EU countries should ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health

- Guarantee access to safe and legal abortion
- Remove all barriers to sexual and reproductive health services
- The COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on women’s health and rights
- There should be no VAT on menstrual products

MEPs urge member states to protect and further enhance women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights in a report adopted on Thursday.

With 378 votes in favour, 255 against and 42 abstentions, plenary states that the right to health, in particular sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), is a fundamental pillar of women’s rights and gender equality that cannot in any way be watered down or withdrawn.

Parliament declares that violations of women’s SRHR are a form of violence against women and girls and hinder progress towards gender equality. It thus calls on EU countries to ensure women are offered high quality, comprehensive and accessible SRHR, and to remove all barriers impeding them from using these services.

Access to abortion, contraception and sexuality education

MEPs stress that some member states still have highly restrictive laws prohibiting abortion except in strictly defined circumstances, forcing women to seek clandestine abortions or carry their pregnancy to term against their will, which is a violation of their human rights. They urge all member states to ensure universal access to safe and legal abortion, and guarantee that abortion on request is legal in early pregnancy, and beyond if the pregnant person’s health is in danger.
MEPs regret that some member states allow medical practitioners, and even entire medical institutions, refuse the provision of health services because of a so-called conscience clause. This leads to the denial of abortion care on the grounds of religion or conscience and puts women's lives in danger.

Furthermore, the House demands that EU countries ensure a range of high-quality contraceptive methods and supplies, family counselling and information on contraception are widely available.

MEPs regret that access to abortion continues to be limited during the COVID-19 crisis, as well as the effects the pandemic has had on the supply and access to contraceptives.

Parliament encourages member states to ensure sexuality education is taught comprehensively to primary and secondary school children, as SRHR education can significantly contribute to reducing sexual violence and harassment.

**Menstrual products are essential basic goods**

Pointing out the negative effects of the so-called tampon tax on gender equality, MEPs call on member states to make use of the flexibility introduced in the VAT Directive and apply exemptions or 0% VAT rates to these essential basic goods. They also ask EU countries to tackle menstrual poverty by providing free period products to anyone in need.

**Quote**

Rapporteur Predrag Matić (S&D, HR) said: “This vote marks a new era in the European Union and the first real resistance to a regressive agenda that has trampled on women's rights in Europe for years. A majority of MEPs have made their position clear to member states and called on them to ensure access to safe and legal abortion and a range of other sexual and reproductive health services.”

**A worldwide issue**
In a separate resolution taking stock of the results of the Nairobi Summit on population and development, MEPs emphasise that women around the world should be guaranteed proper and affordable healthcare and respect for their sexual and reproductive rights. They add that accessible SRHR services, family planning, maternal, antenatal and neonatal healthcare and safe abortion services are important elements in saving women’s lives and reducing infant and child mortality. The text passed with 444 votes to 182 and 57 abstentions.

Further information

Adopted texts (24.06.2021)

Results of the roll-call votes (24.06.2021)

Video recording of the debate (23.06.2021)
Procedure file
Press release - Polish de facto ban on abortion puts women’s lives at risk, says Parliament (26.11.2020)
EP resolution on the de facto ban on the right to abortion in Poland (26.11.2020)
EP Research Service - COVID-19: The need for a gendered response (February 2021)
Free photos, video and audio material - SRHR
Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality
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