



Concept Note

Briefing Session on

Advancing Women and Girls' Health in a Time of Converging Crises

24 April 2025

14:30 to 16:30

Maison de la Paix, Petal 2, Room S12
Eugène-Rigot 2, 1202 Geneva
Geneva, Switzerland

1. Introduction:

The global community faces unprecedented challenges in realising the right to health for all. While progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) acknowledges the importance of gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), this progress is threatened by persistent inequalities, the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, escalating climate change impacts, ongoing conflicts, and socio-economic disparities. These converging crises disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, exacerbating marginalisation and hindering progress towards achieving universal health coverage, with particularly severe consequences for women and girls.

This briefing aims to provide a comprehensive overview of these challenges and propose concrete strategies to advance SRHR within international cooperation and the SDGs. The South Centre will host this briefing to foster policy dialogue on how States can fulfil their obligations to advance the right to health for all, with a central focus on SRHR.

2. Background:

The right to health, including equitable access to healthcare and SRHR, is a fundamental human right. However, the current global landscape presents significant obstacles that disproportionately impact SRHR. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted essential health services and tested the resilience of health systems worldwide. Climate change

exacerbates these challenges through displacement, food insecurity, and increased vulnerability to gender-based violence, all of which disproportionately affects women and girls.

In addition, existing conflicts and humanitarian crises further disrupt access to SRHR services, often leading to increased sexual violence and limited access to essential care. Persistent poverty, inequality, and discrimination create significant barriers to accessing SRHR services. Marginalised populations, including women, girls, adolescents, persons with disabilities, and those living in poverty or rural areas, face disproportionate burdens.

The shifting geopolitical landscapes and changing priorities among donor nations impact the flow of resources and support for global health initiatives, including those focused on SRHR. This creates uncertainty and hinders the ability of developing countries to strengthen their health systems. Specifically, there's a growing trend of questioning multilateralism and a move towards more nationalistic approaches, affecting funding and cooperation. This increasing trend challenges the universality of human rights, including attempts to undermine established norms and standards and restrict access to SRHR services and information.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Pact for the Future provide crucial frameworks for advancing the right to health. However, effective implementation requires strengthened international cooperation and a specific focus on addressing the root causes of SRHR inequities. The core principles that underly the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Pact for the Future must be upheld and reinforced, with a strong emphasis on their relevance to SRHR.

The Sharing of good practices and experiences among developing countries' representatives will allow exploring how to enhance international cooperation and assistance and address the specific SRHR needs of vulnerable populations in crises. Key elements of the discussion will include analysing human rights challenges in the light of the principles and actions required to implement the SDGs and the Pact for the Future and mitigating the impact of reduced international assistance on SRHR.

3. Objectives:

This briefing will analyse the key challenges hindering gender equality and SRHR realisation, particularly the disproportionate impact of converging crises and socio-economic disparities on women and girls. It will highlight the critical importance of integrating comprehensive gender equality and SRHR services into strengthened primary healthcare systems while facilitating dialogue on enhancing international cooperation and assistance to support developing countries. Furthermore, the event will address broader human rights challenges, and their impact on the right to health. Finally, it will provide a platform for sharing best practices, approaches, lessons learned, and challenges developing countries encounter in advancing health equity and SRHR through legal and policy frameworks. In particular, this briefing will:

- Provide an analysis of the key challenges hindering the realisation of SRHR, focusing on the disproportionate impact of converging crises and socio-economic disparities on women and girls;
- Highlight the critical importance of integrating comprehensive SRHR services into primary healthcare systems and strengthening primary healthcare's capacity to address diverse SRHR needs; and,
- Identify best practices in developing and implementing integrated SRHR into primary health services, strengthening international cooperation, and aiding developing countries in advancing SRHR.

4. Agenda:

Welcoming Remarks

Prof. Carlos Correa, Executive Director, South Centre.

Current Challenges for Realising the Right to Health and of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR).

Dr. Haileyesus Gethahun, Chief Executive Officer, Health Development Partnership for Africa and the Caribbean.

H.E. Mr Leslie Ramsammy, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Guyana to the United Nations and Other International Organisations.

H.E. Mrs Marcela Arias Moncada, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Honduras to the United Nations and Other International Organisations.

H.E. Mr Mxolisi Nkosi, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Mission of the Republic of South Africa to the United Nations and Other International Organisations.

Mrs Catrin Schulte-Hillen, Sexual and Reproductive Health Specialist in Emergency, United Nations Population Fund.

5. Expected Outcomes: Report to the G77 and China:

The briefing's outcomes will inform a comprehensive report on advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights in the context of converging global crises.

6. Meeting Details:

The session will be held at the Maison de la Paix, Chem. Eugène-Rigot 2, 1202 Geneva, Room S12, in Geneva on 24 April 2025, from 14:30 to 16:30. The meeting will also be conducted in a hybrid format for participants not located in Geneva, Switzerland.

Participants will include representatives from the Missions in Geneva. Human rights and health officials from capitals are also invited to attend. To confirm your participation and registration, please contact Mr Daniel Uribe at uribe@southcentre.int.