

Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development

This statement is delivered on behalf of Federation for Women and Family Planning, Poland, and ASTRA, Central and Eastern European Network advocating for sexual and reproductive health and rights and promoting gender equality.

Women's empowerment is one of the key factors of sustainable development and is a cross-cutting component of the new development framework. We applaud the CSW to continue to play a strong role in monitoring the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and establishing strong linkages with the relevant SDG goals and targets. Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights are key to the Sustainable Development Goals and are now recognized explicitly as integral to achieving those goals. However, they remain to be contested and questioned issues around the world.

The current trends taking place in Central and Eastern Europe are very alarming. Instead of an improvement in the lives of women we are now experiencing a backlash in women's rights advancement. In the past few years we have experienced numerous attacks on women's reproductive rights. The vast existing cultural and social barriers are possibly the most important factors influencing women's access to reproductive health services and commodities. However, the major obstacle is the lack of political will and common interest in embracing women's health. The backlash on gender equality and the "anti-gender movement" is fueled by extreme and conservative forces with substantial effects on women's health. The most glaring example is the abuse of the conscience clause among service providers. Growing acceptance for fundamentalism and right-wing rhetoric has become an issue of the entire region and can be observed in other parts of the world.

Addressing this process and realizing the Sustainable Development Goals will only be achieved through empowerment of all women and girls and by taking forward actions that:

- Ensure that sexual and reproductive health and rights are positioned at the heart of sustainable development;
- Ensure comprehensive sexuality education in schools;
- Ensure access to safe and legal abortion and remove all legal and structural barriers to universal access to safe abortion;
- Ensure access to affordable methods of modern contraception;
- Take appropriate steps to eradicate all forms of gender based violence;
- Recognize the sexual and reproductive rights of people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity.

These are fundamental priorities for any human rights-based and people-centered agenda and must be part of the new development framework.