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La santé et les droits sexuels et reproductifs à la croisée des chemins : des réactions anti-genre à la reconquête des droits, de l'autonomisation et de la justice

How we can reclaim Sexual and Reproductive Rights

Between progress and regression: The rise of anti-gender movements and their impact on SRHR

De Carine Weiss

Global progress on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) is coming under increasing pressure. Alongside crises such as climate change, conflict and economic uncertainty, an internationally networked anti-gender movement is forming that is working specifically to dismantle equality and protection mechanisms for women, girls and LGBTQI+ people. Its strategies range from restricting access to abortion and sex education to spreading disinformation.



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Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) have long been recognised as essential to human health, autonomy, and gender equality. Over the past three decades, the global health community has repeatedly reaffirmed that SRHR is not a peripheral agenda, but a foundational pillar of sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda, adopted in 2015, enshrined this understanding, integrating SRHR across multiple goals from maternal health and gender equality to education, poverty reduction, and social justice. Since the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994 in Cairo, global commitments have led to major gains: expanded access to contraception and safe childbirth care, reduced maternal mortality, and growing recognition of bodily autonomy as a non-negotiable human right. These achievements rested on the premise that gender equality, empowerment, and non-discrimination are prerequisites for sustainable development.

The rise of anti-gender movements

Yet today, SRHR progress is under unprecedented threat. The global landscape in which ICPD commitments were forged has shifted dramatically. Climate emergencies, conflict, displacement, economic precarity, and widening inequalities are transforming societies. But alongside these structural crises, a powerful political force has emerged that directly targets the foundations of SRHR: the global gender backlash.

Across regions, anti-gender actors rooted in nationalist, conservative, and authoritarian political projects are mobilising to restrict reproductive rights, dismantle gender equality frameworks, and erase protections for women, girls, and LGBTQI+ people.

These movements are not isolated phenomena; they are globally networked, well financed, and strategically coordinated.

Their methods are strikingly consistent:

- reframing gender equality as a threat to national identity,
- attacking “gender ideology” to delegitimise human rights norms,
- spreading digital disinformation,
- restricting abortion access,
- undermining comprehensive sexuality education, and
- weakening women’s rights institutions and civil society.

This backlash is not simply ideological it is a political strategy to reinforce patriarchal power structures, divert public attention from economic injustice, and legitimise authoritarian governance. The consequences for SRHR are immediate and measurable.

Eroding rights, rising harm

The rollback of SRHR has direct public health impacts. According to the World Health Organization, 45% of all abortions worldwide occur under unsafe conditions, a stark reminder of what happens when rights are restricted. Six in ten unintended pregnancies end in abortion. Restrictive laws do not reduce abortion; they increase harm, especially for those already facing discrimination, including adolescents, migrants, people living with disabilities, LGBTQI+ communities and people in humanitarian crises.

Gender backlash also fuels stigma, violence, and discrimination in health systems. It delegitimises evidence-based SRHR interventions and undermines the work of frontline providers. In many contexts, digital disinformation campaigns have become key tools for manipulating public sentiment, polarising communities, and obstructing access to accurate health information.

A critical moment for the global SRHR community

The 30 years celebrations of the ICPD-conference took place in a world shaped by overlapping crises. Yet these crises are not only external threats, they are being instrumentalised by anti-gender actors to justify regressive policies. Economic insecurity, forced displacement, demographic anxieties, and technological disruption provide fertile ground for scapegoating women, migrants, and sexual minorities.

In this environment, defending SRHR requires more than service delivery. It demands political clarity and collective action. SRHR is not merely a technical health agenda it is a politicised arena where struggles over power, identity, and rights are unfolding in real time.

Reclaiming SRHR: A political and moral imperative

Despite these challenges, resistance is strong. Feminist movements, youth networks, migrant-led organisations, LGBTQI+ groups, health providers, and human rights defenders are mobilising globally to reclaim the narrative and protect bodily autonomy. Their work demonstrates that progress is still possible when advocacy is evidence-driven, intersectional, and grounded in the lived realities of those most affected.

Reclaiming SRHR at this crossroads requires:

- strengthening rights-based legal frameworks,
- investing in gender-transformative health systems,
- countering disinformation with evidence and community-led communication,
- protecting human rights defenders,
- and addressing the structural drivers such as misogyny, racism, nationalism, and economic inequality that allow gender backlash to flourish.

I recently recorded a podcast with Neil Datta on the rise of anti-gender movements and their impact on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). We discussed how these organisations strategically work to influence political decisions with the aim of restricting gender equality, LGBTQI rights, contraception, abortion, and comprehensive sexuality education. Understanding their networks and tactics is essential for human rights defenders to effectively counter attempts to roll back SRHR. Our conversation underscores a clear message: achieving gender equality requires confronting and stopping the anti-gender movement.

Conclusion: The future depends on our actions now

SRHR stands at a pivotal moment. The current backlash is not a temporary interruption it is a global political project that must be actively confronted. The decisions made now will determine whether the next decades are marked by regression or by renewed momentum towards gender justice and bodily autonomy.

Reclaiming rights, empowerment, and justice is not optional. It is an urgent imperative for the global health community and for all who believe that every person has the right to control their body, their future, and their life.

On 29 April 2026, the SRHR Conference of Medicus Mundi Switzerland in Bern will gather experts under the theme “Between Drought and Dignity: How Climate Change Threatens Sexual and Reproductive Rights”, we will also unpack how rising gender backlash intensifies these threats. Registration soon open.

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