Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to all aspects of sexuality and reproduction, not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity.

Guttmacher Institute and the Lancet Commission

AN INTEGRATED DEFINITION OF SRHR

The Guttmacher Institute and the Lancet Commission report "Accelerate progress – sexual and reproductive health and rights for all" suggests that a positive approach to sexuality and reproduction should recognize the part played by pleasurable sexual relationships, trust, and communication in promoting self-esteem and overall well-being.

ACHTHEVING SRH RELIES ON:

- Access to the necessary information, resources, services and support, including, access to modern contraceptives.
- Realizing the sexual and reproductive rights (SRR) 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
  - be free from discrimination, coercion, exploitation and violence

AN ESSENTIAL PACKAGE OF SRHR INTERVENTIONS

According to the Guttmacher-Lancet Commission, an essential package of SRHR interventions includes the commonly recognized components of SRH, and less commonly provided interventions that are necessary for a holistic approach to addressing SRHR:

- Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)
- Counselling and services for a range of modern contraceptives
- Antenatal, childbirth and postnatal care
- Safe abortion services and treatment of complications of unsafe abortion
- Prevention and treatment of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STI)
- Prevention, detection, immediate services and referrals for cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)
- Prevention, detection and management of reproductive cancers, especially cervical cancer
- Information, counselling and services for subfertility and infertility
- Information, counseling and services for sexual health and well-being

Youth must be healthy. HIV has claimed more than 32 million lives so far. We want to be the generation that sees the end of HIV & AIDS. Through reshaping healthcare, engaging young people and through the development of innovative tools, delivered by the community at the community level – I am confident we can succeed!

Eddie, Youth Champion, Kenya
Nearly 2 million people become newly infected with HIV. Nearly one in three women experience intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence.

**THE BENEFITS OF FULLY REALISING SRHR**

**SRHR are central to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),** in particular SDG3 (good health and wellbeing), SDG4 (education), and SDG5 (gender equality).

Preventing child, early and forced marriage, ensuring access to voluntary contraceptive services and CSE are crucial to prevent teenage pregnancy and school dropouts, ensuring girls can attend and stay in school longer.

Investing in SRHR would substantially reduce unintended pregnancies, unplanned births and maternal deaths.

Every dollar spent on contraceptive services beyond the current level would save $3 in the cost of maternal, newborn and abortion care as the use of contraceptives reduces the number of unintended pregnancies.  

Worldwide, there are over 1.8 billion people between the ages of 10-24. Close to 90% live in low- and middle income countries, where they make up a large proportion of the population.

**SRHR are key to unlocking the potential of the largest youth generation in history.**

Youth rights must be respected & promoted. Supporting young people to be informed about their sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as being empowered to become active citizens are equally important in them realising their full potential!

Andrew, Youth Champion, Kenya

**GLOBAL CHALLENGES AROUND SRHR**

More than 257 million women face an unmet need for modern contraception.

There are 121 million unintended pregnancies and 61 per cent of these unintended pregnancies end in abortion.

25 million unsafe abortions take place. Unsafe abortion hospitalizes about 7 million women a year globally and results in an estimated 193,000 maternal deaths per year.

More than 45 million women receive inadequate or no antenatal care.

More than 350 million men and women need treatment for one of the four curable STIs.

Nearly 2 million people become newly infected with HIV.

Nearly one in three women experience intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence.

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COVID-19 has caused severe disruptions in meeting family planning needs. The need to provide urgent COVID-19 response, plus the lack of personal protective equipment for clinical staff, has prevented health personnel from providing SRHR services safely. Furthermore, visiting health facilities was dangerous in itself due to the risk of COVID-19 exposure or impossible due to movement restrictions. Furthermore, accessing health services was impossible due to movement restrictions. The imposed movement restrictions meant adolescents had to stay at home, resulting in further increase of drug abuse and teenage pregnancies.

A modelling study has shown that a 10 per cent decline in use of short- and long-acting reversible contraceptives due to reduced access because of the pandemic could result in an additional 48 million women with an unmet need for modern contraceptives and an additional 15 million unintended pregnancies over the course of a year.

Youth must have access to education. 130 million girls worldwide are not in school. In many countries around the world, including Uganda, social and cultural norms still exist that reinforce gender stereotypes, preventing girls from attending school. This has to change! An extra year of secondary schooling for girls can increase their future wages by 10 to 20%.

Peace, Youth Champion, Uganda

THE EUROPEAN UNION’S COMMITMENTS TO SRHR

The New European Consensus on Development reaffirms the EU commitment to SRHR, in the framework of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the outcomes of their review conferences.

In 2020, the EU adopted the Gender Action Plan III (GAP III), which recognises SRHR as an essential priority for the achievement of gender equality. GAP III also reaffirms the EU’s commitment to dedicate 85% of external cooperation projects to the promotion of gender equality as a principal or significant objective, with a new commitment for all EU Delegations in partner countries to implement at least one action with gender equality as principal objective.

Strong and explicit commitments to the promotion of full SRHR are also included in the recently negotiated ACP-EU Partnership Agreement, which guides the relations between the EU and Africa, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP).

Numerous EU Council Conclusions, reaffirm and call for the promotion of SRHR in the EU’s external action, such as those on Human Development, the Team Europe approach, Water in the EU’s external action, EU-Africa relations, and Youth in external action.

A landmark report on the situation of SRHR in the EU was adopted by the European Parliament in June 2021, calling upon the EU and its Member States to support and promote access to SRHR services, ensure access to the full range of SRHR, and remove all barriers impeding full access to SRHR, including in the EU’s external action.
At the end of 2020, the EU adopted its current seven-year Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF 2021-2027), that allocates €79.5 billion to the new EU development cooperation instrument, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument/Global Europe (NDICI/GE). The NDICI includes strong references to SRHR and provides a sound basis for future implementation of EU programmes on SRHR.

As part of its external action, the European Commission (EC) is set to adopt a "Team Europe Initiative" (TEI) on SRHR in sub-Saharan Africa, which brings together the EC and several member states.

Worrying funding trends: In the past years (2017 to 2019), under the previous EU financial framework, there was a notable decrease of EU funding to SRHR, both in total disbursements and when looking at EU support to SRHR as percentage of Official Development Assistance (ODA).

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Youth must be equal. We must stand up for the rights of girls around the world, and fight for our right to freely make decisions about our health, our bodies, and our futures.

Mercy, Youth Champion, Kenya