

## CALL TO ACTION

26-27 September 2023 | Tbilisi, Georgia

We, the participants of the regional conference “Accelerating Progress in Sexual and Reproductive Health in Eastern Europe and Central Asia” held in Tbilisi on 26-27 September 2023, representing governments, civil society and academia, international thematic networks, the private sector and professional societies,

- Welcome the significant progress that has been made over last three decades in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights,
- Recognize that many challenges remain to be addressed in ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and realizing reproductive rights for *all* people, *everywhere* in the region,
- Acknowledge that further progress is under threat in a changing environment, as a result of, inter alia, armed conflicts, health crises, poverty, emigration of skilled health personnel, pushback against gender equality and reproductive rights, and climate change.
- Emphasize the importance of increased investments in sexual and reproductive health and rights for integrating essential sexual and reproductive health services within universal health care.
- Advocate for delivering universal access to sexual and reproductive health, as a fundamental right of each individual and the responsibility of each country and territory in the region.
- Express our commitment to strengthening our efforts, cooperation, and accountability for accelerating progress towards achieving sexual and reproductive health for all.

## Priorities for further action

We confirm that we will be guided in our action by the following priorities:

- **Advancing universal health coverage** for accelerating universal access to essential sexual and reproductive health services for all, leaving no one behind,
- **Eliminating preventable maternal deaths and morbidity**, reversing the recent increase in maternal mortality in some countries and reducing the impact of health crises, armed conflicts and other factors slowing down progress in maternal health,

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- **Reconfirming the continued importance of family planning in low-fertility contexts** as being central for women's ability to realize their fertility intentions and reproductive rights, for minimizing the incidence of unintended pregnancies, and for enabling women and girls to fulfil their potential, thereby strengthening societies' human capital and demographic resilience,
- **Prioritizing infertility prevention and treatment** to support couples and individuals in realizing their reproductive choices,
- **Addressing the growing numbers of new cases and deaths caused by reproductive system cancers** (cervical, breast, ovarian), with particular focus on cervical cancer prevention, due to its preventability,
- **Ending gender-based violence and harmful practices such as child marriage** which are violations of human rights and barriers to the full realization of bodily autonomy,
- **Addressing the lack of awareness and knowledge in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights**, as well as **harmful social and gender norms** and misconceptions, myths and attitudes with negative impact on people's ability to realize their reproductive rights, both among the general population and among service providers,
- **Addressing the criminalization of HIV transmission, as well as remaining punitive laws, persisting stigma and discrimination** towards people living with, and at risk of, HIV across the region, which impede effective HIV responses,
- **Prioritizing young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights** by ensuring access to comprehensive sexuality education and youth-friendly health services, with particular focus on those furthest behind, through meaningful engagement of young people and other stakeholders, as a vital investment in the health, rights and development of current and future generations,
- **Realizing the reproductive rights and addressing the sexual and reproductive health needs of people with disabilities**, including women and young people, often overlooked by health systems and neglected by societies,
- **Developing ambitious plans for developing workforces fit for purpose** to deliver sexual and reproductive health in primary care settings on a sustainable footing, including by working with international partners to deliver teaching and training for enhanced roles of midwives and nurses,
- **Building the capacity of national statistical and health systems** to deliver, and apply to policy dialogues, accurate, age- and gender-disaggregated **sexual and reproductive health data**, with a focus on vulnerable groups at the national and subnational levels,
- **Strengthening the resilience of the health sector** to adapt and respond to the sexual and reproductive health needs of populations, especially women and girls, **in the face of climate change and increased emigration of skilled medical personnel.**

We commit to redouble our efforts in the following areas, in line with relevant national policies and priorities:

- **Advance sexual and reproductive health policies**, ensuring universal, equal access to the full range of integrated sexual and reproductive health services as part of **universal health coverage** and in the context of broader investments in health, development and demographic resilience.
- **Increase investments** in sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, applying **domestic resources** to innovative, impact-oriented sexual and reproductive health strategies and programmes.
- **Strengthen health systems blocks** for delivering universal access to sexual and reproductive health in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Programme of Action adopted by the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).
- **Expand the range** and ensure the **availability of integrated sexual and reproductive health** services within the primary health care approach, aimed at the prevention of complications of pregnancy and delivery, the provision of youth-friendly health services, quality ante-natal and postnatal care, comprehensive abortion care, in line with national legislations, and contraceptive and family planning services, addressing unmet needs for family planning, and in particular, contraception and fertility counseling, menopause counseling and treatment, and preventing unintended pregnancies, cervical cancer, and HIV and other STIs.
- **Apply digital technologies and innovative approaches, along with traditional learning approaches, to advance health literacy** and education in the area of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, in addition to integration of comprehensive sexuality education in the general education system
- **Invest in national institutional capacities and human resources** to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and realization of reproductive rights, including by updating national education curricula for service providers and advancing continued education and licensing/certification programmes for service providers at different levels.
- **Update national sexual and reproductive health service guidelines and protocols**, referring to the internationally recognized evidence and practices and applying life course, gender-sensitive, human-rights-based approaches, leaving no one behind.
- **Build broad coalitions to challenge harmful social and gender norms**, roles and stereotypes that limit the ability of women and girls to realize their bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- **Analyze, address and prevent gender-based violence and harmful practices**, which are violations of human rights and barriers to the full realization of bodily autonomy.

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- **Address the growing HIV epidemic** by increasing national ownership of the HIV response and empowering civil society and communities to be an integral part of national strategies and plans, by adopting policies that decriminalize HIV transmission, and by tackling structural and societal barriers, including stigma and discrimination towards people living with HIV.
- **Ensure that the needs of vulnerable and marginalized groups**, including, but not limited to, people living with HIV, persons with disabilities, adolescents and youth, older persons, including key populations, **are addressed in programmes, service guidelines and standards.**
- **Prioritize community empowerment** through strengthening community-based models and the role of CSOs and health mediators to improve health outcomes.
- **Ensure preparedness and response** to humanitarian crises to ensure access of crisis-affected populations to the **Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) for reproductive health in emergencies.**
- **Analyze and address the changing environment and factors with potential impact on the health of populations**, including the policy environment, the demographic, socioeconomic and political context, climate change, and societal norms over the life course
- **Invest in national institutional capacity building to deliver sexual and reproductive health data** as part of SDG monitoring and policy development/implementation processes, with particular focus on vulnerable and difficult to reach population groups, applying life course lenses to data gathering and analyses.
- **Work together** to exchange expertise, knowledge and good practices by creating communities of practice, applying innovative partnerships models to intercountry and multisectoral cooperation.