

SCIENTIFIC &
TECHNICAL
ADVISORY GROUP

&

GENDER & RIGHTS
ADVISORY PANEL

UNDP/UNFPA/UNICEF/
WHO/WORLD BANK
Special Programme of
Research, Development
and Research Training
in Human Reproduction

Statement on the promotion, protection and fulfilment of sexual and reproductive health and rights

The promotion, protection and fulfilment of sexual and reproductive health and rights are currently experiencing marked resistance around the world.

This is evident in a sustained lack of sufficient funding; stigmatisation of both users and providers of sexual and reproductive health services; continued support for harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation; paring down of legislation that protects women's rights; tolerance of violence against women and girls; increasing restrictions on access to, and provision of, scientifically accurate sexual and reproductive health information, including comprehensive sexuality education; unnecessary restrictions on the availability of contraceptive methods; and the imposition of legal barriers, such as third party consent requirements, to sexual and reproductive health services.

This situation harms women and threatens the capacity of states – in all regions of the world – to honour and fulfil their pledge, when launching the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to “*respect, protect and promote human rights, without distinction of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national and social origin, property*”, to “*leave no one behind*”, and, in particular, their declaration to “*first reach those who are furthest behind*”.

The last three decades have seen important gains in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights, particularly for women living in low- and middle-income countries. Maternal mortality has decreased by 44% in 25 years; more women living with HIV are on antiretroviral therapy; an increasing number of women are using contraceptive methods to prevent unintended pregnancies; and screening and treatment for women with cervical cancer has improved. All of which contributed to significant progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.

Critical gaps continue to exist, however. The goals for sexual and reproductive health and rights in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) remain unfinished, and have been carried over to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals agreed by UN Member States. Maternal mortality remains the second-leading cause of death for girls aged 15 to 19 years old. Unsafe abortion and lack of access to postabortion care continues to be a leading cause of maternal mortality and morbidity. One in three women still experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. 225 million women who want to avoid pregnancy are not using modern contraception, especially among the most marginalised.



Making the case

There is strong evidence that investment in sexual and reproductive health services can pay dividends, not only in terms of lives saved but also in reduced government expenditure on maternal health, water, sanitation, education and housing. Government investment in contraceptive programmes improves girls' ability to remain in education and thus improves the long-term economic output for families. Reductions in mortality and fertility may lead to stronger economic growth. It may also bring significant benefits in terms of emissions reductions associated with climate change.

Within the United Nations system, the *UNDP/UNFPA/UNICEF/WHO/World Bank Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction (HRP)*, is the main instrument for research in sexual and reproductive health and rights. It brings together policy-makers, scientists, health care providers, clinicians, consumers and community representatives to identify and address priorities to improve sexual and reproductive health. The programme provides the definitive guidance, based on robust, scientific evidence to inform best practice.

We, the members of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Group (STAG) and the Gender and Rights Advisory Panel (GAP) of the HRP, are deeply concerned that current global trends will restrict access to life-saving sexual and reproductive health services and information for women and girls, especially those most in need, and fear that the significant gains made over the past three decades will be compromised. As an independent body of scientists, we bring perspectives from diverse countries, cultures and disciplines. We call on the international community, individual governments, private sector and others to protect everyone's right to the highest attainable standards of sexual and reproductive health, safeguard the progress made to date, and take all necessary steps to sustain and expand national sexual and reproductive health programmes, as well as to protect and promote the independent research, evidence and implementation. These restrictions threaten continued development of scientifically accurate evidence through rigorous research and development of norms and standards to guide provision of safe, effective and acceptable sexual and reproductive health services.

Now, more than ever, it is critical to ensure access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services and information and to guarantee that scientific evidence is developed, shared and used by decision-makers to ensure the promotion and protection of sexual reproductive health of all individuals everywhere, so that no one is left behind.



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