



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

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### Statement submitted by International Planned Parenthood Federation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) is a leading advocate of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and a global service provider. IPPF is a locally owned, globally connected federation which works through Member Associations and collaborative partners in a total of 142 countries to empower women, men and young people in the most vulnerable situations to access life-saving services and programmes, and live with dignity. We have had general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 1973.

### **The role of SRHR in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of the climate crisis**

#### I. Impacts of the climate crisis on the realization of SRHR

The climate crisis has devastating impacts on the realization of human rights, the advancement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Deeply ingrained, systemic and multiple forms of discrimination mean that women and girls are at a higher risk of experiencing harmful effects of the climate crisis. Where women and girls experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, such as on account of their ethnicity, disability or migrant status, their vulnerability is heightened even more. Many of the adverse impacts women and girls may suffer in the context of the climate crisis relate to their SRHR.

The climate crisis can affect realization of SRHR in a range of ways. At a quite practical level, the climate crisis can impede access to SRH services. Where critical infrastructure, such as clinics and roads, is destroyed in extreme weather events, this can prevent people from accessing health services or make them unavailable. In humanitarian response work, SRH services are often under-funded and under-prioritised. Even where services are available and within reach, women, girls, and marginalized communities may be unable to access them due to existing gender-related and other barriers that are heightened during crises. Where SRH services are unavailable, maternal morbidity and mortality and other adverse health outcomes increase.

Lack of access to clean and safe water, such as in the aftermath of extreme weather events or due to increasing water scarcity as a result of climate change, can also pose a major impediment. Clean and safe water is critical for ensuring provision of safe and quality SRH services, including during pregnancy and childbirth and for the administration of certain contraceptive methods. Lack of adequate sanitation facilities and water points in safe locations also increases the risk of sexual and gender-based violence and affects management of menstrual health.

The climate crisis can also have a range of harmful impacts on maternal health. Recent research conducted by the Association of Air Pollution and Heat Exposure With Preterm Birth, Low Birth Weight, and Stillbirth focused on the United States, found significant associations between air pollution and heat exposure related to climate change and risk to pregnancy outcomes, including preterm birth, low birth weight, and stillbirth. Black women were found to be at a higher risk of adverse outcomes than white women, illustrating how exposure to multiple forms of discrimination exacerbates vulnerability. Maternal health can further be affected by saline contamination of drinking water as a result of saltwater intrusion from rising sea levels. Increased salt intake can lead to a number of adverse pregnancy and maternal health outcomes, including preterm births and maternal deaths.

Furthermore, the climate crisis can increase the incidence of sexual and gender-based violence. Risks of sexual and gender-based violence are heightened during

humanitarian crises and in times of displacement. Both can be expected to increase as a result of more severe and frequent extreme weather events and the slow onset effects of the climate crisis, such as sea level rise. Child, early and forced marriages are also more likely to take place in times of crisis and displacement.

The climate crisis may further pose particular risks for the rights and health of people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics. Due to their frequent marginalization, sexual and gender minorities are often more severely affected by disasters associated with natural and other hazards. A neglect of their needs in disaster risk reduction policies and practices can further compound their vulnerability. Continued criminalization of same-sex sexual activity in various jurisdictions presents a major barrier to the needs of sexual and gender minorities being acknowledged and addressed.

## II. SRHR in climate change adaptation and resilience

SRHR must be recognized as an important element of climate change adaptation and resilience. SRHR are critical for fulfilling women and girls' rights, advancing gender equality, health, and well-being and for overcoming marginalization and thus for strengthening individuals' and communities' resilience and capacity to adapt to the climate crisis.

Inequalities and marginalization are key factors in heightening vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. Addressing gender inequalities and other forms of marginalization and discrimination is therefore crucial to reducing vulnerability and increasing resilience to climate change and an important element of climate change adaptation. Empowering and fulfilling women and girls' rights, advancement of gender equality further strengthens the capacity of women, girls, and marginalized communities to participate in the development and implementation of measures for climate change adaptation and mitigation, which in turn will increase their fairness, effectiveness, and sustainability.

SRHR interventions are not only essential for health and well-being, but are also critical enablers of women's and girls' access to opportunities across social, economic, and political life, where current gender gaps are stark. Unintended pregnancies, complications in pregnancy and childbirth, unsafe abortions, sexual and gender-based violence, sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and reproductive cancers all are major impediments to the health and well-being of women and girls. Addressing these through quality, accessible SRH service provision and advancement of sexual and reproductive rights is critical for promoting and fulfilling the health and rights of women and girls and for enabling their full and equal participation in all aspects of life.

SRHR must be an important consideration in measures aimed at enhancing resilience to both the slow onset impacts of the climate crisis and its more immediate effects. With extreme weather events increasing in frequency and intensity as a result of climate change, disaster risk reduction is an important component of climate change adaptation, which SRHR should form an integral part of. SRHR are critical for reducing vulnerability to the effects of crises. Where rights are upheld before disasters occur, they are less likely to be violated during disasters and after they have taken place.

According to the report of the Guttmacher-Lancet Commission, advancing SRHR and, in turn, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls requires availability of a broad package of SRHR services and information, which should include contraceptive services; maternal and newborn care; safe abortion care; prevention and treatment of HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections; comprehensive sexuality education; prevention, detection, and counselling for sexual

and gender-based violence; prevention, detection, and treatment of infertility and cervical cancer; and counselling and care for sexual health and well-being. Advancing SRHR also requires interventions beyond the health sector to address the structural barriers – embedded in social norms, laws, and policies – that prevent individuals from realizing their SRHR. It further requires placing particular focus on the needs of marginalized groups, including through addressing the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that prevent them from realizing their rights.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Recognize and support SRHR as critical to climate change adaptation and resilience**

Governments should recognize and support SRHR as critical to climate change adaptation and resilience. SRHR should be integrated into policy and implementation processes on climate change adaptation from global to local levels. Donor governments and agencies should increase their funding support for SRHR in relation to climate change adaptation.

#### **Ensure focus on human rights, non-discrimination and gender equality in responses to the climate crisis**

Responses to the climate crisis must be grounded in human rights and the principle of non-discrimination and seek to alleviate rather than reinforce existing inequalities. Gender equality should be a key consideration in climate processes and should be mainstreamed across all efforts to address the climate crisis.

#### **Enable meaningful civil society engagement**

Effective and responsive climate action requires the meaningful participation of civil society working with communities affected by the climate crisis in the development and implementation of policies on climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilience at all levels, ranging from international to national and local processes. Particular focus should be placed on the meaningful engagement of women's and youth groups as well as of groups working with and representative of marginalized populations.

#### **Advance mitigation of climate change**

Reflecting their disproportionate impacts and responsibility for the climate crisis, high-emission countries must take decisive action to cut their greenhouse gas emissions. High-income countries should further provide suitable levels of funding and other forms of support to low- and middle-income countries to respond and adapt to the climate crisis.