SRHR are increasingly under threat, with the rise of illiberal coercive action which is particularly harmful to those in the most vulnerable situations. Access to SRHR varies greatly within and between EU Member States (MS), making it impossible to achieve gender equality. In 2019, access to SRHR was denied to those in vulnerable situations, 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 SRHR was denied to those in vulnerable situations, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation.

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 SRHR was denied to those in vulnerable situations, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation. SRHR are increasingly under threat, with the rise of illiberal coercive action which is particularly harmful to those in the most vulnerable situations.

The EU’s founding values include democracy, the rule of law and 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.

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.

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 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.

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.
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 SRH.

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).

We care. For reproductive freedom and safety.

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