

## **Sexual and reproductive rights: the cornerstone of a feminist Europe**

A Resolution to address the worsening of sexual and reproductive health and rights in Europe.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are essential human rights and European states have the duty to respect and protect them. Without full sexual and reproductive health and rights, some of the most significant and intimate aspects of our lives are at risk. However, millions still have these rights denied as a result of draconian laws and policies that ultimately reflect deeply rooted patriarchal gender stereotypes and archaic forms of oppression against women. European states must commit to strongly advancing gender equality and sustainable development in this crucial sphere of life.

### **Reproductive rights backsliding**

In recent years, threats to women's sexual and reproductive health and rights have resurged in many parts of Europe. Some based on ideology or religion, but others, deriving from austerity measures attacking many health systems all over the EU. Well-funded anti-choice movements have organised to question and diminish long-term progress in gender equality, even within the governments of several European countries. Criminalising termination of pregnancy is one of the most damaging ways of politicising women's bodies and lives, subjecting them to risks to their lives and depriving them of autonomy in decision-making.

Rolling back existing protection on sexual and reproductive health and rights, in particular through the introduction of restrictions on access to abortion and various forms of contraception, this backlash has also affected the work of many human rights defenders, civil society actors, and health-care providers working to advance women's rights. This backlash attacks women's physical and sexual self-determination all over Europe. The organization "One of Us" lobbies aggressively against any form of abortion. In Germany, the debate on §219a banning medical advertising for abortions was instrumentalised by fundamentalists. At the same time, feminist actors also form powerful alliances to resist the backlash. In Ireland, a referendum fights to delete the complete ban of abortions from the constitution, in Poland, the "Black Protests" mobilize thousands to demonstrate for women's rights and in Spain, women's rights organizations succeeded in preventing a total ban of abortions.

All attempts to restrict feminist actions in civil society must be taken seriously and acted upon immediately. It is paramount to see ongoing attacks on human rights defenders, particularly those advocating for reproductive justice, as attacks on democracy and freedom of speech. Civil society must be protected from both formal and informal disadvantage tactics by conservative forces. Sexual and reproductive health-care providers must be safe from violence and harassment and supported in their work. The conscience clause, which is becoming a common excuse to deprive women of their right to abortion and contraception, must be stopped.

The violation of SRHR has the most devastating impact on marginalised and other vulnerable groups of women in Europe, including those living in poverty, Roma women, adolescents, transgender women, incarcerated women, those with disabilities, refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented migrant women. A woman's social and economic background shouldn't determine her access to reproductive rights.

### **An example: The case of Poland**



Poland has one of the most restrictive laws on abortion in Europe, permitting abortion only when there is a risk to a woman's health or life, a severe foetal impairment, or when the pregnancy is the result of sexual assault. Most women in Poland who decide to end a pregnancy are denied access to legal abortion care; according to the Federation for Women and Family Planning, there are 80-150 thousand illegal abortions every year. Many women seek clandestine and unsafe abortions, self-administer the abortion pill, or if they have the means, travel to another country to access abortion services. With the lack of evidence-based sex education at school, more and more women are in danger of being abused, falling ill or losing control over their bodies. Comprehensive sex education must become a common standard for everyone. It is also unacceptable to limit access to so-called emergency contraception. The recent law put in place to prescribe the morning-after pill is a form of violating women's rights and must be revoked.

Restricting the current law would further hinder women, particularly those living in low-income situations and rural areas, from accessing safe abortion. It would force women to carry non-viable pregnancies to term, endanger their physical and mental health, restrict them from their best possible futures, and force them to give birth to children who often have no chance of survival.

The European Court of Human Rights has previously ruled that the Polish government, in denying timely access to abortion, has violated women's rights. United Nations human rights experts have sent several communications to the Polish government regarding past attempts to further restrict access to abortion. Experts have highlighted that these efforts risk damaging women's equality, dignity, autonomy and bodily integrity. By restricting their access to information and their rights to private life and health, women are being exposed to forms of cruel and inhuman treatment. The experts have underlined that being forced to continue a pregnancy under any circumstance violates a person's human rights. They have urged the Polish parliament to respect the rights of women to make autonomous decisions about their own bodies and reproductive functions, which are at the very core of their fundamental rights.

### **Shared values must be put into action**

Even the most restrictive laws and policies can be challenged, together. We want to see a Europe where everyone has the possibility to choose when, how, and if they choose to start a family. Making sure women are free to decide whether they have children, how many and when is key to making progress toward the goals in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In Ireland, as a result of relentless campaigning, the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment – restricting legal access to abortion – will be voted on in a national referendum on 25 May 2018. We must acknowledge that without the determination and hard work by civil society organisations, change would not be possible. The European Greens stand in solidarity with their Irish sisters and brothers in voting 'yes' for reproductive rights.

**Therefore, the European Green Party encourages member parties:**



1. to strengthen their bonds with local feminist actors working for SRHR or related topics,
2. to ensure the protection of sexual and reproductive rights for all, especially those from marginalised and vulnerable groups, and
3. to bring the voices of women to the forefront of the upcoming electoral campaigns;
4. to bring up SRHR in debates in upcoming electoral campaigns.

**and calls on European states and the European Union:**

1. to see SRHR as an unconditional aspect of the protection of human rights,
2. to guarantee free and accessible, good-quality and safe sexual and reproductive health care and services for all, along with comprehensive gender equality and sexuality education, and
3. to guarantee the funding for and safe working conditions of such organisations, both nationally and in official development aid.