



## **Statement by the Government of Ireland**

**Delivered by Sarah Hunt, Counsellor, Development Cooperation and Africa Division,  
Department of Foreign Affairs of Ireland;**

**On the occasion of the  
High-level event in the margins of the Summit of the Future under the auspices of the 79th  
session of the United Nations General Assembly**

**Adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights: advancing the agenda for a sustainable future**

**23 September 2024  
New York**

*[Transcribed by PMNCH]*

Excellencies, Honorable Guests, and Distinguished Friends,

Our development cooperation program through Irish Aid places a strong emphasis on reaching the furthest behind first. Traditionally, this has translated into a focus on women and children, crisis and conflict-affected communities, and marginalized socioeconomic groups, including those at risk of HIV and people living with disabilities. However, we have developed a greater appreciation for the benefits and necessity of more focused engagement with adolescents and youth.

It is impossible to engage meaningfully on climate change without considering youth as central stakeholders. Ireland's renewed and revitalized approach to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) builds upon changes in our domestic legislation. Notably, these changes were driven by an engaged, passionate, and youthful electorate. The message was clear: sexual and reproductive health and rights are essential, and young people and adolescents are willing to engage passionately and vote on these issues.

These domestic changes have been accompanied by new developments in the SRHR agenda. Since 2022, the government has introduced a free contraception scheme for young people aged 17 to 25, which has since been expanded, with ongoing discussions for further enhancements. This initiative was informed by a clear, evidence-based assessment of need and demand.

On the development side, we have leveraged our domestic progress to launch a new SRHR initiative within our development cooperation program. This initiative consolidates and strengthens Ireland's long-standing commitment to addressing sexual and gender-based violence, improving maternal and newborn health, and ending the HIV epidemic. Additionally, it commits us to refocus efforts in humanitarian settings, with a particular emphasis on adolescents.

We are committed to reducing adolescent birth rates and ending harmful practices, such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and child marriage, which have a profoundly negative impact on the health and well-being of young and adolescent girls. We agree with Professor Bloom on the need for evidence-based approaches. Access to science-based evidence and information is central to our strategy. This commitment is reflected in our support for high-quality, age-appropriate, comprehensive sexuality education programs that equip adolescents with the information they need to make informed decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive health.

In addition to these investments, we support healthcare services, including health system strengthening and the provision of contraceptive supplies. We also provide targeted support for research and development to expand SRHR services for people of all ages.

In conclusion, much of what we are achieving today has been driven and enabled by the commitment of adolescents and young people, who have made these issues a priority for legislators and policymakers. For that, I commend you, congratulate you, and encourage you to stay the course, keeping this space open and positive.

Thank you.