



POLICY BRIEF

Ensuring Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Care as Part of Universal Health Coverage

International Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Consortium
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This policy brief underscores the need to include SRHR in achieving Universal Health Coverage and is intended to inform advocacy, research, and policy efforts by community leaders, policymakers, public health professionals, and academics.

Key messages

- **Universal Health Coverage (UHC)** is essential to the right to health—ensuring everyone can access needed care without facing additional financial hardship, and a key goal under SDG 3 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- **SRHR is fundamental to the achievement of UHC** and must be comprehensively integrated into health policies, financing, and service delivery. This includes services for contraception, safe abortion or post-abortion care, maternal health, comprehensive sexuality education, and STI/HIV prevention and care.
- **SRHR is a high-impact investment** that improves health outcomes, reduces maternal and neonatal mortality, promotes gender equality, upholds human rights commitments and drives sustainable development.
- **Equitable access to SRHR must be a priority**, recognising the needs of women, girls, adolescents, and marginalised groups—such as LGBTQI+ people, people with disabilities, and climate-affected communities—through inclusive, rights-based services and community-led approaches.
- **To achieve UHC, investment must be made into building resilient health systems that can meet growing demand for SRHR services** – through integrated service delivery, building strong supply chains, sustainable financing, and fostering a trained health workforce to ensure consistent, accessible care for all.

THE ISSUE

Universal Health Coverage (UHC) aims to ensure that all people can access the health services they need—when and where they need them—without facing financial hardship. Achieving UHC is a cornerstone of global health and development efforts and is critical to fulfilling the right to health for all, as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 3 in particular).

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) are an essential component of UHC. SRHR encompasses a broad range of health services and rights, including contraception, maternal and newborn care, safe abortion or post-abortion care, prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV, testing and treatment for reproductive tract cancers, and access to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) for young people. These services are fundamental to reducing maternal and neonatal mortality, preventing unintended pregnancies, supporting bodily autonomy, and advancing gender equality.

However, SRHR remains underprioritized in many national UHC plans, including in the Asia-Pacific region where millions continue to face major barriers in accessing essential services and information. These barriers—ranging from financial hardship and geographic isolation to social stigma, discriminatory norms, and restrictive laws—are often compounded by health systems that are under-resourced, fragmented, and ill-prepared to meet diverse SRH needs.

The region is witnessing persistent and widening gaps in SRHR, which threaten hard-won gains in health equity and sustainable development. High maternal mortality, unmet need for contraception, adolescent pregnancies, and rising rates of STIs are all symptoms of critical service gaps. These challenges fall most heavily on women, girls, adolescents, and marginalised communities, including LGBTQI+ individuals, people living with disabilities or those living in rural, remote, and climate-vulnerable areas. Likewise, inadequate health infrastructure, weak supply chains, and fragmented health services leave many countries unable to meet the full spectrum of SRH needs. A chronic shortage of skilled health personnel—including midwives, nurses, and doctors trained in delivering rights-based SRH care—further limits the capacity of health systems to ensure equitable care to all people.

With nearly 60% of the world's youth aged 15–25 residing in the Asia-Pacific region, the lack of access to CSE also represents both a serious public health challenge and a missed development opportunity¹. Without accurate, age-appropriate, and culturally relevant information, young people are unable to make informed decisions about their bodies, relationships, and futures. This gap leaves them vulnerable to adolescent pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections including HIV, early and forced marriage, and sexual and gender-based violence.

OPPORTUNITIES

Integrating SRHR into UHC strategies offers a pathway to streamline services, improve efficiency, and ensure comprehensive, rights-based care for all². Governments can strengthen health system resilience by embedding essential SRHR services—such as contraception, safe abortion and post-abortion care, maternal health, STI prevention, and support for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)—within national health packages and financing frameworks. This integration not only advances health outcomes but also promotes gender equality and progress towards development commitments.

Securing dedicated funding for SRHR within national health budgets is crucial to realising these gains and unlocking long-term demographic and development benefits. In line with the guidance put forward by WHO³, this should take a multi-step approach that considers policy and legislative reform, improvements to health infrastructure, building workforce capacity, strengthening supply chains and improving the delivery of high-quality, integrated services.

In line with this, national and donor governments alike must prioritise SRHR as a central pillar of their health and gender equality commitments. Increased international support is essential to empower national governments and partners in scaling up SRHR services and ensuring these commitments translate into tangible health improvements on the ground.

Investing in SRHR is not only a human rights imperative but also a highly strategic and cost-effective approach to building stronger health systems, reducing the burden of preventable diseases, and enabling individuals—especially women, girls, and young people—to participate fully and equally in social, economic, and political life. To close persistent service gaps and address inequalities, governments must commit to sustained, targeted investment in SRHR as a foundation for resilient, inclusive, and equitable health systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recognise SRHR as a fundamental human right** and as essential to strengthening health systems, improving health outcomes, advancing gender equality and progress towards development commitments.
- **Fully integrate SRHR into national UHC strategies.** Ensure comprehensive SRHR services, including contraception, safe abortion, maternal health, STI prevention, and support for survivors SGBV, are included in health benefit packages, financing plans, and workforce development.
- **Invest in resilient, inclusive health systems.** Prioritise sustained funding for supply chains, building a skilled and fairly compensated SRHR workforce, and expanding inclusive, youth-friendly services to build equitable, people-centred systems that can meet diverse needs of populations and withstand future challenges

- **Guarantee universal access to CSE.** Scale up age-appropriate, culturally relevant, evidence-based CSE through schools and trusted community channels to empower young people to exercise their SRHR, improve health outcomes, reduce violence, and advance gender equality.
- **Prioritise meaningful community engagement and accountability.** Involve civil society, youth, and marginalised groups in designing and delivering SRH programming and interventions; building trust, ensuring responsiveness, increasing transparency, and promoting equity.
- **Advance policy and legislative reform.** Advocate for removing legal and regulatory barriers to SRHR access, enabling full integration within UHC and protecting human rights in the face of growing global challenges.

Visit [International Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Consortium](https://www.srhrconsortium.org) for further reading or to find out more about the International SRHR Consortium.

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¹ United Nations Population Fund. Sexual and Reproductive Health of Young People in Asia and the Pacific. Bangkok: UNFPA, 2015. Accessed June 4, 2025. https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA%20SHR%20YP%20AP_2015%20for%20web-final.pdf

² United Nations Population Fund. Universal Health Coverage for Sexual and Reproductive Health in Asia-Pacific. Bangkok: UNFPA, 2018. Accessed June 4, 2025. <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/publications/universal-health-coverage-sexual-and-reproductive-health-asia-pacific>

³ World Health Organization. Critical Considerations and Actions for Achieving Universal Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health in the Context of Universal Health Coverage through a Primary Health Care Approach. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2022. Accessed June 4, 2025. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240052659>