

HOW CAN YOU, AS A MEP, CHAMPION SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS (SRHR)?

EUROPEANS DESERVE TO LEAD FREE AND SAFE SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE LIVES

SRHR underpin the health and well-being of all Europeans, from access to contraceptive and abortion care, sexual health services, and comprehensive sexuality education, to being protected from violence and coercion, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation. When people are denied universal access to SRHR, achieving gender equality is impossible. Unfortunately, in 2019, access to these rights varies greatly within and between EU Member States (MS), which is particularly harmful to those in the most vulnerable situations. SRHR are increasingly under threat, with the rise of illiberal coercive

movements against gender equality, women's and LGBTI rights, and a shrinking civil society space within the EU.

The European Parliament (EP) has traditionally been the EU institution that stood up the most for SRHR, and this needs to continue. As it represents European citizens directly, the EP has a specific voice and responsibility in ensuring that the EU deals with the issues voters are most concerned with. According to the [2017 Eurobarometer](#), 91% of Europeans believe that promoting gender equality is important to ensuring a fair and democratic society.

HOW CAN THE EU HELP DELIVER ON REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM FOR ALL?

WHILST SRHR ARE PRIMARILY A NATIONAL COMPETENCE, THE EU CONTRIBUTES TO SHAPE THE DEBATE AND BRING ABOUT THE CHANGE NEEDED TO IMPROVE PEOPLE'S LIVES.



Democracy, the rule of law and human rights

The EU's founding values include democracy, the rule of law and the respect for human rights. Through Article 7, the EU can monitor and ultimately sanction MS if they breach EU values. In 2017, Article 7 was activated against Poland and the EP adopted a [resolution](#) on the situation of the rule of law and democracy, which notably called on Poland to respect women's SRHR. In 2018, for the first time, the EP took the initiative to activate Article 7 against Hungary, with a [resolution](#) containing recommendations on improving gender equality in the country. In the beginning of 2019, MEPs [endorsed](#) a proposal of the European Commission (EC) to link EU funds to respect for the rule of law.



Gender equality and non-discrimination

Equality between men and women and non-discrimination are core EU values. Through gender mainstreaming, the EU aims to promote gender equality in all its policies. The principle of non-discrimination applies to all EU policies and includes discrimination based on sex and sexual orientation. The EU [funds](#) organisations

promoting non-discrimination, gender equality and combating gender-based violence in Europe. The current EU [Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality](#) and the [List of Actions to advance LGBTI Equality](#) should be updated by the next EC. The EP and some MS have requested that the EC adopts more comprehensive gender equality and LGBTI strategies.



Human rights and development outside of EU borders

Through its external policies and funding instruments, the EU promotes and protects human rights and democracy, and provides development and humanitarian aid. It provides protection for human rights defenders and funding to civil society organisations working on human rights, gender equality, access to SRHR, and against gender-based violence in third countries.



Public health

The EU Health Strategy complements national health policies and supports cooperation between MS, focusing on improving public health and preventing diseases, giving equal access to high quality healthcare for all Europeans and promoting research and best

practices. The EU funds [health projects](#), some of which are carried out by NGOs. In 2017, the EP called on the EC and MS to ensure that the specific health needs of women and LGBTI people are taken into account, and underlined the importance of access to SRHR and comprehensive sexuality education; in a 2019 [resolution](#), it called on the EU to include SRHR in its Public Health Strategy.



Social policies

Through the European Pillar of Social Rights, the EU aims to promote equal opportunities and combat discrimination and ensure social protection and inclusion throughout the EU. Recently, the Council Presidency and the EP reached an [agreement](#) on a work-life balance directive, aiming to encourage men and women to take an equal share in family-related responsibilities through improved parental leave.

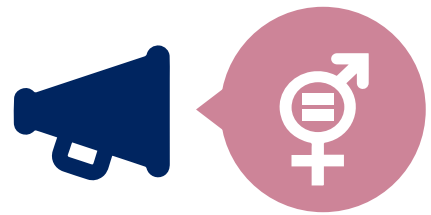


Youth

In its [Youth Strategy 2019-2027](#), the EU focuses specifically on youth at risk of marginalisation and discrimination and mentions the need for guidance and support on health and relationships. The EP has on several occasions called on MS to ensure access to comprehensive sexuality education. This is key so that young people can develop crucial life skills to foster healthier and safer relationships based on equality and respect.

HERE IS HOW YOU, AS A MEP, CAN STAND UP FOR REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM, SAFETY AND DIGNITY

AS A MEP, WE URGE YOU TO USE ALL THESE OPPORTUNITIES TO ENSURE ALL EUROPEANS CAN LEAD FREE AND SAFE SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE LIVES, AND STRIVE TO PUT AN END TO REPRODUCTIVE COERCION.



THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, A POWERFUL LEGISLATIVE ARM

Scrutiny over the executive

In September and October, you will have the power to ask questions to the proposed Commissioners and approve or not their nominations. Throughout your mandate, you will have scrutiny powers over the EC's activities. You can for instance ask parliamentary questions to the EC to demand information and clarifications on policy implementation. In 2016, MEP Heidi Hautala [asked](#) the EC about funding access to contraceptive care in development cooperation. The EC announced in response €30 million in 2016-2017 for CSOs' work on gender equality, including SRHR.

Budgetary powers

One of the most important role of the EP is to vote on the EU's Annual Budgets and Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). MEPs regularly obtained increases in annual budgets for funding to SRH in development policy. The EP already adopted ambitious positions for the [2021-2027 MFF](#) and on specific [development](#) and [fundamental rights instruments](#), but the budgets allocated in the next MFF will be agreed upon by the new EP. You will therefore have a key role in securing increases in funding for SRHR, women's rights, gender equality and CSOs.

Here is where you can have the most influence

You can ensure to be a member of the most relevant Committees for SRHR and gender equality: the Committees on Women's Rights and Gender Equality; Development; Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs; and Budgets. You can also become a member of intergroups or networks, notably on [SRHR](#) or [LGBTI rights](#).



YOU CAN BRING SRHR INTO THE SPOTLIGHT AND DENOUNCE REPRODUCTIVE COERCION

By voting for the inclusion of progressive language in reports, publishing studies or organising events, you can bring political visibility to SRHR, denounce regressive changes, encourage action and promote best practices.

- The EP regularly calls on the EU to stand for SRHR in its external action. For instance, in its [position](#) on the European Consensus for Development, the EP called for "universal access to affordable, comprehensive, high-quality information and education on SRH and family planning services".
- The EP also defends SRHR within the EU. In its [report](#) on the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention, the EP strongly affirmed that the denial of SRHR including abortion care was a form of violence against women, reiterated that women and girls must have control over their bodies and sexualities, called on MS to guarantee access to the full range of SRHR, and to implement the Istanbul Convention; language reiterated in the [report](#) on the situation of fundamental rights within the EU in 2017.
- Recently, MEPs adopted a [resolution](#) denouncing the backlash against women's rights and gender equality in the EU (2019).
- The EP published studies on the [backlash](#) against women's rights and gender equality in the EU (2018); SRHR and the impact of [denying care](#) based on personal beliefs (2018); [women's rights in Western Balkans](#), with a specific section on SRHR (2018); and the use of EU funds to promote [gender equality](#) (2016) and fight [violence](#) against women and girls (2018).
- MEPs organised public hearings on the backlash against reproductive rights in Europe, with a [manifesto](#) signed by 100 MEPs (2018), and on access to SRHR in Central and Eastern Europe (2015).