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Applying Human Rights to Sexual and Reproductive Health - a Reality for All?

SEXUAL HEALTH Switzerland Advocacy Work

Sexual rights are human rights

By Susanne Rohner

SEXUAL HEALTH Switzerland promotes sexual rights as accredited member of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). There are several issues demanding for improvements in Switzerland for example access to contraception, comprehensive sexuality education, preventing and combatting violence against women, prevention of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and the promotion of sexual health and rights of vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities, sex-workers, migrants and asylum seekers.



IPPF campaign to the sexual rights of young people: “Know it Own it! Your sexual rights matter“, see <http://action.ippfen.org/> (Photo: IPPF)

SEXUAL HEALTH Switzerland (SGCH) is the umbrella organization of the Swiss centers for sexual and reproductive health and the corresponding professional organizations. In this function, SGCH is mainly active at the national level, providing guidance, materials, training, advocacy and networking to its members that are present in all Swiss cantons. SGCH is also accredited member of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). In this role, SEXUAL HEALTH Switzerland promotes sexual rights both at national and international level.

Sexual rights developed in the IPPF declaration on sexual rights form the policy framework for all advocacy work of SGCH. They include among others the right to equality and freedom from all forms of discrimination based on sex, sexuality or gender; the right to life, liberty, security of the person and bodily integrity, the right to health including access to sexual and reproductive health care services, the right to education and information, the right to consensual sexual relations, to freely chose a partner and decide freely whether or not, how and when, to have children and the right to pursue a satisfying, safe and pleasurable sexual life.

No health without rights

Sexual rights and sexual health are closely interlinked. Sexual rights are a prerequisite to enable people to achieve the highest attainable standard of sexual health. WHO defines sexual health as a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. To attain and maintain sexual health, sexual rights of all people must be respected, protected and fulfilled (WHO 2006a). This includes empowering people to make their own choices in their sexual lives and to feel confident and safe in expressing their own sexual identity.

Sexual rights as such are not binding. However, numerous components of sexual rights are outlined and recognized in national laws and international human rights documents and treaties, such as the right to the highest attainable standard of health, the right to life and the right to education. Furthermore, several elements of the right to non-discrimination are for example included in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Challenges in Switzerland

In the Swiss context, challenges to promote sexual rights include the lack of a national strategy on sexual health and the complexity with respect to existing corresponding legislation. In order to be able to draw a clear picture on the legal situation, SEXUAL HEALTH Switzerland will present a national study later this year that will provide an overview on the legal obligations related to the different components of sexual rights. In parallel, different stakeholders are preparing the grounds for a national sexual health strategy.

In the daily reality in Switzerland, much progress has been achieved in the past years with regards to access to safe abortion and access to information and counseling. However, many challenges and gaps remain. The Swiss centers for sexual and reproductive health regularly report difficulties of different groups like adolescents, migrant groups and asylum seekers to finance contraception.

Furthermore, comprehensive sexuality education for all young people is still far away from being achieved in Switzerland. Comprehensive sexuality education is still not included in the curricula of all cantons, with the consequence that not all children and young people have

equal access to information, education and empowerment related to sexuality.

Other areas of concern are domestic violence, discrimination and human rights violations experienced by vulnerable groups like LGBTI persons (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and intersex), people with disabilities, sex workers, migrants and asylum seekers. The disregard of their sexual rights has also an impact on their sexual health, as national health statistics demonstrate.

SEXUAL HEALTH Switzerland advocacy work

In its advocacy work, SEXUAL HEALTH Switzerland engages in UN monitoring mechanisms like the Universal Periodic Review. In 2012, SGCH submitted a report together with the Sexual Rights Initiative to put some of the challenges related to sexual rights on the agenda of the Swiss review. The report included recommendations with regards to discrimination of LGBTI, discrimination of people with disabilities, discrimination of people living with HIV, limited access to contraception for vulnerable groups, unequal access to comprehensive sexuality education and sexual violence in the context of human trafficking.

Parliamentary group CAIRE+ and the Agenda 2030

An important partner for the advocacy work to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights is the parliamentary group CAIRE+. SEXUAL HEALTH Switzerland holds the secretariat of this all-party parliamentary group originating from the International Conference on Population and Development 1994 in CAIRE.

The parliamentary group CAIRE+ has also been active in the past years in the context of the creation of the global framework Post-2015, with the goal to anchor sexual and reproductive health and rights issues the new global agenda for sustainable development. The Agenda 2030 now includes several goals and targets related to sexual and reproductive health and rights such as SDG 3 on health and SDG 5 on gender equality.

The Agenda 2030 requires all countries for example to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights (UN SDG 5.6) as well as to reproductive health-care services (UN SDG 3.7), to end discrimination and eliminate violence against women and girls as well as harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. The Agenda 2030 for sustainable development has to be implemented universally, also in Switzerland. Therefore, the underlying goals and targets will serve as a new reference framework for our advocacy work both at national and international level for the next 15 years. The linkage of sexual rights and human rights and also the one of sexual and reproductive health and rights and sustainability will be at the center of our engagement.

References:

- IPPF: Sexual Rights: an IPPF declaration. London 2008
http://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/sexualrightsippfdeclaration_1.pdf

- WHO 2006a
http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/sexual_health/sh_definitions/en/
- UN SDG 5.6 *ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.* <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/events/meetings/2015/un-sustainable-development-summit/en/>
- UN SDG 3.7 by 2030, *ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes* <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/events/meetings/2015/un-sustainable-development-summit/en/>



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