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# 149th IPU Assembly

Geneva  
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## Workshop

### *Can parliaments tip the balance for sexual and reproductive health and rights?*

Organized jointly by the IPU, the World Health Organization, and the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH)

*Tuesday, 15 October 2024, 09:00-10:30  
Salle Genève (CCV, annex to the CICG)*

#### Concept note

#### Background

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are central to sustainable development and as such are an integral part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They are not only critical for maternal, child and adolescent health and well-being, but also for gender equality and women's empowerment, while enabling all people to fully participate in, and contribute to, their societies<sup>1</sup>. However, disparities and discrimination in access to sexual and reproductive health services remain and in fact are becoming exacerbated, especially for the most marginalized women and girls. Since 2015, progress in reducing maternal deaths has largely stalled, or in some cases even reversed<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, many women are still unable to exercise decision-making over their own bodies. Individuals and communities facing structural inequalities and intersecting forms of oppression are the most affected. These disparities are driven by cultural and gender norms, social taboos, lack of information and misinformation, but also regressive forces working to undermine and reverse progress, contributing to polarization and shrinking the political space for SRHR.

Within this context, parliaments are a key actor. Legislation is being used on one hand to promote progress, and on the other to restrict access to services and criminalize sexual and reproductive behaviours. Initiatives to repeal protective legislation have also been observed. As leaders and representatives of the people, parliamentarians also play an important role in shaping values and attitudes, including the narrative around SRHR.

#### Objectives and guiding questions

The IPU has been working with health partners to open up spaces for dialogue, provide access to evidence and technical expertise, share examples and practices of effective promotion of health and human rights, and engage all relevant stakeholders. This work is spearheaded by the IPU Advisory Group on Health, which prioritized vulnerable and marginalized populations in SRHR in its 2024 workplan. The workshop will present the results of these efforts and encourage constructive debate on improving access to sexual and reproductive health services and upholding the human rights that enable sexual and reproductive health.

<sup>1</sup> [Investing in sexual and reproductive health and rights: essential elements of universal health coverage](#), WHO, 23 May 2023.

<sup>2</sup> [A woman dies every two minutes due to pregnancy or childbirth: UN agencies](#), WHO, 23 February 2023.

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The workshop will address the following questions:

- What is the political space for SRHR and how is SRHR being politicized?
- How are parliamentarians using evidence and how can parliaments build an evidence-based culture in addressing SRHR?
- What are some examples of effective parliamentary action on SRHR, including in reaching vulnerable and marginalized populations?

#### **Useful resources**

- Handbook: [\*Road map for action on women's, children's and adolescents' health\*](#)
- [Podcasts](#):
  - o Sexual and reproductive health and rights: What role for parliamentarians?
  - o Access to health: Are parliaments redressing inequalities for women and girls?
- WHO Report: [Extending sexual and reproductive health and rights to future generations through science and evidence](#)

#### **Practical arrangements**

This 90-minute session is open to all delegates at the 149th IPU Assembly.

Interpretation will be provided in English, French, Spanish and Arabic.