



# INTERNATIONAL DAY OF ACTION FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH

2022 REGIONAL CALL FOR ACTION

**#WomenHealth  
Matters**

**#SRHRisEssential**

**#PassEAC  
SRH Bill**



On May 28, the International Day of Action for Women's Health, activists in all their diversities around the world take action, mobilize, and demand the fulfilment of women's right to health. This year in Africa, we call on everyone to once again assert that #WomensHealthMatters and #SRHRisEssential amid crises and global

Within the context of the post-pandemic recovery, we continue to hold governments accountable to the gendered impacts of the pandemic that remain unaddressed to date. Some of these impacts include loss of livelihoods, increased care burdens on women and girls, heightened risks to sexual and gender-based violence, and barriers to accessing essential sexual and reproductive health services, including safe abortion and post-abortion care.

We also escalate the need for accountability at the regional level as we recognize that the multiple crises we face - economic, political, humanitarian, climate, disinformation - require no less than concerted regional effort to be adequately addressed. We pay special attention to the further de-prioritization of women's health globally and in many African countries experiencing crises and uncertainty, and we express our deep concerns about the increasing opposition to women's sexual and reproductive health rights in the region.

## Concerning trends

- In Ukraine, where Russia's military invasion is bombing social institutions such as schools and medical facilities, tens of thousands of pregnant people are projected to deliver their babies in bomb shelters. Women in Ukraine are also experiencing sexual violence and wartime rape.
- In the United States, the Supreme Court is set to overturn Roe VS Wade, its landmark decision on abortion rights. The loss of this historical legal precedent is seen to impact negatively abortion rights all over the world.
- In East Africa, the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) in 2017 has withdrew the East Africa Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) Bill, 2017, asking to redraft the said legislation afresh. The Bill is being redrafted and discussed currently however the bill is still facing opposition from conservatives, fundamentalists and other opposition groups from religious bodies.
- In the Democratic Republic of Congo, where one of the most complex humanitarian crises has resulted in deterioration of health and social infrastructure and in record-levels of hunger of its people, women and girls do not have access to basic services, such as maternal health and birthing facilities and reproductive health information and services.

- Meanwhile, feminist and human rights organizations and activists everywhere have to deal with shrinking spaces for rights advocacy, increase in anti-feminist, anti-gender rhetoric, and mass disinformation and propaganda as right-wing, authoritarian leaders continue to take power.
- In most of the East and Southern Africa (ESA) countries, young people's sexuality and sexual activity is a taboo subject, and viewed as something that should be prevented, discouraged, suppressed or forbidden. Young persons with disabilities particularly face significant barriers to access information, education and services in sexual and reproductive health that are adequate, comprehensive and free of prejudice. At the same time, unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV/AIDS, harassment and sexual violence, to which many young persons in their diversity are exposed, are a major threat to their personal development, health and quality of life.

## Gains and wins

Still, there have also been wins to celebrate as countries in the global south have been able to make progress on SRHR and abortion legislation amid the pandemic.

In Kenya, the High Court affirmed that abortion care is a fundamental right under the Constitution of Kenya. This makes arbitrary arrests and prosecution of healthcare providers and patients illegal and moves Kenyan legislation to introduce abortion laws that align with the Constitutional values of autonomy and bodily integrity, allowing women the full enjoyment of their SRHR.

In Ghana, the government has interpreted its existing laws to recognize the importance of safe abortion service for women's health and wellbeing. The Ministry of Health has taken significant efforts to expand post-abortion care and the grounds for safe abortion services to include rape, incest, fetal abnormality or disease, or to protect physical and mental health.

In Latin America, Argentina, Mexico, and Argentina have all liberalized their respective abortion laws amidst the pandemic. With varying degrees of liberalization, setting an incredibly positive tone for the rest of the region's states to follow suit.

Early this year, we also welcomed the World Health Organization's new set of abortion care guidelines that underscores the urgent need to lift unnecessary law and policy barriers to safe abortion.

# Take Action!

Evidently, contexts are fast-changing and progress on our agenda is not linear. We experience rollbacks as much as we achieve gains and we continue to work amid crises and uncertainty.

**This May 28, International Day of Action for Women’s Health, we call on SRHR activists and allies across continent to resist continuing rollbacks and false narratives that disenfranchise marginalized communities and negatively impact women’s health and rights and to come together to combat the multiple crises we face by calling on our governments to recognize that #SRHRisEssential and central to all crisis responses.**

We will take our lessons from the pandemic and assert the rights based approach to women’s health and sexual and reproductive health and rights for all, which means empowering everyone to make choices over their bodies, health and lives free from discrimination, stigma and violence. We will take inspiration not only from our gains but from each other who continue to struggle regardless of having won or lost.

**Join us and SRHR activists worldwide in calling on African governments and global institutions to:**

- Recognize sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) as essential in post-pandemic recovery and commit to its achievement through legislation and implementation of policies that facilitate access to sexual and reproductive health services and information, including safe abortion and post-abortion care services, and repealing of harmful policies, particularly those that criminalize women and marginalized genders for making choices over their bodies, health and lives;
- Recognize the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression experienced by African women and girls in all their diversities, especially those living in vulnerable situations, that prevent them from accessing crucial social services, such as public transport and infrastructure, housing and sanitation, education and health services;

- Protect and facilitate the attainment of the life course sexual and reproductive health and rights of all persons and provide for the progressive realization of integrated sexual and reproductive health information and services as part of the universal health coverage, and pass the EAC SRH Bill 2021;
- Prohibit and eliminate sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), which include harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation and cutting, and femicide, and recognize SGBV as a shadow pandemic that affects a third of all women globally and is especially prevalent during crisis;
- Address health, information, and education needs of young people by providing them with comprehensive sexuality education and addressing challenges related to the digital divide, and ensuring the equal, full, and meaningful participation of young people in all their diversity in development efforts;
- Address access needs of young people on sexual and reproductive health services and comprehensive sexuality education by ensuring adolescent- and youth-friendly facilities, information and services are available, healthcare workers are trained, hotlines or online services for consultation and referral are in place, and young people are empowered to access these services;
- Address menstruation-related stigma, isolation, harassment, discrimination and social exclusion. Ensure that girls, women with disabilities, transgender men and non-binary persons have access to free menstrual health commodities and health facilities they need. Strengthen menstrual health and hygiene programmes to address the obstacles to menstrual health, freedom and development.
- Fight mass disinformation, including on issues of abortion, gender and sexuality, and invest in research that applies an intersectional lens that links socioeconomic, health, and gender inequalities to climate change, to address the data gaps, provide evidence-based insights to strengthen policies and programs, and promote intersectional analysis;
- Address structural barriers, embedded in social norms, laws, and policies that prevent individuals from realizing their sexual and reproductive health and rights and exacerbate the multiple crises we are experiencing; and
- Oppose the rise of fundamentalisms and authoritarianism; and denounce war of aggression, build peace, and strengthen solidarities based on rights and evidence-based policymaking at regional level.

# Join Us!

Mobilize and demands the fulfillment of women's right to health.

- Organize a local, national or regional event around May 28 Day of Action.



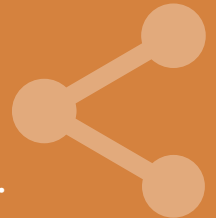
- Assist and support your member organization / local chapters/ local community in organizing their own local events to assert that Women's Health Matter.



- Promote the Campaign on your list-serve and social media channels.

- Organize tweetathons.

- Use hashtags #SRHRisEssential, #EACSRHRBillMatters; #WomenHealthMatters.



- Share updates, and pictures and reports of your events and actions.

Email us at [walta@wgnrr.org](mailto:walta@wgnrr.org)

