



# Dialogue for change

Supporting material for policy dialogue  
on sexual and reproductive health and rights



Government Offices of Sweden  
Ministry for Foreign Affairs

# Introduction



Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) impact individuals, societies and economies worldwide. SRHR play a prominent role in Sweden's feminist foreign policy, international development cooperation and humanitarian assistance.

SRHR span across different areas such as human rights, gender equality, health, education, the labour market, climate, water, sanitation and hygiene, democracy, peace and security. Work on SRHR therefore requires a multi-sectoral approach.

Dialogue is an important tool in promoting SRHR. Staff at the Government Offices of Sweden, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and Swedish embassies and missions therefore have a key role to play in integrating SRHR in dialogue with different actors.

This brief highlights key aspects from *Dialogue for Change—Supporting material for policy dialogue on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)*, produced by the Government Offices of Sweden (the Ministry for Foreign Affairs), Sida and the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (RFSU).

## A COMPREHENSIVE DEFINITION OF SRHR

SRHR cover both sexual and reproductive health and sexual and reproductive rights.

Sweden supports the comprehensive and evidence-based definition of SRHR launched by the Guttmacher-Lancet Commission (GLC) in 2018.

The GLC defines sexual and reproductive health as follows:

*“Sexual and reproductive health is a state of physical, emotional, mental, and social wellbeing in relation to all aspects of sexuality and reproduction, not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction, or infirmity. Therefore, a positive approach to sexuality and reproduction should recognise the part played by pleasurable sexual relationships, trust, and communication in the promotion of self-esteem and overall wellbeing.”*

Sexual rights encompass several human rights that guarantee people the right to decide over their bodies and their sexuality free from discrimination, coercion and violence. The achievement of sexual and reproductive health relies on the realisation of sexual and reproductive rights.

## SRHR IN INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTS

The normative basis for the work on SRHR is found in international instruments and frameworks and Sweden's commitments in relation to these.

- *The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)*, in Cairo, established that reproductive health concerns the relationships and sexual lives of all individuals during their entire life cycle.
- *The 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women*, in Beijing, set out that women's SRHR are vital to ensuring their active participation in every aspect of society.
- *The ICPD Programme of Action and the Beijing Platform for Action*, and the outcomes of their follow-up conferences, are central in SRHR work.
- *2030 Agenda*, all the Sustainable Development Goals in the 2030 Agenda can be linked to SRHR. The clearest links are to good health and wellbeing (SDG 3), quality education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), clean water and sanitation (SDG 6) and reduced inequalities (SDG 10).

## SWEDEN'S THEMATIC SRHR PRIORITIES

Sweden's SRHR work must be guided by clear rights and gender perspectives and be based on international commitments.

Sweden prioritises the following thematic areas: maternal health, access to comprehensive

sexuality education, contraception, safe and legal abortion, sexually transmitted infections and HIV, and sexual and gender-based violence. Prioritised groups include women, girls, young people, persons living with disabilities and LGBTIQ persons.

#### **WHY ARE SRHR A PRIORITY FOR SWEDEN?**

Sexual and reproductive health and rights are human rights – all individuals have the right to make decisions about their own body and sexuality and to have access to comprehensive care and services that supports their rights.

Unmet SRHR needs, unintended pregnancies, complications of pregnancy and childbirth, unsafe abortions, sexual and gender-based violence, including child marriage and female genital mutilation, and sexually transmitted infections, have far-reaching consequences for the individual, as well as for public health and for social and economic development.

#### **WORKING FOR SRHR WITH AND THROUGH PARTNERS**

Working together with like-minded governments and other actors, including members of parliament, multilateral organisations, civil society, academia, religious actors and the business community, is crucial to promote and protect SRHR.

#### **SWEDEN, AN IMPORTANT VOICE IN THE WORLD**

Attempts to separate sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and reproductive rights (RR) from sexual rights (SR) are common. This undermines the comprehensive definition of SRHR. Sweden must promote the full SRHR agenda, including sexual rights.

# Preparing for dialogue

#### **OPENINGS FOR DIALOGUE**


Different aspects of the SRHR-agenda are closely linked, which means that a dialogue on one thematic area may create openings for discussion on other issues.

Thematic areas can be approached from a human rights perspective or a public health perspective.

From a human rights perspective, one can argue that maternal mortality and morbidity, caused by discriminatory legislation, norms and practices or ill-functioning health systems, can be avoided. From a public health perspective, the benefits from investing in continuity of care can be stressed.

#### **QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT**

- What does national legislation look like and what are the conditions for change in terms of realpolitik on the ground? What do different political actors want?
- What are the most important and most central SRHR challenges in the country we are working in? What are the consequences for different groups in the country? Use the statistics and other fact-based information as arguments and link them to a specific objective. Fact-based and statistical data on population questions can provide a scientific starting point for debate and negotiation. Also talk to different groups that provide different views of their perception of reality.
- What is the purpose of the Swedish intervention and what does this demand of the foreign mission or the home unit? Can data and information be obtained from colleagues at other foreign missions or from the country office of a UN body to strengthen the argument?
- What do we want to achieve/accomplish? Be as concrete as possible and avoid spanning too many issues at the same time.
- Which guidelines and steering documents are we following, e.g. international, regional or national commitments, including Swedish policies and positions?
- What obstacles might we encounter and how can we prepare to deal with them?
- What are the internationally agreed terms and language on SRHR and in which resolution or other policy document were they agreed?



**It's a human right  
to decide over  
your own body!**

# Checklist for dialogue

The following question and policy areas may help in building arguments and knowledge, and provide openings for dialogue. International and regional agreements and commitments are key starting points, and it is important to find out which agreements the country has ratified, as well as any reservations. One should also be aware of what is included on SRHR in the country's national reporting to the monitoring committees of the human rights conventions, where applicable, and the conclusions and recommendations the committees have issued regarding these. The reporting on human rights by Swedish embassies is also an important source of information.

## HUMAN RIGHTS AND NATIONAL LEGISLATION

- How are human rights met – for women, men, children and young people, LGBTIQ persons and persons living with disabilities?
- What does national legislation or national policy framework look like in field of health or other areas that affect SRHR? How do the country's global and regional commitments relate to its national implementation?
- How are questions handled that have a bearing on maternal health, women's access to safe abortions and young people's access to contraception?
- What is the legislation like on abortion, use of contraception and maternal health?
- What is the situation like in terms of the rule of law?
- How is violence and other crimes against women prosecuted?
- Are there laws that regulate voluntary sexual activity between adults?
- What legislation is there on children's rights, sexual crimes and the rights and conditions of LGBTIQ persons?
- What is the national age of majority and the legal age for sexual debut?
- In terms of people living with HIV/AIDS, are there laws that protect against discrimination and/or infection prevention and control legislation?
- Are people able to organise and make their voices heard? Who finds it the most difficult to do so?

## GENDER EQUALITY

- What is the lowest age for marriage under the law? Do women have the right to divorce?
- Are there laws about men's responsibility for their children?
- Do women have the right to own land? Do women have the right to inherit?
- Are there laws on violence against women?

## EDUCATION

- Is it compulsory to provide sexuality education in schools and if so, what does it contain?
- Which components are in line with UNESCO's guidelines on sexuality education?
- Is it permitted to hand out condoms in schools or in other public places?
- What is the situation like for girls who become pregnant while attending school?
- Is there any form of regulation on discrimination in school, e.g. against LGBTIQ persons?

## HEALTH

- Do young people have access to contraception counselling and testing?
- Are there different types of contraception to choose from?
- What does access to contraception such as condoms look like?
- What are the costs of sexual and reproductive healthcare?

## SOCIAL NORMS

- What norms contribute to individuals' rights being infringed or strengthened?
- Which groups affect social norms for others?
- What can motivate people to break social norms that are harmful to others?

## PUBLIC OPINION, THE MEDIA AND POLITICS

- Are SRHR questions asked in the media?
- Which ministers raise these questions and in what way?
- Who defends these issues in public?
- Who is/are opposed to these issues?
- What does support look like in Parliament?
- What does support look like among civil society actors, local communities and among traditional and religious leaders?
- What is the attitude of different key actors at national, regional and local level?
- Which people have formal and informal power in society?
- What role is played by: Religious representatives? Local leaders? Traditional leaders? Parliament? The media? Women's organisations and networks? Certain individuals or groups of men or women? Rights defenders and other civil society associations?

## ATTITUDE OF INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

- What does support look like among EU Member States?
- What is the attitude of international actors such as the donor community?
- Which donors or multilateral actors are active in the health sector, the education sector, in the field of human rights; or other relevant sectors?
- What are their starting points?
- What are their questions for dialogue?
- How can we more effectively reinforce each other's dialogue?
- Are like-minded donors included in contexts where Sweden is not represented and, in such cases, can we influence them?

## MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

[www.regeringen.se](http://www.regeringen.se)

Switchboard +46 8 405 10 00

Twitter @SweMFA

Facebook Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Instagram @utrikesdep @swedishmfa



Government Offices of Sweden  
Ministry for Foreign Affairs