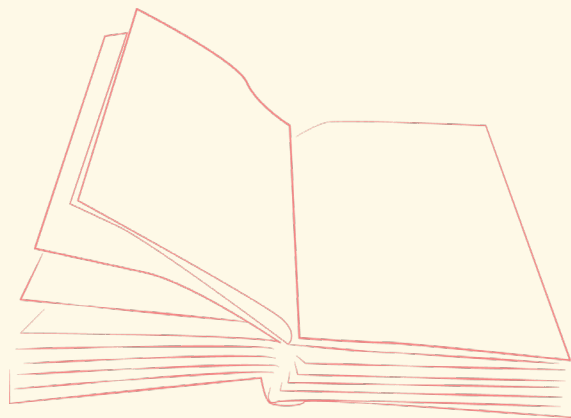
Due to a wide range of barriers, access to SRH services and information varies widely within and between countries, which has devastating effects on the lives and health of people. Currently:

- ➔ **Approximately 300 000 women a year die from complications related to pregnancy, childbirth and unsafe abortion.⁴**
- ➔ **164 million women who want to delay or avoid pregnancy and are not using any contraceptive method.⁵**
- ➔ **In sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion of women who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods continues to be among the lowest in the world at 56%. The largest gaps in meeting the need for family planning are among young women and adolescents.⁵**
- ➔ **Around 45% of all abortions are unsafe, of which 97% take place in developing countries.⁶ Unsafe abortion is a leading cause of maternal deaths and morbidities.**
- ➔ **1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.⁷**
- ➔ **More than 3 million girls are estimated to be at risk of female genital mutilation (FGM) every year.⁸**

The definition of SRHR

In 2019, the Lancet published a landmark Commission on SRHR which presented an integrated definition of SRHR. The Guttmacher Lancet Commission defines SRHR as “a state of physical, emotional, mental, and social wellbeing in relation to all aspects of sexuality and reproduction, not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction, or infirmity. All individuals have a right to make decisions governing their bodies and to access services that support that right”.⁹ The rights are based on the human rights of all individuals to:

- Have their bodily integrity, privacy and personal autonomy respected
- Freely define their own sexuality, including sexual orientation and gender identity and expression
- Decide whether and when to be sexually active
- Choose their sexual partners
- Have safe and pleasurable sexual experiences
- Decide whether, when and whom to marry
- Decide whether, when and by what means to have a child or children, and how many children to have
- Have access over their lifetimes to the information, resources, services and support necessary to achieve all the above, free from discrimination, coercion, exploitation and violence





3. SRHR AND AN EU FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY: THE IMPORTANCE OF A GLOBAL EU VOICE

3. SRHR AND A EU FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY: THE IMPORTANCE OF A GLOBAL EU VOICE

SRHR are one of the most explicit and ‘feminist’ areas for foreign and international development. It concerns women’s, girls’ and LGBTQI+ people’s bodily autonomy and freedom, their ability to exercise decision-making over their bodies and future. Gender equality and women’s rights are highly debated and politicised in international policy dialogues, chief among them, SRHR.¹⁰

A feminist foreign and development policy can be a powerful and effective tool for the EU and its Member States, to have a substantial positive impact on gender equality and SRHR. It can create strong incentives for the emergence of a brave and persistent global EU voice for SRHR, one that, regardless of resistance and opposition, keeps the dialogue alive and pushes the gender equality and SRHR agenda forward, including the more contested areas: the right to legal and safe abortion,¹¹ LGBTQI+ rights and CSE. Labelling the foreign and development policy ‘feminist’ allows for a more inclusive, systematic and strategic voice at the global level and places it firmly in the opposition to the anti-rights and anti-gender agenda.¹ A feminist policy takes the forefront, and in times of opposition and polarisation, inclusively lead the work for gender equality and SRHR across the globe.¹

A feminist foreign policy approach to SRHR means collaborating and engaging with a broad range of actors that are working with SRHR issues, including SRHR, women’s rights and feminist organisations as well as other human rights defenders, progressive faith-based actors and LGBTQI+ activists. It is vital to ensure strong alliances and common ground with like-minded actors, but it is equally important to engage in dialogue with unexpected allies such as moderate or “movable middle” states, and other actors in order to move the SRHR agenda forward.¹ As such, a feminist foreign policy approach to SRHR needs to constantly take new and innovative actions that are based on clear evidence.

A feminist policy takes the forefront, and in times of opposition and polarisation, inclusively lead the work for gender equality and SRHR across the globe

Calling a policy ‘feminist’ underlines the intention to go beyond merely reforming existing structures – but to transform them.¹ For a sustainable shift in unequal gender power relations, and to achieve SRHR for all, positive social norms must be strengthened and harmful social norms must be transformed. With a feminist foreign policy approach, the EU could have a stronger voice in the global arena arguing for greater recognition of the role that social and gender norms play in the fulfilment of SRHR and protecting people from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

A woman in a black t-shirt and green scarf is speaking into a red and white megaphone. She is holding a white flagpole. In the background, there are several other flags, including a rainbow flag and a purple flag with a white symbol. The scene is outdoors, likely at a protest or demonstration. The text is overlaid on the image in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

4. AN EU FEMINIST AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY THAT PUTS SRHR AT THE CENTRE

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In this section, RFSU concretises SRHR interventions and support in the context of four approaches that we believe the EU could strengthen in its foreign and development policy in order to become a global leader on SRHR.

4.1 THE TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH: elimination of root causes and changing social norms

Today there is a wealth of evidence to show that transforming social norms is critical to gender equality.¹² Gender-transformative approaches create opportunities to challenge destructive social and gender norms. They address systematic oppression and gendered power inequities – the unequal distribution of power and control between people of different genders.¹

Gender stereotypes and restrictive social norms around femininity, masculinity and sexuality directly affect individuals' choices, freedoms and capabilities. Social norms dictate that the appropriate roles for women and girls are as caregivers, and that their bodies belong to their husbands, resulting in the marginalisation of women and girls and their exclusion from a range of areas, including education, economics/work and decision-making at all levels.¹² Harmful social norms lead to a range of human rights violations – including violations of SRHR such as access to contraceptives, safe abortions and comprehensive sexuality education, the right to bodily autonomy and protection against sexual and gender-based violence SGBV.¹

To transform social norms, including those that hinder the fulfilment of SRHR, we must tackle them holistically. With a feminist foreign policy, the EU and its Member States should support transformative norm change at all levels, including by having a strong voice in the global arena, arguing for greater recognition of the role that social and gender norms play for the fulfilment of SRHR and protecting people from SGBV.

A transformative approach means facilitating changes from the bottom up, for example through support to interventions that tackle individuals' and communities' attitudes and beliefs relating to the importance of controlling girls' bodies and sexuality.¹ It also means support for changes from within, by supporting programmes that empower and mobilise young people to recognise gender stereotypes and to advocate for SRHR, both their own and those of others, and for their right to be protected from SGBV.¹

Harmful gender norms should also be transformed from the top, through policy and financial support for work on eradicating the discriminatory policies and laws that have come about because of harmful social norms and gender stereotypes. For example, tackling legal barriers to young people's access to sexuality education and contraceptives, or the criminalisation of LGBTQI+ persons.¹

Thus, an EU feminist foreign policy needs to analyse and address the underlying root causes of gender inequalities which allows an understanding of how different rights are interrelated. For instance, if the EU aims to strengthen women's, girls' and LGBTQI+ persons' economic empowerment and to increase their participation in the labour market, the root causes that hinder these groups from playing an equal part in economic development must be carefully analysed and firmly addressed. Root causes here could be harmful gender norms that limit women's, girls' and LGBTQI+ persons' SRHR, expose them to SGBV, keep girls out of school, or cause an unequal distribution of unpaid household work.¹

Examples of Sweden's support to tackling social norms to fulfill SRHR

Social norm change is recognised as a key strategy in Sweden's work for gender equality in general and for the fulfilment of SRHR in particular. For a long time, Sweden's commitment to challenging discriminatory norms that make it difficult for women, girls, young people and LGBTQI+ persons to enjoy their SRHR and be protected from SGBV has been spelled out in key action plans and policies.¹³ Sweden has also supported a large number of programmes and partnerships investigating new (and established) strategies and methodologies for social norm change that involve religious and cultural institutions, gatekeepers and community leaders as key agents in changing the harmful gender norms that contribute to SGBV and violations of SRHR.

Furthermore, support from the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) for changing social norms and attitudes toward LGBTQI+ minorities on societal and legislative levels has included support for LGBTQI+ communities and organisations, together with interventions to target particular politicians and decision-makers who are seen as receptive - or at least non-hostile - to LGBTQI+ rights. Such programmes have involved targeting celebrities, well-known artists and media, and using social and traditional media to reduce stigma and change norms. Sweden also helps fill evidence gaps relating to social norm change and the linkages with gender equality and SRHR, including by supporting research on SRHR and social norms undertaken by the Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA).¹⁴

4.2 THE INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH: leaving no one behind in support of SRHR

In policies and programmes, girls, women and LGBTQI+ persons are often regarded and treated as homogeneous groups, which is far from reality. Depending on a range of factors and circumstances (physical ability/functionality, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, minority status, religion or other systemic inequalities) people are subjected to different levels of discrimination and marginalisation.^{15,16} For example, the level of unsatisfied SRH needs among poor women and girls in rural areas are usually much higher than that of those living in urban settings.¹⁷ Younger women and girls that are unmarried have very different SRH needs compared to their married peers who may already have children. Race and ethnicity often determines a person's level of access to SRH services.¹⁸ For example, indigenous women die in pregnancy and childbirth more often than other women.¹⁹ As such, understanding and revealing how multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination play out throughout life allows SRHR policies and programmes to be designed in ways that promote inclusivity and lead to real and sustainable change.

An intersectional approach is about understanding these overlapping, and often marginalising, categories, systems, and structures in the context of particular power relations. It helps us avoid generalisations about women, girls, LGBTQI+ persons. For example, to ensure that women, girls and LGBTQI+ persons, in all their diversity, enjoy their SRHR, programmes and policies need to consider the religious and cultural contexts and then direct efforts toward changing the practices that discriminate.¹ An intersectional perspective is for example needed in order to understand the impact of religious and customary family law on gender equality. Family law can often regulate issues such as the legal age of marriage, the right to enter freely into a marriage, marital rape, divorce, custody of children, inheritance laws – all crucial for ensuring equal rights, economic empowerment and the right to citizenship. Depending on the context, religion and culture can be either a protective or a discriminatory factor for women, girls and LGBTQI+ persons. Engaging in dialogue with religious and cultural actors is therefore an important strategy when addressing these types of intersecting factors of discrimination.¹



Digitalisation and SRHR services - leaving no one behind

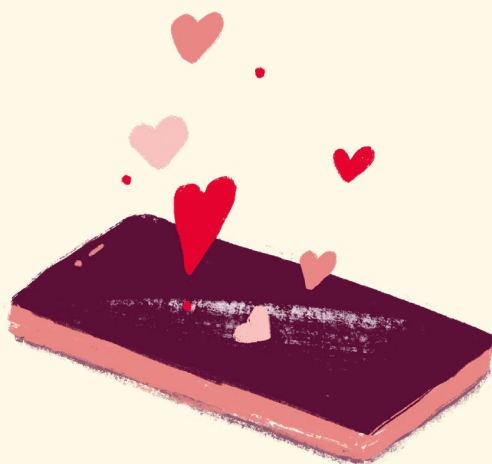
The utilisation of digital technology presents significant opportunities for advancing overall health and SRHR for people who are left behind. By embracing digital solutions, we can enhance access to SRHR services and information, following the feminist foreign policy principles of intersectionality and ensuring that no one is left behind.

Digital platforms offer an avenue to improve access to SRH services, including telemedicine options for hormonal contraception, medical abortion, maternal care, and testing and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases.²⁰ These solutions are particularly important for individuals who are not reached by traditional public health and education systems or live in contexts where laws and stigma limit open discussions.

Digital tools can facilitate the tracking of specific SRH needs and expand access to SRH care. They can support self-care initiatives, provide telemedicine solutions for abortion access, HPV and STI testing, and maternity care.²⁰ Fertility and menstrual tracking apps, for example, empower women to better understand their bodies, menstrual cycles, reproductive health, and fertility.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that not everyone has equal access to digital solutions. Over a third of the global population, particularly women and girls, individuals in rural areas, those with low incomes, and limited education, still lack online connectivity.²¹ Barriers include the absence of smartphones, inadequate internet infrastructure, and structural inequalities. Gender stereotypes further exacerbate the disparities, hindering women and girls from equal access to digital platforms. Therefore, while expanding access to digital SRHR technologies is important, it should complement offline efforts, recognizing that digitalization and technology accessibility vary significantly between and within countries.

It is also crucial to address the potential risks associated with digital SRHR technologies. Girls and women facing multiple forms of discrimination are at higher risk of cyberbullying, extortion, blackmail, and other online rights violations. Safeguarding measures, such as privacy protections, data security, and comprehensive policies, must be in place to mitigate these risks and ensure that digital spaces remain safe and inclusive for all.



4.3 THE HOLISTIC APPROACH: SRHR in the context of health system strengthening

SRHR are fundamental to health as a human right and to Universal Health Coverage* (UHC) as recognised by 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.²² The outstanding challenges when it comes to access to SRH services are huge: 4.3 billion people suffer from inadequate SRH services,²³ and millions of women and girls who want to avoid pregnancy lack access to modern contraceptive methods.⁴ Adolescents and youth face additional challenges to accessing services. These challenges can be overcome by the integration of SRHR in UHC packages.^{**} To achieve SRHR, SRH services and information must be systematically integrated into UHC frameworks and policies²⁴ and including within national primary health care.

Health and SRHR services need to be designed to take different intersecting factors into account, and for example to apply a life-course perspective. This could mean making youth and LGBTQI+ friendly services available for adolescents and LGBTQI+ persons, and adapting services to the particular needs of the elderly.¹ Like many health challenges older persons grapple with, these are the result of sexual and reproductive events earlier in their lives, such as early or frequent pregnancies, female genital mutilation or sexually transmitted infections.²⁵ Furthermore, health personnel must also have the ability and the know-how to combat stigma and, without prejudice or discrimination, meet the SRH needs and respect the rights of people seeking healthcare, treating everyone with respect.¹



* Universal health coverage (UHC) means that all people have access to the full range of quality health services they need, when and where they need them, without financial hardship. It covers the full continuum of essential health services, from health promotion to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care.²⁶

** A UHC priority benefits package is a set of evidence-informed prioritised health interventions, services and programmes, including intersectoral actions and fiscal policies.²⁷

Team Europe Initiative on SRHR - a promising EU initiative with a holistic approach

The Team Europe Initiative on SRHR in Sub-Saharan Africa is a joint initiative by the EU, its Member States and African partners to support SRHR in Sub-Saharan Africa. The initiative aims to promote access to and demand for high-quality SRHR services, and to contribute to the reduction of maternal mortality and morbidity.*

The Team Europe Initiative is a response to the challenges faced by many Sub-Saharan African countries in addressing SRHR, including limited access to SRHR services, poor quality of care, and harmful practices. The initiative is based on a rights-based approach and emphasises the importance of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

The initiative aims at strengthening:

- ➔ Continental and regional SRHR actions in the health and education sector.** Including strengthening of health systems to ensure that they are able to deliver high-quality SRHR services and supporting education and health sector responses, such as comprehensive sexuality education and linking school to health services.
- ➔ The availability and affordability of quality SRHR-related products for all, especially women and girls.** Including supporting the harmonisation of the regulatory environment.
- ➔ Advocacy and accountability to ensure SRHR needs are met.** Including promoting movement building and coordinated actions of regional parliamentarians and civil society networks working for SRHR and the rights of women and girls.

The Team Europe Initiative is a key part of the EU's commitment to promoting SRHR globally, and demonstrates the EU's recognition of the importance of SRHR in achieving sustainable development and reducing global health inequities.

* Read more about the Team Europe Initiative on SRHR here: https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway/sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights-africa_en#objectives

4.4 THE RIGHTS-HOLDER APPROACH: local civil society actors as critical contributors to change

Local civil society actors and their leadership are prerequisites for gender equality, and for the rights of women, girls and LGBTQI+ persons. Civil society defends and legitimatises the importance of gender equality and rights, by being service providers, watch-dogs or by challenging and transforming harmful gender norms and roles. In doing so they must be able to operate freely and be protected in an increasingly hostile environment of anti-gender actors. Furthermore, local civil society actors need to be recognised as relevant contributors to change.

Research has shown that a strong women's movement is the single most important factor in bringing about strong legislation for women's rights and measurable improvements in gender equality on the ground.²⁸ Initiatives that derive from local needs and are driven by a diverse range of local actors – women, girls and LGBTQI+ persons in all their diversity – reinforce the relevance, legitimacy and sustainability of any action. As such, they must meaningfully participate. To promote meaningful participation by women, girls and LGBTQI+ persons, EU Delegations can play a constructive role by providing safe meeting spaces, protection, and visibility, by acting as a conduit between local and international actors, as well as by supporting those local CSOs financially. If locally anchored feminist activists are invited to events such as high-level meetings and seminars, the position and status of these local actors will most likely be raised.¹

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In recent years, a marker of the anti-democratic mobilisation has been the diminishing of civic space in many countries.³ Civil society organisations, particularly those defending human rights, are facing increasing political restraints worldwide. This closure of civic space is a gendered phenomenon that particularly affects women's rights and LGBTQI+ rights organisations. The people and organisations most at risk from shrinking civic space and repression include organisations working for SRHR and the rights of LGBTQI+ people. Without protection mechanisms such as a safe space, women's, girls' and LGBTQI+ persons representation in political and public life will remain constrained, which in turn means that gender and women's perspectives will be left out of policymaking and decision-making. It is vital to recognise these challenges in EU foreign feminist and development policy and provide support, including financially, and a means of protection, including a safe space where individuals or organisations can recuperate so that they can continue their important work.

Local actions for transformative change

RFSU's regional partners in Asia, Asia Pacific Alliance for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (APA) and Asian-Pacific Resource & Research Center for Women (ARROW), are actively engaged in building movements and amplifying the voices of marginalised groups, including youth, ageing persons, persons with disabilities, and sex workers. By broadening civic space in regional and global policy platforms, these partners contribute to ensuring that the diverse needs and perspectives of these marginalised groups are represented and addressed.

The efforts of APA and ARROW to integrate a feminist intersectional lens into their work are crucial. This approach recognizes the interconnected nature of various forms of oppression and discrimination, and emphasises the importance of addressing multiple dimensions of identity and power. By analysing problems, developing strategies, conducting research, and fostering inclusiveness, APA and ARROW are ensuring that their work is responsive to the unique challenges faced by marginalised groups. Moreover, the focus on building a South-to-South movement by ARROW demonstrates a commitment to increasing representation and amplifying the voices and experiences of individuals and communities from the Global South. This approach acknowledges the importance of shifting power dynamics and promoting more equitable and inclusive spaces in decision-making processes and policy development.

By aligning their work with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, APA and ARROW recognize the integral link between SRHR and broader sustainable development goals. The 2030 Agenda provides a comprehensive framework for addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges, and integrating SRHR into these efforts is crucial for achieving sustainable and equitable development.

Overall, the engagement of APA and ARROW in building movements, promoting inclusivity, and integrating feminist intersectional approaches is essential for advancing SRHR and fostering a more equitable and just society.





5. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EU

5. THE WAY FORWARD AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EU

These recommendations to the EU institutions (the European Commission, EU Delegations in partner countries, the Council of the EU, and the European Parliament) aim to strengthen and advance SRHR in EU's external relations. They highlight the importance of integrating SRHR into all aspects of EU external policies, actions, and funding, as well as the need for strong global leadership and engagement with civil society organisations. The recommendations have been developed in close dialogue with the International Planned Parenthood (IPPF) European Network, the Countdown 2030 Europe Consortium and Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung (DSW).*

ALL EU INSTITUTIONS SHOULD:

- ➔ **Be strong global voices for SRHR, including the most contested areas, such as safe abortion, comprehensive sexuality education, and LGBTQI+ rights.** Working against these rights is a central component of many anti-democratic movements. The EU should make a special investment to protect and politically and financially support organisations and movements working for SRHR, LGBTQI+ and gender equality in anti-democratic countries and contexts.
- ➔ **Monitor the implementation of the NDICI and funding allocations to gender equality and SRHR, using tools like joint programming and Team Europe Initiatives.** Regularly assess the progress and effectiveness of budget NDICI and funding allocations, ensuring that resources are effectively directed towards promoting gender equality and SRHR. The Delegations should use the mid-term review of the multi-annual indicative programmes (MIPs) as an opportunity to allocate more funding to gender-targeted actions**, including SRHR.
- ➔ **Fully commit to and monitor the implementation of the Gender Action Plan (GAP III).** Under the Spanish presidency the Council should adopt Council Conclusions on the GAP III Mid-Term Review, to make recommendations and strengthen its implementation. The Council Conclusions should include a strong prioritisation of intersectionality, fighting against gender stereotypes and harmful gender norms, and ensuring access to and respect for SRHR. The European Parliament should play an active role in monitoring the GAP III implementation and informing the development of GAP IV.

* For more information and resources, please visit:
Countdown 2030 Europe: <https://www.countdown2030europe.org/resources/tag/european-support>
IPPF EN: <https://en.europe.ippf.org/how-can-the-european-union-deliver-on-reproductive-freedom/>
DSW: www.dsw.org/en/eu/

** Gender marker 2 (G2) which means that gender equality is the main objective of the project/programme and is fundamental in its design and expected results. Gender markers are statistical tools to record development activities that target gender equality.

THE COUNCIL OF THE EU SHOULD:

➔ **Prioritise gender equality and SRHR in external policies, actions, and funding instruments, with strong political will and leadership.** SRHR and gender equality should be mainstreamed in all relevant EU Council work on external relations and be given visibility, including through high-level events and political declarations. The Council should affirm that SRHR are at the core of fundamental EU values, as human rights, and a prerequisite for gender equality, freedom, and democracy.

➔ **Progressive Member States should counter opposition to gender equality and SRHR in the Council of the EU and work to maintain them as non-negotiable priorities.** The backlash on women's rights and SRHR has strongly impacted the Council of the EU's capacity to advance its work on important files, including the Gender Equality Strategy, Gender Action Plan III, and the EU Global Health Strategy. Member States should ensure that gender equality and SRHR remain non-negotiable priorities for the EU and its Member States, and work with all Member States to build consensus and progress on these issues.

THE EU COMMISSION AND MEMBER STATES SHOULD:

➔ **Ensure the full implementation of the recently adopted Global Health Strategy (GHS), emphasising the importance of SRHR for advancing Universal Health Coverage.** The Council should adopt Council conclusions endorsing the GHS and committing to its implementation, recognising the importance of SRHR and Gender equality to advance global health and setting up a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation mechanism, which commits the European Union institutions and Member States to the achievement of the Strategy's objectives.

➔ **Use the multiannual financial framework (MFF) mid-term review to allocate additional budget to the NDICI and commit to funding targets for gender equality in ODA.** Recognize the fact that the NDICI was underfunded from the start of the MFF and the additional strain put on the NDICI budget, particularly due to the repercussions of the war in Ukraine, and allocate additional budget to it to respond to increasing needs globally while delivering on the EU already made commitments to several global and regional initiatives. Moreover, the Commission should set specific funding targets for gender equality in ODA, with the aim of dedicating 85% of ODA to programs where gender equality is a significant component and 20% of ODA to programs where gender equality is a principal component.* Finally, the European Commission should make sure that gender equality is mainstreamed throughout its external action, including in the Global Gateway and all relevant Team Europe Initiatives.

* Gender marker 2 (G2)

➔ **Ensure funding and implementation of the Team Europe Initiative on SRHR, leveraging contributions from EU Member States.** The European Commission with a group of Member States are implementing a Team Europe Initiative (TEI) that aims to promote SRHR in sub-Saharan Africa. The European Commission has announced that it will contribute 60 million EUR to the TEI: this amount should leverage additional contributions from EU Member States.

➔ **Invest in SRHR to address the root causes of gender inequality, lack of participation in economic and democratic development, and harmful social norms.** Investments in access to contraceptives, maternal health services, and young people's access to SRH services and information, in particular, is vital, but equally important is to invest in programs that aim to change deeply rooted and harmful social norms.

➔ **Support local civil society organisations (CSOs) politically and financially through EU external funding instruments, consult and give visibility to actors defending gender equality and SRHR.** Work with and finance local CSOs to actively counter the opposition to gender equality and SRHR. The Delegations should reach out to and engage with a wide variety of local CSOs, including SRHR and human rights defenders, women's, girls' and LGBT-QI+ activists, and directly fund their core activities, enabling them to assume full leadership and power, follow their own priorities, adapt to changing conditions, emerging issues and opportunities. To do so, experienced Member States, such as Sweden, should support the EU institutions in setting up direct, core, long-term and flexible funding mechanisms.



6. CONCLUSION

6. CONCLUSION

With a feminist foreign and development policy that centres on SRHR, the EU can play a significant role as a progressive global leader for people's health and lives, rights and development. Funding is scarce and the needs are huge. A strong EU voice is especially necessary due to the opposition we see today to gender equality, SRHR, and LGBTQI+ rights. A feminist foreign policy approach that centres on SRHR is rooted in human rights principles and aims to protect and expand those rights, including the right to the most contested SRHR-areas such as legal and safe abortion, LGBTQI+ rights, and comprehensive sexuality education.

In this report RFSU suggests that to effectively support SRHR, an EU feminist foreign policy should strengthen four types of approaches; the transformative, holistic, intersectional and rights-holder focused approaches. Such policy involves addressing root causes and understanding the intersections of discrimination faced by different groups in order to leave no one behind. It promotes transformative norm change at all levels, challenges discriminatory policies and laws.

The concrete recommendations provided are about integrating SRHR into all aspects of EU external policies, actions, and funding, as well as the need for strong EU leadership, collaboration, and engagement with civil society organisations to advance gender equality and SRHR. An EU feminist foreign and development policy that prioritises SRHR positions the EU as a global leader in promoting people's health, rights and development. By prioritising gender equality, challenging harmful norms, and investing in SRHR, the EU can play a powerful role in promoting justice, empowerment, and the realisation of fundamental human rights for all.

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