

# THE PRESIDENCIES OF SWEDEN, SPAIN AND BELGIUM

## A momentum for the EU Council to ensure SRHR in Universal Health Coverage

The EU should strive towards a world where everyone can enjoy the same rights, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Ensuring a continued, strong voice from progressive European member states on SRHR in the EU and UN has never been more critical as authoritarian and populist movements around the world are increasingly undermining, if not threatening, gender equality and SRHR.<sup>1</sup>

The current Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU, and the upcoming Presidencies under Spain and Belgium, have a critical role to play to uphold EU values and the right to sexual and reproductive health worldwide. In this crossroads moment, Universal Health Coverage (UHC) provides a major political opportunity for the EU to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs and the fulfillment of SRHR.

SRHR are human rights, and should be defended as part of core EU values and promoted as a prerequisite for health equity, gender equality, freedom, and democracy. During 2023 and 2024, there are key opportunities for the three Presidencies to ensure the EU advances the right to SRH and move the world forward in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and UHC. In light of the growing opposition, there is a real risk that SRHR will be excluded from new EU and UN commitments on UHC, including from the political declaration of the High-level Meeting (HLM) on UHC in September 2023. We can not let this happen.

### SRHR AS A KEY ELEMENT OF UHC

Every human being has a fundamental right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health. To realize this right, every individual must be free to make their own choices about their bodies and sexual and reproductive health (SRH), without any forms of discrimination, stigma, violence or coercion.<sup>2</sup> UHC is about ensuring that people have access to the health services they need without suffering financial hardship. To realize SRHR, SRH services and information must be systematically integrated into UHC frameworks and policies.

### SAVING LIVES AND REALIZING PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO HEALTH

The outstanding SRHR challenges are huge: 4.3 billion people suffer from inadequate SRH services,<sup>3</sup> and millions of women and girls who want to avoid pregnancy lack access to modern contraceptive methods. Approximately 300 000 women a year die from complications related to pregnancy, childbirth and unsafe abortion.<sup>4</sup> Adolescents and youth face additional challenges to accessing SRH services.

These challenges can be overcome by the integration of SRHR in UHC packages. The EU can advocate for SRHR being fully incorporated into countries' domestic policies and frameworks relevant to UHC, so that the services provided to people include the full spectrum of essential, quality SRH services.<sup>5</sup> Addressing the current gaps will directly reduce mortality and morbidity, and minimize the health and financial burden on individuals, families, communities and nations.

### OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVANCE SRHR IN UHC DURING THE EU PRESIDENCIES

#### • WE URGE SWEDEN, SPAIN AND BELGIUM TO USE THE EU PRESIDENCIES AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO:

→ **FULLY RECOGNISE SRHR** as a fundamental component of advancing and achieving Universal Health Coverage in EU's external relations, including the full spectrum of essential, quality SRH services for all individuals who need them, as recognised in the EU Global Health Strategy.

→ **HIGHLIGHT THE IMPORTANCE OF COMPREHENSIVE AND INTEGRATED SRHR** services and programs being provided as part of UHC national strategies, policies and programmes in political dialogues with partner countries. Countries should adopt and endorse a comprehensive package of SRHR interventions to be delivered through UHC schemes.

→ **ENSURE THAT ALL EU STRATEGIES AND POLITICAL FRAMEWORKS** relevant for UHC, including the Global Health Strategy, the Gender Action Plan and the Youth Action Plan, are adequately resourced, to enable effective implementation.

→ **INCLUDE A STRONG FOCUS ON UHC AND SRHR** in the Gender Action Plan III's implementation and monitoring, and ensure that it is adequately resourced, and holding the European Commission accountable for the commitments it made.

**• UNDER EACH PRESIDENCY, THERE ARE SPECIFIC OPPORTUNITIES TO PUSH THE AGENDA FORWARD:**

**→ ENSURE A STRONG FOCUS ON SRHR IN UHC IN THE COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ENDORSING THE GLOBAL HEALTH STRATEGY**

The newly adopted EU Global Health Strategy (GHS) seeks to regain the ground lost to reach the health-related targets in the Sustainable Development Goals. The GHS specifically recognises the importance of SRHR as a critical component of advancing UHC.<sup>6</sup> During the Swedish presidency, there will be council conclusions on the GHS.

**• WE RECOMMEND** the presidencies to jointly work for the adoption of conclusions that fully recognise SRHR as a fundamental component of achieving UHC, including the full spectrum of essential, quality SRH services.

**→ ENSURE A STRONG FOCUS ON SRHR, INCLUDING IN UHC, IN THE CCS ON THE MID TERM REVIEW OF THE GAP III**

During the Spanish presidency there will be Council conclusions on the GAP III implementation. GAP III has a specific pillar on promoting and achieving SRHR.<sup>7</sup> This is an opportunity to emphasize intersectionality, fight against gender stereotypes and ensure access to SRH services in the context of UHC, as well as calling for adequate funding for gender equality and SRHR therein.

**• WE RECOMMEND** the presidencies to jointly work for the adoption of Council Conclusions on the GAP III that include a strong prioritization of intersectionality, fighting against gender stereotypes and harmful gender norms, and ensuring access to and respect of SRHR, including access to SRH services as an integral and indispensable part of UHC.

**→ ENSURE A STRONG EU VOICE TO ADVANCE SRHR AT THE 2023 HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON UHC**

In 2019, UN member states gathered for the first ever High-level meeting on UHC. It resulted in a ground-breaking political declaration that recognized SRH as a component of UHC. The upcoming 2023 High-level Meeting on UHC is an opportunity to continue the momentum for SRHR in UHC and a chance to display core EU values by promoting SRHR as a key component of UHC.

**• WE RECOMMENDED** the presidencies to jointly make sure that the EU and its Member States have the EU shows strong political will and global leadership in consultations and processes leading up to the UN HLM 2023 and has a committed and united voice on SRHR in the UN HLM on UHC in September.

**→ ENSURE EU LEADERSHIP IN FUNDING PROGRAMMES FOR SRHR INCLUSION IN UHC?**

In 2024, there will be the mid term review of the EU Multi Financial Framework (MFF) including the Neighborhood and development cooperation instrument (NDICI). Further, it will be the second year of implementation of the Team Europe Initiative on SRHR in Sub-Saharan Africa.

**• WE RECOMMEND** the three presidencies to jointly use the mid-term review of the EU MFF and the NDICI to call for more funding to be allocated to SRHR and the realization of UHC at country-level (by EU Delegations) as well as at regional and global levels. The presidencies can also make sure there is additional national and European funding to the Team Europe Initiative on SRHR in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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Countdown 2030 Europe (C2030E) is a Consortium of 15 leading European non-governmental organizations advocating towards European donors for increased funding and support to Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), including Family Planning (FP), in international development cooperation. Consult C2030E website and join us on twitter for more information on SRHR in EU policies, including the latest figures on European donor support to SRHR.



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