



**Thematic Dialogue**  
**Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. Understanding challenges to bodily autonomy and respect of sexual and reproductive health and rights. The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on access to health and reproductive rights.**

**Concept Note**  
**March 29th, 2021**  
**11:30 – 12:50 (GMT-6 Mexico City Time)**  
**20:30 – 21:50 (GMT-6 Mexico City Time)**

## Background

In 1995, a visionary agenda for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls was created by 189 governments and thousands of activists worldwide: the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. As a defining framework for change, the Platform for Action made comprehensive commitments under 12 critical areas of concern, including the promotion and protection of the human rights of women. In 2021, twenty-six years since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, not a single country has achieved gender equality, and the human rights of women and girls are still constantly threatened.

One of the BPA main concern was women's right to enjoy the highest possible level of physical and mental health. The BPA makes it clear that health is not only the absence of diseases or ailments, but a state of full physical, mental and social well-being. Women's health includes their emotional, social, and physical well-being.

The human right of people to exercise autonomy over their sexuality, express it and relate, interact, and establish relationships freely with other people with experiencing any form of coercion, violence, or discrimination, as well as to decide whether to have children or not and when to do so, is fundamental for the exercise of autonomy in all other areas of life. But the human rights of women, trans people and others who challenge mandated gender roles, girls and adolescent girls are regularly violated and are the target of intense attacks by religious institutions and authoritarian governments.<sup>1</sup> Strengthening women's sexual and reproductive health and rights is a critical lever. In 2019, 190 million women of reproductive age worldwide who wanted to avoid pregnancy did not use any contraceptive method.<sup>2</sup> Improved access to family

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<sup>1</sup> *Mujeres Transformando radicalmente un mundo en crisis*, Un Marco de referencia para Beijing+25 elaborado durante una reunión estratégica de activistas feministas en la Ciudad de México, del 22 al 24 de agosto de 2019.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/gender-equality-womens-rights-in-review-en.pdf?la=en&vs=934>



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planning, for example, helps reduce poverty and improve health. By preventing unwanted pregnancies, it enables adolescent girls to finish school and supports women's participation in the labor force.

Underinvestment in primary public health care services as well as deficits of skilled and well-trained health workers, further reduces the availability of services. In addition, women and girls face multiple forms of discrimination, violence, and stigma in accessing healthcare, including from providers who refuse to provide sexual and reproductive health services. This discrimination, violence and stigma is most acute for the young, older persons, persons with disabilities, afro descendants, Indigenous, LGBTQI people, women living with HIV, migrants, and those facing work-based discrimination.

Even where governments have committed to achieve universal health coverage, many of these programs fail to address or respond to the health needs of women, transgender, and gender non-conforming people, and exclude people who work in the informal sector, migrants, and other low-income and marginalized communities, leaving them at further risk of poverty due to out-of-pocket costs for chronic health issues and health emergencies.

In the current context of the pandemic, the life of the majority of the world's women has been seriously affected by COVID-19 and by the measures adopted by governments. Declarations of a state of emergency and mandatory quarantine as well as the closure of health services and economic activities, have caused and exacerbated crises in different areas with devastating effects on women and girls. In addition, with families confined within the household, domestic and sexual violence has increased. This situation particularly affects girls and adolescents, as they often cannot ask for help. Also, this situation can lead to pregnancy because of sexual violence.

Another risk is the shortage of contraceptive methods, either because there is not enough supply in the public sector or because the economic crisis caused by the pandemic makes it difficult or impossible for women to acquire contraceptives in the private sector. According to UN Population Division data, at the end of 2020 the percentage of all women of reproductive age reporting unmet need for modern contraceptives will increase from 11.4% to 14.5% (optimistic scenario) or from 11.4% to 17.7% (pessimistic scenario). In this context, it is necessary to provide sufficient services for women to seek SRH (Sexual and Reproductive Health) services and obtain contraceptive methods.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, the global maternal mortality ratio has fallen

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<sup>3</sup> Impact of covid-19 on access to contraceptives in the lac region august 2020 Latin America and the Caribbean Technical Report. [https://lac.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/technical\\_report\\_impact\\_of\\_covid\\_19\\_in\\_the\\_access\\_to\\_contraceptives\\_in\\_lac\\_1\\_2.pdf](https://lac.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/technical_report_impact_of_covid_19_in_the_access_to_contraceptives_in_lac_1_2.pdf)

by 38 percent between 2000 and 2017 but is still too high. Also, a crucial issue to consider is the risks that women run from unsafe abortions, since in many countries the legal interruption of pregnancy is not contemplated in the regulations.

After more than two decades, Governments are failing to fulfill their human rights obligations to ensure that all people can enjoy the highest attainable standard of health. Yet, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for women can transform society and some of the most critical areas of work of the Beijing Platform regarding women and girls, are being reconfigured by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This must be recognized in all the actions and blueprints of the Action Coalition on Bodily Autonomy and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). The Action Coalition must both take an integrated approach and define a targeted set of concrete, ambitious and immediate actions to deliver tangible impact on gender equality and girls' and women's human rights between 2021 and 2026.

### General Objective

Have a multi stakeholder approach - the UN system, States, civil society, academia, and international organisations- to support the inclusion of sexual and reproductive health and rights for women and girls in every public agenda and outcome.

### Specific Objectives

- The session is intended to spark joint reflection about the challenges that countries face today to fulfilling the BPA's commitments on women and health, including the challenges posed by COVID-19 and its negative effects on health and sexual and reproductive rights, which implies addressing structural inequalities what women face.
- This dialogue will revisit the essential foundations of the Beijing Platform and jointly build concrete actions, drawing attention to the multiple violations of the right to health and guiding us to a deeper understanding of the short-and medium-term effects that these violations have on women and girls and their life projects.

### Participants

- Civil society organisations
- UN Agencies
- Private Sector
- Governments
- Academia

## Format

This virtual dialogue will be held on March 29 from 11:30 – 13:00 am (MEX time) and in the evening from 20:30 – 22:00 (MEX time) The discussion will be driven by an experienced feminist moderator who will direct the conversation between nine different stakeholders and the audience to ensure a diversity of views. The audience will be able to interact by using the chat on the platform. Simultaneous interpretation will be available.

Suggested time	Proposed activity
11:30 – 11:35 20:30 – 20:35	Welcome and panelist's presentation.
11:35 – 12:25 20:35 – 21:25	<p>Moderated discussion with the panelists. Participants have between 3-4 minutes to answer each question.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the main structural barriers to guaranteeing women's health, physical autonomy, and reproductive rights?</li> <li>• In the current context of a global pandemic, what measures should governments and society take to guarantee the right to comprehensive health for women?</li> <li>• What good practices and experiences can be shared and applied in the actual context to guarantee equal access to health and reproductive services for women and girls?</li> <li>• How can women's and feminist movements contribute and generate concrete alliances with governments, to promote the sexual rights and reproductive rights of women, especially those in countries with restrictive and punitive laws for the exercise of those rights? How can these alliances (like the Action Coalitions) can boost transformative and innovative changes?</li> </ul>
12:25 – 12:45 21:25 – 21:45	Q&A session. The Moderator reads selected questions from the chat.
12:45 – 12:50 21:45 – 21:50	Closing: moderator thanks participants and audience.