

Positive
OUTLOOK
Developing

Research on **sexuality and** **sexuality** **education** **among young** **people**



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1. Introduction

Sexuality education is a central element in health education programmes, being fundamental to providing young people with the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to make informed and responsible decisions regarding their sexual health and well-being. Recognised as an essential human right in international documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, sexuality education goes beyond prevention. Its relevance is not limited to reducing unplanned pregnancies or sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), but also encompasses the promotion of interpersonal relationships based on respect, equity and consent, thus contributing to the emotional well-being and holistic development of individuals.

In the European context, sexuality education has acquired a multidimensional and complex character. While some countries have developed comprehensive and compulsory programmes aligned with international standards, in others, efforts to implement these programmes have been fragmented or have faced significant socio-cultural resistance. This disparity in implementation is reflected in indicators such as teenage pregnancy rates, STD prevalence and levels of discrimination based on gender or sexuality, which vary widely across the different regions of the continent.

Inclusive, evidence-based sexuality education is key not only to addressing these issues, but also to meeting international commitments such as the WHO and UNESCO standards for sexuality education. These standards advocate a comprehensive approach that encompasses cognitive, emotional, physical and social dimensions of sexuality, providing scientific and developmentally appropriate information for each stage of development.

However, the lack of uniform policies and the weight of cultural, religious and ideological factors have prevented significant progress in many regions, limiting young people's access to quality sexuality education.

The main objective of the project presented here is to analyse and evaluate the current state of sexuality education programmes in several European countries, including Italy, Lithuania, Ireland and Spain, each with their particular cultural and legislative contexts. From this evaluation, the aim is to identify good practices and design innovative proposals to overcome existing barriers. This approach responds to the need for a structured intervention that not only integrates the particularities of each national context, but also promotes a common framework for inclusive, rights-based education.

Project Justification

The relevance of this project lies in the convergence of multiple factors that underline the urgency of intervening in the field of sexuality education. Among these factors, the following stand out:

- ***Public health indicators:*** Europe is experiencing significant polarisation in terms of youth sexual health. Countries with mandatory and evidence-based education programmes, such as the Netherlands and Sweden, have significantly low rates of teenage pregnancy and STDs. In contrast, regions where sex education is limited or non-existent, such as Italy or Lithuania, face more pronounced challenges, with higher rates of unplanned pregnancies, gender-based violence and discrimination towards LGBTQ+ groups.

- **Socio-cultural challenges:** In many regions, religious and cultural resistance has influenced the implementation of sexuality education programmes, perpetuating taboos and stigmatisation. This not only limits access to critical information, but also contributes to misinformation and the development of prejudices that affect both young people and adults.
- **Impact on gender equity:** Sexuality education is not only a prevention tool, but also a mechanism to promote gender equity and combat gender-based violence. Lack of information about consent, healthy relationships and gender roles perpetuates dynamics of inequality and abuse.
- **Need for inclusion:** Sexuality education programmes must address the diversity of gender identities and sexual orientations, as well as the specific needs of vulnerable groups, including young people with disabilities and those in marginalised contexts. This requires an intersectional approach that recognises the different realities of learners and fosters acceptance and respect.

Project Objectives

This project is articulated around several interrelated objectives that seek to improve standards of sexuality education in Europe:

- **Comparative analysis:** Evaluate the methodologies, approaches and content of sexuality education programmes in Italy, Ireland, Lithuania and Spain, identifying key similarities and differences.
- **Identification of barriers and facilitators:** Examine the socio-cultural, political and educational factors that influence the implementation of effective programmes, with particular emphasis on resistance and opportunities for improvement.
- **Documentation of good practice:** Collecting examples of successful programmes that can be adapted to other contexts, based on principles of inclusiveness, equity and effectiveness.

- **Education policy proposals:** Formulate practical recommendations for the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education programmes, with a focus on teacher training, curriculum development and inter-sectoral collaboration.

Expected Contributions

The potential impact of this project transcends the educational sphere, extending to social, cultural and public health dimensions:

- **Improving sexual and reproductive health:** Reducing rates of teenage pregnancy, STDs and gender-based violence by promoting safe and consensual sexual practices.
- **Youth awareness and empowerment:** Increasing knowledge, confidence and interpersonal skills among young people, contributing to their integral development and building respectful relationships.
- **Cultural transformation:** Overcoming taboos and stigmatisation related to sexuality, fostering a social environment that is more inclusive and respectful of diversity.
- **Progress in gender equity:** Promoting equal relationships and eliminating gender stereotypes through education and awareness raising.

This project seeks not only to analyse the current state of sexuality education in Europe, but also to be a catalyst for change, offering practical and adaptable solutions that benefit both education systems and communities at large. Sexuality education, seen from this perspective, is not an end in itself, but a means to achieve fairer, more equal and healthier societies.

2. Methodology

The methodology used in this research combines a qualitative and quantitative approach, designed to comprehensively address the project's objectives. This mixed approach allows data to be collected, analysed and contrasted to reflect both individual experiences and subjective

perceptions as well as general patterns and trends observed in different national contexts. The methodology is based on data triangulation, which ensures the validity and reliability of the results by combining multiple sources and perspectives.

The methodological development is articulated in several complementary phases that include documentary review, primary data collection through surveys and interviews, and critical analysis of the results. Each phase was designed taking into account the particularities of the local contexts in Italy, Ireland, Lithuania and Spain, in order to ensure that the results are representative and culturally relevant.

Documentary review

The first phase of the project consisted of an exhaustive review of scientific literature, normative documents, public policies and previous studies related to sexuality education in the countries studied. The objectives of this phase were as follows:

- Identify policy and regulatory frameworks in place in each participating country, with a focus on European standards for sexuality education, such as those defined by UNESCO and WHO.
- Analyse comparative studies that evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of educational programmes in different cultural contexts.
- Collect public health indicators related to sexuality education, including teenage pregnancy rates, STD incidence, and data on gender-based violence and discrimination.

The review was conducted using recognised academic databases (e.g., PubMed, Scopus, JSTOR) and platforms of international organisations. Recent and relevant sources were prioritised to ensure the timeliness of the data.

Primary data collection

The second phase involved the collection of primary data by:

1. **Structured surveys:** Designed to collect quantitative information on the perceptions and experiences of young people, educators and sexuality education experts. These surveys included closed-ended questions and Likert-type scales to measure levels of agreement or disagreement on specific topics, including:
 - Perception of the effectiveness of existing sexuality education programmes.
 - Topics they consider a priority in sexuality education.
 - Extent of accessibility to sexual health education resources and services.
2. **Semi-structured interviews:** Conducted with educators, youth workers, policy experts and representatives of non-governmental organisations. This qualitative method allowed for in-depth exploration:
 - Socio-cultural barriers that hinder the implementation of educational programmes.
 - Examples of good practice and innovative strategies.
 - Specific needs of vulnerable groups, such as LGBTQ+ youth or those with disabilities.
3. **Focus groups:** Conducted in local contexts to gain a collective perspective and explore group dynamics related to sexuality education. Participants included both young people and educators, allowing for the identification of shared perceptions and disagreements.

Research instruments

The instruments used were designed specifically for this project and validated through pilot testing on a small sample of participants in each country. They were developed in local languages (Italian, Lithuanian, English and Spanish) to ensure comprehension and cultural relevance. The instruments included:

- Digital questionnaires: Distributed through platforms such as Google Forms and Qualtrics, with mechanisms that ensured confidentiality and anonymity.
- Interview guides: Structured around key themes, but with flexibility to allow exploration of emerging themes based on interviewees' responses.

- Focus group protocols: Designed to foster an atmosphere of trust and open dialogue, with guiding questions and participatory dynamics.

Analysis of the data collected

The analysis of the data obtained in the research has been structured on three interrelated levels: descriptive, comparative and interpretative. This approach has made it possible to extract meaningful information both from a country-specific perspective and from a holistic view at the European level.

First, quantitative data from the surveys have been processed using statistical tools such as Microsoft Excel. Descriptive analyses have been conducted to identify general trends in responses, and inferential analyses to explore possible associations between variables such as gender, age, geographic location and perception of sexuality education. This has included correlation tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA) to assess significant differences between the countries studied.

The qualitative data, collected through interviews and focus groups, were analysed using a thematic approach. Specialised software such as NVivo was used to facilitate the categorisation and coding of responses. This process included the identification of recurrent patterns and emerging themes related to cultural barriers, pedagogical strategies and specific needs of young people. In addition, the analysis has allowed the quantitative data to be contextualised by linking it to the individual experiences and perspectives of the participants.

Cross-country comparative analysis has been essential to identify similarities and differences in sexuality education programmes, common challenges and good practices. This has been complemented by interpretative analysis examining how socio-cultural and political factors have influenced programme implementation and effectiveness. Particular attention has been paid to the interactions between national policies and European standards, assessing the degree of alignment with UNESCO and WHO recommendations.

Ethical considerations

The research was conducted in strict accordance with the ethical principles established by the Declaration of Helsinki and the guidelines of the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The participation of all subjects was completely voluntary, and informed consent was guaranteed by means of written forms distributed in the local languages of the countries studied.

To protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants, data has been stored on secure platforms with restricted access, and all responses have been anonymised prior to analysis. Researchers have been trained in key ethical issues, such as cultural sensitivity and the management of sensitive information related to sexuality.

Particular attention has been paid to ensuring that interviews and focus groups were conducted in safe and respectful environments. In the case of dealing with vulnerable groups, such as LGBTQ+ youth or people with disabilities, additional measures have been taken to ensure that their participation was inclusive and without risk of discrimination.

This holistic methodological approach has ensured the validity, reliability and cultural relevance of the data, while protecting the rights and well-being of all participants involved.

3. Theoretical framework

a. What is sexuality education?

Sexuality education, understood as a systematic and evidence-based process, aims to equip individuals with the knowledge, skills and values necessary to make informed and responsible decisions regarding their sexual health, emotional well-being and interpersonal relationships. This approach is grounded in principles of human rights, gender equity and holistic

development, highlighting its importance not only to prevent risks, but also to foster respect, inclusion and personal autonomy.

Conceptualisation and scope

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), sexuality education is a learning process that encompasses cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects related to sexuality. Unlike approaches limited to the reproductive or preventive sphere, comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) includes topics such as consent, communication in relationships, power dynamics, gender identities, sexual orientation and sexual and reproductive rights. This definition transcends traditional notions and recognises that sexuality is an essential dimension of the human experience that must be approached in a positive and non-judgemental way.

In this sense, sexuality education should be adapted to the age and developmental stages of individuals. International standards, such as those developed by UNESCO and WHO, state that this learning should begin in early childhood, with appropriate content that evolves in depth and complexity throughout life. These standards emphasise that, to be effective, sexuality education must be scientific, inclusive, culturally relevant and accessible to all, regardless of social, cultural or economic background.



Historical perspective and transformations

The conceptualisation of sexuality education has evolved significantly over time. Traditionally, in many countries, it was limited to the teaching of reproductive anatomy and the prevention of pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases, focusing primarily on a fear and

abstinence-based model. This restrictive approach, still prevalent in some contexts, has been criticised for its limited effectiveness and for ignoring fundamental issues such as pleasure, emotions, diversity and equity.

With the rise of feminist, human rights and public health movements in the second half of the 20th century, sexuality education began to reorient towards a comprehensive model. This shift was consolidated in key documents such as the Beijing Declaration (1995) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which underline the need to ensure inclusive and universal sexuality education as a fundamental human right.

Focus on comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)

CSE is distinguished by its holistic approach, which addresses not only physical health, but also the emotional and social well-being of individuals. According to the UNESCO technical report (2018), the main components of CSE include:

- Scientific information: Provide accurate information on anatomy, reproduction, contraception, STD prevention and informed consent.
- Personal skills development: Promoting competencies such as effective communication, decision making, critical thinking and negotiation in interpersonal relationships.
- Reflection on values and attitudes: Fostering respect for diversity, gender equality and human rights, challenging stereotypes and prejudices.
- Inclusion of diversity: Recognising and validating different gender identities, sexual orientations and family configurations.

Importance and documented benefits

Numerous studies have shown that comprehensive sexuality education programmes have positive impacts in a number of areas. According to research by WHO and UNESCO, these programmes:

- Delay sexual initiation and promote safe and consensual practices.
- They reduce rates of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.
- They foster more equitable and respectful relationships, reducing gender-based violence and discrimination.
- They contribute to the development of psychosocial skills that strengthen self-esteem, critical thinking and resilience.

Sexuality education should not only be seen as a preventive tool, but as a fundamental pillar in the construction of more just, egalitarian and inclusive societies. Its effective implementation requires the commitment of governmental, educational and community actors to ensure that all people, without exception, have access to this essential right.

b. Brief history of sexuality education

Sexuality education has evolved as a field of study and practice in response to the social, cultural and scientific transformations that have marked the development of modern societies. Its history reflects tensions between scientific progress and ideological constraints, often influenced by religious, cultural and political values. This section provides an in-depth review of the main historical milestones in sexuality education, contextualising them within a broader framework of social change and its impact on educational policies.

Origins: morality and social control

Early approaches to sexuality education, although not formalised, focused mainly on the control of sexual behaviour within religious and moral frameworks. During the Middle Ages and

the Renaissance, sexuality was perceived as a dimension of life regulated by ecclesiastical dogmas, aimed at ensuring reproduction within marriage and avoiding "immorality". In this context, debates on sexuality were limited to discourses on sin, purity and impulse control.

With the advent of the Enlightenment in the 18th century, scientific knowledge began to gain ground over religious explanations, and sexuality began to be studied from medical and biological perspectives. However, this incipient secularisation of discourses on sexuality continued to focus on reproductive aspects, deliberately excluding dimensions such as pleasure, consent and diversity.

Sex education in the modern era: prevention and public health

The Industrial Revolution of the 19th century brought profound changes in social structures, including mass migration to cities, the increasing independence of women in the workplace, and the rise of labour movements demanding improvements in health and welfare. In this context, discourses on sex education took on a new purpose: the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, particularly syphilis, which was reaching epidemic proportions in Europe and North America.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, figures such as Sigmund Freud and Havelock Ellis introduced key concepts of human sexuality, challenging the rigid norms of their time. However, scientific progress coexisted with conservative initiatives that limited sex education to abstinence-based models. Organisations such as the Social Purity League in the United Kingdom and similar movements in the United States promoted programmes that emphasised chastity as the only "moral" way to prevent disease and unwanted pregnancies.

The impact of social movements in the 20th century

The 20th century marked a turning point in sexuality education, driven by social transformations and significant scientific advances. During the second half of the century, the

advent of modern contraceptives, particularly the contraceptive pill in 1960, revolutionised sexual and gender dynamics. This technical advance allowed women to exercise greater control over their sexuality and raised the need to address broader issues in sexuality education, such as consent, relationships and family planning.

Feminist movements in the 1970s played a central role in the inclusion of gender perspectives in sexuality education. In this period, sexuality education began to take a more holistic approach, encompassing not only biological, but also emotional, social and cultural aspects of sexuality. Feminisms challenged patriarchal models in which women's sexuality was understood as subordinate to male control, and demanded the incorporation of issues such as consent, gender-based violence and sexual diversity into educational curricula.

At the same time, the civil rights struggle and LGBTQ+ movements challenged the dominant heteronormative and binary notions of society. This activism promoted the recognition of diverse sexual and gender identities, and demanded that sexuality education include content relevant to the experiences of these groups.

The HIV/AIDS crisis: a catalyst for comprehensive sexuality education

The HIV/AIDS pandemic in the 1980s was another milestone in the evolution of sexuality education. The rapid spread of the virus highlighted the urgent need for education programmes to promote safe sex. Although these efforts initially faced resistance due to the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS, particularly towards men who have sex with men, sex workers and injecting drug users, the health crisis spurred a global consensus on the importance of evidence-based sexuality education.

In this period, international agencies such as WHO, UNESCO and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) began to establish global guidelines for sexuality education, laying the foundation for what is now known as comprehensive sexuality education (CSE).

The 21st century: sexuality education as a human right

Over the past two decades, sexuality education has evolved towards a human rights-based approach. Key documents such as the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) explicitly recognize sexuality education as an essential component of ensuring people's health, gender equality and well-being. CSE, promoted by international agencies, advocates for programmes that are inclusive, culturally relevant and focused on the needs of young people.

However, this evolution has not been without its challenges. In some countries, particularly those with strong religious influence or conservative political contexts, the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education programmes continues to face significant resistance. These tensions reflect a persistent conflict between advances in human rights and traditional socio-cultural norms.

Critical reflection: towards a transformative educational model

The history of sexuality education demonstrates that its evolution is deeply intertwined with broader societal changes. While significant progress has been made in promoting more inclusive and evidence-based approaches, gaps remain in their global implementation. Overcoming these barriers requires a renewed commitment from governments, educational institutions and social organisations to ensure that sexuality education not only informs, but also transforms the power dynamics, gender inequities and cultural biases that continue to limit its potential.

c. Effectiveness of sexuality education programmes

The effectiveness of sexuality education programmes has been the subject of numerous studies internationally, providing strong evidence of their positive impact on various aspects of sexual and reproductive health, as well as on the psychosocial well-being of young people.

However, their success depends on several factors, such as the approach adopted, the quality of the content, the training of educators and the socio-cultural context in which they are implemented. This section explores the main academic and practical evidence supporting the effectiveness of sexuality education programmes, highlighting the conditions necessary for their success.

Evidence on effectiveness

Numerous studies by international agencies, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), UNESCO and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), have documented the benefits of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) programmes. Among the most prominent findings are:

- ***Delayed sexual initiation:*** Evidence-based programmes have shown that CSE contributes to young people delaying their first sexual experience, which reduces the risk of early pregnancy and exposure to sexually transmitted infections (STIs). A meta-analysis by UNESCO (2018) indicated that comprehensive programmes are more successful in this regard than abstinence-only approaches.
- ***Increased contraceptive use and safe practices:*** Young people participating in CSE programmes tend to show increased knowledge and use of contraceptive methods, such as condoms and hormonal contraceptives. This results in a significant decrease in unintended pregnancies and the incidence of STIs, including HIV/AIDS.
- ***Reducing gender-based violence:*** CSE has also proven to be effective in promoting equitable and respectful relationships, helping to reduce the prevalence of abusive behaviours and the normalization of gender-based violence. By addressing issues such as consent, power dynamics and gender stereotypes, young people develop skills to identify and reject harmful behaviours.
- ***Improved psychosocial well-being:*** Programmes that integrate emotional and social components promote greater self-esteem, resilience and communication skills in young

people. This strengthens their ability to make informed decisions and cope with social pressures related to sexuality.

Determinants of success

The effectiveness of sexuality education programmes depends on several essential conditions that ensure their quality and relevance:

1. ***Comprehensive and evidence-based approach:*** CSE, in contrast to approaches limited to risk prevention, addresses sexuality from a multidimensional perspective that includes cognitive, emotional, social and cultural aspects. This approach, aligned with UNESCO's international standards, ensures that content is relevant and appropriate for different stages of development.
2. ***Training of educators:*** Adequate training of teachers and youth workers is crucial to ensure that they can address sensitive issues in an informed, inclusive and non-judgmental manner. Studies have shown that programmes led by well-trained educators generate better results than those where teachers lack specific training.
3. ***Cultural and contextual adaptation:*** The effectiveness of CSE is enhanced when content is culturally relevant and adapted to young people's social context. This includes the use of inclusive language, representation of diverse identities and consideration of socio-cultural norms that influence attitudes towards sexuality.
4. ***Youth participation and interactive approach:*** Programmes that actively involve young people in the learning process, through participatory methodologies such as debates, role-plays and case studies, tend to be more effective. This fosters meaningful learning and reinforces ownership of content.
5. ***Access to complementary resources and services:*** Sexuality education is most effective when complemented by access to sexual and reproductive health services, such as youth-

friendly clinics, counselling and contraceptive distribution. Linking education with these resources facilitates the practical application of the knowledge acquired.

Obstacles and challenges

Despite the evidence in support of CSE, its implementation faces numerous challenges:

- ***Socio-cultural resistance:*** In contexts where traditional norms or religious influences prevail, programmes may be perceived as contrary to local values, making acceptance and funding difficult.
- ***Lack of resources and institutional support:*** In many cases, sexuality education does not receive the political priority and financial resources necessary for effective implementation, limiting its reach and quality.
- ***Stigmatisation and misinformation:*** Prejudices persist about CSE, such as the misconception that it encourages early or "promiscuous" sexual behaviour, which hinders its promotion.

Sexuality education is a powerful tool not only for addressing public health issues, but also for promoting gender equity, respect for diversity and youth empowerment. However, its impact depends on a sustained commitment by governments, communities and education systems to overcome the barriers mentioned above and ensure the implementation of high-quality programmes.

Evidence shows that, when well designed and implemented, sexuality education not only improves sexual health indicators, but also contributes to the holistic development of young people, strengthening their capacity to build healthy relationships and exercise their rights on equal terms.

Differentiated impacts according to programme approach

The effectiveness of sexuality education programmes is not uniform; it varies considerably depending on the approach taken. Sexuality education models can be divided mainly into three categories:

1. **Abstinence-based:** This approach, widely implemented in some conservative-oriented countries, promotes abstinence as the only option for preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Although these programmes have been advocated by sectors that privilege religious or moral values, scientific evidence shows that they have limited impact. A report by the Guttmacher Institute (2017) concludes that abstinence-focused programmes do not significantly reduce rates of sexual initiation, unintended pregnancy and STIs, and often omit crucial information about contraception and healthy relationships.
2. **Focused on prevention:** These programmes include information on contraceptive methods and STD prevention, but often approach sexuality from a narrow perspective, focusing exclusively on risks and negative consequences. Although they generate better results than abstinence programmes, they tend to fail to incorporate issues such as consent, gender equity and emotional well-being, which limits their impact on interpersonal relationships and holistic development.
3. **Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE):** This approach, promoted by international agencies such as UNESCO and WHO, addresses sexuality in a multidimensional way. It includes physical, emotional and social health issues, encompassing values such as respect, inclusion and consent. Studies have shown that CSE programmes generate the best long-term outcomes by promoting safe practices, improving psychosocial well-being and fostering relationships based on equality and mutual respect (UNESCO, 2018).

Psychosocial dimensions of effectiveness

Beyond sexual health indicators, such as pregnancy rates or STDs, sexuality education has profound effects on the psychosocial dimensions of young people. These impacts include:

- **Strengthening self-esteem and autonomy:** By providing evidence-based information, CSE programmes empower young people to make informed decisions about their bodies and sexuality, reinforcing their confidence and sense of agency.
- **Interpersonal relationship skills:** Programmes that include communication and conflict resolution components improve young people's ability to set boundaries, negotiate consensus and build equitable relationships.
- **Reducing the internalisation of stigma:** By including issues such as sexual and gender diversity, CSE contributes to reducing self-stigma and social exclusion, especially among LGBTQ+ youth.
- **Challenging gender norms:** CSE encourages critical reflection on gender stereotypes, promoting more egalitarian attitudes and the deconstruction of traditional roles that perpetuate discrimination and violence.

Macro-structural conditions for effectiveness

The impact of sexuality education programmes is also conditioned by macro-structural factors that can amplify or limit their effectiveness:

- **Legislative and policy framework:** National contexts with policies that support CSE and integrate it into compulsory school curricula show broader and more consistent implementation. Countries such as Sweden and the Netherlands, where CSE is supported by clear laws, have made significant progress on sexual health and gender equity indicators.
- **Investment in education:** Adequate funding for teacher training programmes, curriculum development and educational resources is essential. In many countries, sexuality education programmes face budgetary constraints that affect their quality and reach.
- **Cross-sectoral collaboration:** The effectiveness of CSE is enhanced when there is cooperation between education, health and community sectors. This allows education to

be linked with sexual health services, counselling and awareness-raising campaigns, creating a comprehensive supportive environment for young people.

Innovations in implementation

Recent ESI programmes have incorporated innovative technologies and methodologies to maximise their impact:

- **Digital education:** Online platforms and mobile apps are being used to reach young people in contexts where access to face-to-face sexuality education is limited. These tools allow for more flexible and personalised interaction.
- **Participatory approaches:** The inclusion of young people as co-designers or facilitators of programmes has proven to be effective in increasing their relevance and uptake.
- **Intersectional perspective:** Programmes that consider the multiple identities of young people (gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability) show greater impact in addressing specific needs and reducing inequalities.

Critical reflection on effectiveness evaluation

Evaluating the effectiveness of sexuality education programmes requires a multidimensional approach that transcends traditional health indicators. While reductions in teenage pregnancy and STDs are important metrics, it is equally relevant to consider changes in attitudes, interpersonal skills and social relationships.

A key challenge in evaluation is the need for longitudinal methods that capture the long-term impact of CSE, given that many of its benefits, such as building equitable relationships or youth empowerment, manifest themselves gradually. Furthermore, it is essential to ensure that evaluation tools are inclusive and culturally adapted, avoiding biases that may distort the results.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of sexuality education programmes depends on a combination of pedagogical, contextual and structural factors. Evidence supports CSE as the most comprehensive and effective model, provided that it is implemented in an inclusive, participatory framework and sustained by sound public policies. These programmes not only benefit young people in the present, but contribute to building more equal, healthy and resilient societies in the long term.

d. Difference between sexual and reproductive health

Sexual health and reproductive health are central concepts in contemporary debates on human rights, public health and education policy. Although they share points of convergence and are mutually dependent, each addresses specific dimensions of human well-being. Their conceptual distinction is essential for designing effective interventions that respond to both individual needs and collective goals of sustainable development.

Sexual health is defined, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), as a state of physical, mental, emotional and social well-being related to sexuality. This approach integrates both preventive aspects and the recognition of the right to enjoy sexuality, within a framework of respect, consent and equity. Sexual health transcends the absence of disease to address elements such as pleasure, interpersonal communication, gender identity, sexual orientation, and protection from violence and discrimination. This concept places sexuality as an intrinsic part of the human experience, contributing to personal and social development.

On the other hand, reproductive health, also according to the WHO, focuses on the physical, mental and social well-being related to the reproductive system and its functions. This term encompasses the ability of individuals to reproduce and to make free, responsible and informed decisions about their reproductive lives. It includes access to health services related to family planning, prenatal and post-natal care, and the prevention and treatment of infections that affect

the reproductive system. Reproductive health focuses on ensuring that people are able to carry out their reproductive decisions in conditions of equality, safety and dignity.

The main difference between the two concepts lies in their scope and purpose. While sexual health encompasses all dimensions of human sexuality, not limited to its reproductive function, reproductive health focuses specifically on processes related to fertility, pregnancy and childbearing. While the two share an inescapable connection, sexual health takes a more inclusive and general perspective, applicable to all people regardless of gender, sexual orientation or desire to have children. Reproductive health, on the other hand, has a more specific emphasis, targeting people of childbearing age or those interested in reproduction.

Throughout history, these differences have led to divergent approaches to policy implementation. For example, in some contexts, attention to reproductive health has been prioritised because of concerns related to birth control or the reduction of maternal and infant mortality rates. This has led to the promotion of family planning services, antenatal care and contraceptive education. However, this approach has often omitted fundamental sexual health issues such as pleasure, consent, diversity of sexual orientations and prevention of gender-based violence.

In contrast, modern approaches to sexual health seek to integrate all dimensions of human sexuality into a framework that not only addresses risks, but also promotes autonomy, respect and emotional well-being. In this sense, comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) has become a key tool to overcome the fragmentation between sexual health and reproductive health, integrating both concepts in educational programmes and health services that consider people as complex individuals with diverse needs.

Despite these conceptual differences, the interrelationships between sexual health and reproductive health are profound. For example, full reproductive health cannot be ensured without considering sexual well-being. A person cannot make informed decisions about fertility

or access to contraception without a comprehensive understanding of sexuality and sexual rights. Similarly, sexual health, in its preventive dimension, depends on quality reproductive health services that include access to testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, such as HIV.

In the field of human rights, both concepts converge in promoting a framework of autonomy, equality and dignity. Sexual rights, such as the right to informed consent, freedom of choice in sexual relations and access to information, are fundamental to the exercise of reproductive rights. Similarly, access to reproductive health services ensures that people can exercise their sexuality without fear of unintended adverse consequences, such as unplanned pregnancies or infections.

In practical terms, integrating sexual and reproductive health into educational policies and programmes is a challenging but necessary task. On the one hand, it requires overcoming cultural, religious and social barriers that have perpetuated a limited and fragmented view of human sexuality. On the other hand, it requires political and financial commitment to ensure universal access to quality health services, as well as the implementation of inclusive, evidence-based education programmes adapted to local contexts.

A recurring criticism in the field of sexual and reproductive health is the tendency to prioritise reproductive over sexual issues, especially in societies where sexuality remains a taboo subject. This imbalance not only reflects historical and normative biases, but also limits the potential of interventions to address systemic problems such as gender-based violence, discrimination against LGBTQ+ people, and lack of information about pleasure and consent.

In conclusion, while sexual health and reproductive health are distinct in their specific approaches and objectives, their integration is fundamental to ensuring full human well-being. Recognising and addressing these differences allows for the design of more effective interventions that take into account the diversity of people's experiences and needs. It also

underscores the importance of a comprehensive approach to sexuality education that not only prepares individuals to make decisions about their reproductive lives, but also enables them to exercise their sexuality freely, respectfully and safely.

e. Inclusion and diversity

Inclusive sexuality education is central to ensuring that all people, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability or cultural background, have access to the information and resources needed to live healthy and fulfilling sexual lives. This approach not only responds to demands for social justice and equity, but is also supported by growing scientific evidence showing that exclusion in sexuality education perpetuates inequalities, misinformation and stigmatisation.

Sexuality education and structural inequalities

Historically, sexuality education has been designed from a heteronormative and reproductive-centred framework, which has marginalised groups such as LGBTQ+ people, young people with disabilities and those from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. This narrow focus has had significant consequences, such as increasing vulnerability to sexual and reproductive health risks and perpetuating discriminatory attitudes in societies.

The exclusion of certain groups from educational programmes also translates into barriers to accessing health services and adequate representation in educational resources. For example, a UNESCO study (2016) showed that the lack of LGBTQ+ representation in mainstream sexuality education contributes to higher rates of depression, anxiety and self-harm in young people who identify as LGBTQ+.

Inclusive approach to sexuality education

An inclusive approach recognises the diversity of experiences and needs related to sexuality, and considers the multiple dimensions that influence how individuals access and experience sexuality education. This approach should be based on principles such as equity, respect for human rights and cultural representation, ensuring that all individuals feel reflected and validated in educational content.

Inclusion in sexuality education involves explicitly addressing issues such as:

- **Sexual and gender diversity:** Recognising and validating different sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions is crucial to combat discrimination and foster social acceptance. The lack of this approach perpetuates heteronormative and cisnormative attitudes that render many people invisible. A study in Canada (Taylor et al., 2011) showed that schools with inclusive programmes for LGBTQ+ students reported less bullying and higher psychosocial well-being for all students, not just sexual minorities.
- **Accessibility for young people with disabilities:** Persons with disabilities, often excluded from traditional educational programmes, require adapted materials and approaches that consider their specific needs. This includes the use of assistive technologies, clear language and activities that promote their autonomy in decisions related to their sexuality. Lack of accessibility not only violates their rights, but also exposes them to increased risk of sexual abuse (Servais, 2006).
- **Cultural and ethnic inclusion:** Programmes should be culturally sensitive, respecting the particularities of each context, without compromising fundamental principles of equity and human rights. This is especially relevant in migration contexts, where differences in sexuality education between countries of origin and destination can create barriers to access and understanding.

Impacts of inclusive sexuality education

The implementation of inclusive programmes not only benefits the groups directly involved, but also generates positive impacts at the collective level. Inclusion fosters a culture of respect and acceptance, promoting values of equality that reduce discrimination and violence. In a global analysis by UNESCO (2018), inclusive sexuality education programmes were found to contribute significantly to:

1. Improve the mental and emotional health of young people, especially those facing discrimination or social exclusion.
2. Reduce rates of gender-based violence and bullying by addressing stereotypes and prejudices from an early age.
3. Encourage greater participation and engagement in educational programmes by students, as they feel represented and listened to.

Considerations for inclusive implementation

While the importance of inclusion is widely recognised, its implementation faces multiple challenges, including cultural, political and social resistance. In some contexts, inclusive initiatives are perceived as contrary to traditional values, creating tensions and blockages in their implementation. To overcome these obstacles, it is essential to adopt a strategic approach that involves multiple stakeholders, including governments, education communities and civil society organisations.

In addition, the training of educators plays a critical role in the success of these programmes. Teachers must be trained not only in inclusive content, but also in how to create safe and respectful learning environments where students can express their questions, concerns and experiences without fear of being judged or discriminated against.

Inclusive sexuality education is an essential component of promoting more equitable and just societies. It not only responds to the need to guarantee the human rights of all people, but also proves to be an effective tool for improving health, well-being and social cohesion.

Implementing inclusive programmes requires sustained commitment, an inclusive vision and an adaptive capacity to overcome challenges and maximise their benefits.

4. Contextualization

a. Europe

Sexuality education in Europe presents a diverse and complex picture, marked by cultural, political and regulatory differences that influence the way in which programmes are implemented in different countries. Despite progress in promoting common standards promoted by international bodies such as UNESCO and the World Health Organization (WHO), significant inequalities persist in the access, scope and content of sexuality education in the region. This section analyses the main features of sexuality education in Europe, with a focus on general trends, policy frameworks and specific challenges faced by European countries.

Diversity in approaches

Europe is home to a wide variety of approaches to sexuality education, reflecting the cultural, religious and social influences of each nation. In countries such as Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany, sexuality education has established itself as an integral part of the school curriculum, with an evidence-based approach that encompasses both risk prevention and the development of skills for healthy relationships and the promotion of respect for diversity. In these countries, sexuality education is taught from an early age and is progressively adapted to the developmental stages of students, following a model aligned with international guidelines. In contrast, in southern and eastern European countries such as Italy, Poland and Romania, sexuality education remains limited, with programmes often facing political and cultural resistance. In many cases, these programmes are reduced to basic information on reproduction and disease prevention, omitting fundamental issues such as consent, pleasure, equitable

relationships and sexual diversity. This fragmentation reflects not only normative disparities, but also tensions between progressive and conservative sectors within these societies.

Regulatory frameworks and international standards

In Europe, sexuality education is influenced by regional policy frameworks that seek to harmonise national policies. One of the key documents is the Council of Europe's Strategy on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (2018), which underlines the importance of ensuring universal access to comprehensive sexuality education as a fundamental human right. This document advocates for inclusive, evidence-based and culturally sensitive programmes that promote gender equality, sexual rights and diversity.

Another important milestone is the International Technical Framework for Comprehensive Sexuality Education, developed by UNESCO, which has served as a guide for many European countries in implementing their programmes. This framework sets out a comprehensive approach covering eight key components: relationships, values and rights, understanding the human body, sexuality, gender-based violence, personal skills, society and culture, and sexual and reproductive health.

In addition, the World Health Organization (WHO) has published specific standards for Europe, highlighting the importance of providing sexuality education from an early age as part of a preventive and holistic approach. These standards underline the need to include content on consent, gender equality and diversity, in line with human rights principles.

Progress and achievements in the region

Overall, Europe has made significant progress in implementing sexuality education programmes compared to other regions of the world. Countries such as Sweden and the Netherlands are internationally recognised for their comprehensive programmes, which have successfully reduced rates of teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and gender-

based violence. These countries also stand out for their inclusive approach, which addresses sexual and gender diversity and promotes healthy interpersonal relationships from an early age.

In Western Europe, sexuality education is seen as an essential component of the school curriculum, supported by strong public policies and sustained political commitment. This model has led to widespread acceptance of sexuality education among the population, creating a more favourable environment for its implementation.

Persistent challenges

However, despite these advances, Europe faces significant challenges in implementing comprehensive and equitable sexuality education across the region. The main barriers include:

1. ***Cultural and religious resistance:*** In countries such as Poland, Hungary and Italy, conservative sectors have blocked comprehensive sexuality education initiatives, arguing that they promote values contrary to family and religious traditions. Such resistance not only limits the reach of programmes, but also perpetuates taboos and misinformation about sexuality.
2. ***Regional inequalities:*** The gap between northern and southern/eastern European countries is evident, both in quality and access to sexuality education. While in countries such as Sweden and Germany programmes are compulsory and adequately resourced, in others, such as Romania and Bulgaria, sexuality education is optional or non-existent.
3. ***Lack of teacher training:*** In many regions, educators lack adequate training to address sexuality issues in an inclusive and scientific manner. This leads to inequalities in the quality of sexuality education, even within countries.
4. ***Political polarisation:*** In some contexts, sexuality education has become an issue of polarised political debate, used as a tool in ideological discourses that hinder its evidence-based implementation.

Critical reflection

The diversity of approaches to sexuality education in Europe highlights the tensions between advances in human rights and local socio-political dynamics. Although the region has succeeded in setting advanced standards and generating exemplary models, these advances have not been evenly distributed. The lack of homogeneity reflects an urgent need to strengthen political and social commitment to the implementation of programmes that respect international standards and respond to the needs of the most vulnerable populations.

The European experience also offers valuable lessons on how to overcome cultural resistance and promote acceptance of comprehensive sexuality education. Countries with advanced systems have shown that success lies in combining strong policy frameworks, investment in teacher training, and awareness-raising campaigns that foster dialogue and public understanding of the importance of sexuality education.

In conclusion, Europe is in a unique position to lead the advancement of sexuality education globally, but this requires a continued effort to close regional gaps and ensure that all young Europeans have access to inclusive, comprehensive and quality sexuality education.

b. Italy

Introduction

Sexuality education in Italy finds itself in a paradoxical position within the European context. On the one hand, the country is bound by its membership in the European Union to comply with international standards on sexual and reproductive health, such as those promoted by UNESCO and the World Health Organisation (WHO). On the other hand, socio-cultural resistance and the historical influence of the Catholic Church have hindered the implementation of coherent national policies, relegating sexuality education to a secondary dimension in school systems.

Italy does not have a legislative framework to make sex education compulsory in schools, unlike countries such as Sweden or the Netherlands, where it has been integrated into school curricula for decades. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) should start at an early age and cover not only risk prevention, but also the development of skills to build healthy, respectful and equal relationships (WHO Europe, 2020). However, in Italy, this comprehensive approach is still far from being consolidated.

The regulatory and educational vacuum has significant implications for Italian youth. Recent studies show that a considerable proportion of adolescents lack accurate information on contraception and prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). A report by ISTAT (2021) revealed that only 24% of young Italians have received any formal sexuality education at school, compared to more than 80% in northern European countries. This lack of access not only limits their ability to make informed choices, but also perpetuates gender inequalities and discriminatory attitudes towards LGBTQ+ groups.

Historically, resistance to sexuality education in Italy has been deeply linked to the influence of the Catholic Church, which considers sexuality a subject linked to the private and family sphere. This stance has influenced the design of educational policies that, when addressing sexuality, are often limited to biological or reproductive issues, omitting essential topics such as consent, respect for diversity and interpersonal relationships. Moreover, legislative proposals to introduce comprehensive sexuality education have been repeatedly blocked in parliament, reflecting a political and cultural polarisation on this issue (Paternostro, 2020).

The delay in implementing comprehensive sexuality education programmes in Italy has tangible consequences. Teenage pregnancy rates, while lower than in some countries outside Europe, are significantly higher than in nations with well-established programmes. In addition, according to the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), Italy has one of the highest rates of inconsistent use of modern contraceptives among young people, which increases vulnerability to unintended pregnancy and STIs. Furthermore, the ILGA-Europe report (2021) places Italy

among the countries with the highest rates of institutionalised homophobia in Europe, underlining the need to integrate inclusive content in educational programmes.

Despite these challenges, Italy has isolated examples of good practices that have emerged at local or regional level. Initiatives led by non-governmental organisations and youth associations have shown that it is possible to implement effective educational programmes when supported by communities and developing content tailored to the specific needs of young people. These experiences, although limited in scope, represent a starting point for moving towards a more inclusive and coherent model at the national level.

Background and Outcomes

Sexuality education in Italy is marked by a complex historical and socio-cultural context, combining traditional resistance with contemporary efforts to align the country with international standards. This section explores the historical background, structural barriers and existing initiatives, highlighting the consequences of the absence of a coherent national framework and the observed outcomes on the health and well-being of young Italians.

Historical and socio-cultural context

Italy's delay in implementing comprehensive sexuality education programmes is deeply rooted in the country's historical and religious dynamics. Since the 1929 Concordat between the Holy See and the Italian government, the Catholic Church has had considerable influence on education systems and the regulation of issues related to sexuality. Catholic doctrine, which associates sexuality with reproduction and family morality, has influenced the perception of sexuality as a private and non-educational issue.

During the 1960s and 1970s, with the rise of the feminist and civil rights movements, debates arose over the need to introduce sex education in schools. However, legislative attempts were blocked due to political and cultural opposition, leaving local initiatives as the only way to address the issue. In the 1990s, some regions such as Emilia-Romagna started to implement pilot projects on sexuality education, but their scope was limited to certain schools and depended on the support of regional authorities.

Structural barriers

One of the main barriers to the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education in Italy is the lack of a national regulatory framework. Unlike countries such as Sweden or Germany, where sexuality education is compulsory and part of the school curriculum, in Italy there is no legislation regulating its systematic inclusion. This legal vacuum creates significant inequalities, as access to sexuality education is largely dependent on local decisions or individual teacher initiatives.

Inadequate training of educators is another structural challenge. Many teachers do not receive specific training to teach sexuality education, leading to inconsistencies in the quality and content of programmes. According to a UNESCO report (2020), the lack of teacher preparation limits the capacity of schools to address sensitive issues such as consent, sexual diversity and gender equity, perpetuating a biological and restrictive approach.

Current initiatives

Despite the barriers, there are examples of local and regional initiatives that have sought to fill the gap left by the lack of national policies. In regions such as Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna, pilot programmes have been developed in collaboration with non-governmental associations and health experts. These projects often include interactive workshops, group activities and multimedia resources to address issues such as prevention of sexually transmitted infections, respect for diversity and informed decision-making.

For example, the Italian organisation "AIDOS" has led programmes targeting young people and educators, promoting inclusive and evidence-based approaches. These initiatives, although valuable, face limitations in their reach and sustainability due to lack of public funding and long-term political support.

Consequences of the absence of a national framework

The lack of a coherent national policy has significant effects on Italian youth. In terms of sexual and reproductive health, Italy shows worrying indicators compared to other European countries:

1. Teenage pregnancy rates, while relatively low compared to countries outside Europe, are higher than in nations with comprehensive sexuality education programmes such as the Netherlands or Denmark. This reflects limited access to contraceptive information and sexual health services.
2. Knowledge about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) remains insufficient among young people. According to a report by ISTAT (2021), more than 40% of Italian adolescents do not have adequate information on how to prevent diseases such as HIV, exposing them to avoidable risks.
3. At the societal level, the lack of inclusive sexuality education perpetuates discriminatory attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people. The ILGA-Europe (2021) report highlights that Italy is among the countries with the highest rates of sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination in Europe.

Positive results observed in local initiatives

Despite these shortcomings, local initiatives have demonstrated that well-designed sexuality education programmes can have a significant impact on young people's health and well-being. For example, projects implemented in the Emilia-Romagna region have reduced STI rates among participating students, while improving their knowledge about consent and healthy

relationships. These experiences underscore the potential of sexuality education to transform attitudes and behaviours when implemented in an inclusive and systematic way.

The lack of a national framework in Italy reflects a fragmented and uneven approach to sexuality education, which leaves young people unprotected from health risks and perpetuates structural inequalities. While local initiatives have achieved positive results, their limited scope is not sufficient to address the needs of young people at the national level. Overcoming these barriers requires renewed political commitment and a human rights-based approach to ensure universal access to comprehensive sexuality education.

Policy Recommendations

To address current gaps and move towards the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education in Italy, a set of policy recommendations is needed that reflect the specific needs of the country, while aligning with UNESCO and WHO international standards. These policies should be inclusive, evidence-based and culturally adapted, with a focus on ensuring equity and respect for human rights.

Establishment of a national legislative framework

The first key recommendation is the creation of a legislative framework that makes comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) compulsory at all school levels. This framework should establish clear guidelines on the minimum content to be covered, including issues such as consent, gender equity, sexual diversity, prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and family planning. Crucially, this legislation must be developed in consultation with health, education and human rights experts, ensuring that it is inclusive and free of ideological bias.

One example to consider is the model adopted in Sweden, where sexuality education is compulsory from infancy and is progressively integrated into the school curriculum. This

approach not only ensures consistency in implementation, but also ensures that the content is appropriate for each stage of development (WHO Europe, 2020).

Investment in teacher training

A critical component for the success of any sexuality education programme is the adequate preparation of educators. In Italy, the lack of specialised training has led to inconsistencies in the quality of existing programmes, reinforcing the need to invest in teacher training.

In-service training programmes for educators need to be designed, focusing on inclusive and evidence-based pedagogical strategies. These programmes should include not only technical knowledge about sexual and reproductive health, but also skills to address sensitive issues such as gender diversity and sexual orientation, and the management of power dynamics in interpersonal relationships.

Community inclusion in implementation

Given the socio-cultural context in Italy, where resistance to sexuality education comes from both political and religious groups, it is essential to involve communities in the implementation process. This includes creating spaces for dialogue with parents, community leaders and religious representatives to sensitize them on the importance of CSE and how it contributes to the overall well-being of young people and society.

In regions such as Emilia-Romagna, initiatives that include families and communities in the design and implementation of programmes have been shown to have higher rates of uptake and

success (AIDOS, 2020). This participatory approach not only reduces resistance, but also generates a sense of co-responsibility in promoting sexuality education.

Development of inclusive educational materials

Another key recommendation is to design educational materials that reflect the diversity of young people's experiences and needs. These materials should be accessible to people with disabilities, culturally relevant and free of stereotypes. In addition, they should include positive representations of LGBTQ+ identities and explicitly address issues such as consent, gender-based violence and respect for differences.

Agencies such as UNESCO and WHO have developed technical guidelines that can serve as a basis for the creation of such resources in Italy, adapting them to local contexts.

Linking with sexual and reproductive health services

Sexuality education in schools should be complemented by access to sexual and reproductive health services, such as youth clinics, counselling and contraceptive distribution. This integrated approach ensures that young people not only acquire knowledge, but also have access to practical resources to support informed decision-making.

In countries such as the Netherlands, linking sexuality education and health services has been shown to be highly effective in reducing rates of teenage pregnancy and STIs (IPPF, 2021). In the case of Italy, a coordinated effort between the education and health sectors is required to replicate these good practices.

Public awareness campaigns

Finally, it is essential to implement awareness-raising campaigns aimed at society at large, to dismantle taboos and stigmas surrounding sexuality education. These campaigns

should focus on highlighting the benefits of CSE, not only for young people, but also for building a more equitable and healthy society.

Campaigns can include strategies such as media outreach, community workshops and partnerships with supportive public figures. An evidence-based approach is key to countering the misinformation and sensationalist narratives that often accompany the debate on sexuality education in Italy.

Implementing these recommendations requires sustained political commitment and effective coordination across multiple sectors, including education, health, civil society organisations and local communities. Overcoming socio-cultural and structural resistance will not be an immediate process, but evidence shows that the benefits of comprehensive sexuality education are widespread and long-lasting. Italy has the opportunity to learn from successful models in other European countries and adapt these experiences to its context, moving towards a more inclusive, equitable and rights-based education system.

Relevant Stakeholders

The implementation of sexuality education programmes in Italy depends on the collaboration of a variety of key stakeholders, who play crucial roles in the design, promotion and implementation of policies and programmes. This section identifies and analyses the main stakeholders involved, from government institutions to civil society organisations, and highlights their responsibilities and challenges in the process.

Governmental institutions

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health are the central actors for the implementation of sexuality education policies in Italy. While the Ministry of Education has the responsibility for setting curriculum guidelines and ensuring teacher training, the Ministry of

Health plays an essential role in integrating sexuality education with sexual and reproductive health services.

The main challenge facing these institutions is the lack of inter-ministerial coordination, which has led to gaps in the implementation of comprehensive programmes. In addition, frequent changes in the Italian political landscape have resulted in a lack of continuity in education policies, making it difficult to develop long-term strategies.

Regional and local governments

As Italy is a decentralised country, regional and local governments have a significant role in implementing educational initiatives. Some regions, such as Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany, have led pioneering efforts by introducing pilot sexuality education programmes in schools. These initiatives demonstrate that, even in the absence of a national framework, local governments can act as drivers of change.

However, reliance on these regional initiatives also creates inequalities, as young people in regions with less political commitment or limited resources have less access to sexuality education. This underscores the need for a coordinated approach to ensure territorial equity.

Civil society organisations

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil associations have played a key role in filling the gap in national sexuality education programmes. Entities such as AIDOS have spearheaded educational projects that address issues such as prevention of sexually transmitted infections, consent and gender equity. These organisations have also been instrumental in raising public awareness and advocating for inclusive policies.

Despite their positive impact, NGOs face challenges such as lack of sustainable funding and opposition from conservative sectors. Their ability to expand is also limited by the absence of a legal framework that structurally supports their efforts.

Teachers and youth workers

Teachers and youth workers are key actors in the direct implementation of sexuality education. Their role involves not only imparting knowledge, but also creating a safe and respectful environment to discuss issues related to sexuality. However, lack of specific training limits their ability to address these issues in an effective and non-judgemental manner.

It is essential to invest in their training, not only to equip them with technical skills, but also to strengthen their capacity to manage classroom dynamics on sensitive issues and to promote values of inclusion and respect.

Family and community

Families and communities play an important role in the acceptance and legitimisation of sexuality education. In Italy, where traditional values have a strong presence, family support is key to overcoming cultural resistance. Programmes that involve parents in the design and implementation of sexuality education have proven to be more effective in terms of acceptance and sustainability.

However, many parents lack the information or confidence to discuss sexuality issues with their children, highlighting the need for awareness-raising campaigns aimed at families. These campaigns should emphasise the benefits of sexuality education for young people's overall well-being, demystifying the prejudices associated with these programmes.

International organisations

Entities such as UNESCO, WHO and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) play a crucial role in promoting international standards and in providing technical and financial support for the implementation of educational programmes. In Italy, these bodies have provided guidelines and tools that serve as a reference for designing local initiatives, although

their impact remains limited due to the lack of a national policy that fully adopts these recommendations.

Collaboration between these actors is essential to ensure the success of sexuality education in Italy. However, the current fragmentation and lack of coordination among stakeholders creates inequalities and limits the scope of initiatives. Establishing inter-institutional cooperation mechanisms and ensuring active participation of all sectors involved is key to overcoming these barriers.

Conclusion

Sexuality education in Italy faces structural, cultural and political challenges that have hindered its implementation at the national level, leaving young people unprotected from sexual and reproductive health risks and perpetuating social inequalities. Without a strong legislative framework to regulate its enforceability and scope, sexuality education in the country relies on local and regional initiatives, which, while they have made some progress, are insufficient to address the needs of a diverse and changing youth population.

The analysis demonstrates that the absence of comprehensive sexuality education programmes has tangible implications for the health and well-being of young Italians. From the lack of adequate information on contraception and the prevention of sexually transmitted infections, to the perpetuation of discriminatory attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people and the persistence of gender-based violence, the effects of this lack extend beyond the classroom, affecting society as a whole.

On the other hand, examples of good practice developed in regions such as Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany, as well as the efforts of civil society organisations, demonstrate that it is possible to move towards a more inclusive and evidence-based model. These local experiences can serve as starting points for the development of national policies to ensure territorial equity and universal access to comprehensive sexuality education.

Mainstreaming sexuality education in Italy requires not only renewed political commitment, but also the mobilisation of multiple actors, from local governments to families and communities. Teacher training, the design of inclusive materials and the strengthening of intersectoral cooperation are key elements to ensure the quality and sustainability of education programmes.

Italy is at a crucial moment to align its policies with international standards promoted by UNESCO and WHO, which recognise sexuality education as a fundamental human right and an essential tool for the integral development of individuals. Implementing comprehensive programmes will not only benefit new generations, but will also contribute to building a society that is more equitable, healthy and respectful of diversity.

c. Lithuania

Introduction

Lithuania, as part of Eastern Europe, faces a complex picture regarding the implementation of sexuality education programmes. Although the country has made progress on a number of social and economic indicators since independence in 1990, sexuality education remains a controversial and limited topic in education. The influence of religion, traditional values and the lack of a coherent legislative framework have hindered the development of comprehensive sexuality education programmes, leaving young people vulnerable to sexual and reproductive health risks.

In the Lithuanian context, debates on sexuality education are strongly influenced by the cultural and political legacy of the Soviet era, during which sexuality was a taboo subject and almost

completely excluded from school curricula. Although there have been attempts in recent decades to integrate this content into the education system, initiatives have been fragmented and have faced strong opposition from conservative and religious groups, who perceive sex education as a threat to traditional family values.

The UNESCO report (2018) notes that Lithuania lacks compulsory national sexuality education programmes, and the content taught in schools is often limited to basic biological information about reproduction, excluding topics such as consent, healthy relationships and sexual diversity. This has led to a significant gap between the needs of young people and the educational resources available, contributing to worrying rates of teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and discrimination towards LGBTQ+ people.

However, the picture is not without progress. In recent years, non-governmental organisations and youth movements have led initiatives to promote more inclusive and evidence-based sexuality education, highlighting the need to address sexuality from a human rights and gender equity perspective. These experiences, although limited in scope, offer a basis for future interventions at the national level.

Background and Challenges

Lithuania's history of sexuality education is marked by its past under the Soviet regime, during which issues related to sexuality were treated as taboo and excluded from the education system. During this period, sexuality was confined to the private sphere, and public education did not address either reproduction or risk prevention. After independence in 1990, Lithuania began to develop its own educational frameworks, but sexuality education was not consolidated as a priority, reflecting the influences of religious tradition and the country's prevailing conservative culture.

The lack of a national regulatory framework that integrates sexuality education as a compulsory part of the school curriculum has led to a fragmented picture. Current content is mainly limited to biological aspects of reproduction and puberty, leaving out key issues such as consent, prevention of sexually transmitted infections, equitable relationships, and diversity of gender and sexual orientation. This narrow focus not only perpetuates misinformation, but also reinforces discriminatory attitudes and gender stereotypes.

In the area of sexual health, indicators reflect the challenges arising from this gap. Lithuania has relatively high rates of teenage pregnancy compared to other EU countries with comprehensive sexuality education programmes. In addition, sexually transmitted infections, including HIV and HPV, remain a growing concern, especially among young people. According to a Eurostat report (2021), a high percentage of adolescents in Lithuania lack adequate knowledge about contraceptive methods and safe practices, exposing them to avoidable risks.

Another significant problem is discrimination against LGBTQ+ people. Lithuania ranks low on ILGA-Europe's LGBTQ+ Rights Index (2021), and the lack of representation in sex education contributes to a hostile environment towards sexual and gender minorities. This perpetuates a culture of exclusion and fosters homophobic attitudes that negatively impact the mental health and well-being of LGBTQ+ youth.

Despite these barriers, local initiatives have been identified that seek to improve access to sexuality education. Organisations such as the Lithuanian Youth Information Centre have developed workshops and educational resources aimed at young people, addressing issues such as STI prevention, respect for diversity and the promotion of healthy relationships. These initiatives, while limited in scope, demonstrate that it is possible to move towards a more inclusive and evidence-based model.

The lack of comprehensive programmes has consequences not only for the physical and emotional health of young people, but also for the social development of the country. High rates

of gender-based violence, discrimination and sexual health problems highlight the urgency of implementing national policies to ensure equitable access to sexuality education for all young Lithuanians.

Policy Recommendations

Implementing comprehensive sexuality education in Lithuania requires a policy approach that addresses existing barriers and promotes an inclusive and evidence-based framework. Policy recommendations for the Lithuanian context should consider both cultural dynamics and the country's international commitments, ensuring that education programmes respond to young people's needs and contribute to social equity.

Introduction of a binding national legislative framework

It is essential to establish legislation that makes comprehensive sexuality education compulsory in all schools in the country. This framework should be aligned with international standards set by UNESCO and WHO, ensuring that content includes information on sexual and reproductive health, consent, gender equity, sexual diversity and risk prevention.

The development of this legislation requires collaboration between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and civil society actors to ensure that the framework is inclusive and culturally adapted. Compulsory provision is key to reducing regional inequalities and ensuring that all young people have access to quality education, regardless of their social or cultural background.

In-service training for educators

Teacher training is a priority in implementing effective programmes. Currently, many educators in Lithuania lack the pedagogical tools necessary to address issues related to

sexuality in an inclusive and scientific manner. There is a need to design continuous training programmes that include:

- Pedagogical strategies for dealing with sensitive issues in the classroom.
- Up-to-date knowledge of sexual and reproductive health.
- Methods to promote respect for diversity of gender and sexual orientation.

Training programmes should be developed and promoted by the government in collaboration with universities and organisations specialised in sexual and reproductive rights.

Development of inclusive educational materials

It is essential to design and distribute educational materials that reflect the diversity of experiences and needs of young Lithuanians. These resources should include accessible information about the human body, interpersonal relationships and different gender identities and sexual orientation.

In addition, it is important to ensure that these materials are culturally relevant and available in formats adapted for people with disabilities. Their development should be based on international standards, adapted to the Lithuanian context, and accompanied by evaluation mechanisms to ensure their effectiveness.

Strengthening cross-sectoral cooperation

The success of comprehensive sexuality education in Lithuania depends on effective coordination between the education and health sectors. It is crucial to link educational content with youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services, such as youth clinics, counselling and contraceptive distribution.

This cooperation should also include awareness-raising campaigns to promote access to these services, especially in rural areas where cultural and geographical barriers are more pronounced.

Social awareness and community participation

As cultural resistance is one of the main barriers to sexuality education in Lithuania, it is necessary to implement awareness-raising campaigns targeting communities. These campaigns should:

- Highlight the benefits of comprehensive sexuality education for young people's health and well-being.
- Demystify prejudices associated with sexuality education.
- Involve families, religious and community leaders in the design and implementation of programmes.

The participatory approach is essential to generate social acceptance and overcome ideological resistance that has limited progress in this area.

Monitoring and continuous evaluation

It is important to establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to measure the impact of sexuality education programmes. These processes should include collecting data on outcomes in terms of knowledge gained, attitudes towards diversity and changes in sexual health indicators such as STI and teenage pregnancy rates.

Ongoing evaluation will allow programmes to be adjusted as necessary and ensure their long-term sustainability.

Relevant Stakeholders

The implementation of sexuality education programmes in Lithuania is influenced by a complex web of actors who play critical roles in their design, promotion and delivery. The conservative nature of Lithuanian society, the lack of a clear legislative framework and the fragmentation of efforts among various stakeholders have created an uneven picture of access to and quality of sexuality education in the country. This section discusses the main actors involved, highlighting their roles and the impact they have on the development of comprehensive sexuality education.

Central government and key ministries

The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport is primarily responsible for setting education policy in Lithuania. However, to date, it has not developed a mandatory national framework regulating the teaching of sexuality education in schools. Current school curricula limit sexuality to basic biological content, leaving out essential topics such as consent, equal relationships, sexual diversity and prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

The Ministry of Health, although focused on public health, has had a limited role in integrating sexuality education with sexual and reproductive health services. There is a significant disconnect between the education and health sectors, making it difficult for young people to access key information and resources, such as youth clinics or contraceptive counselling.

Inter-ministerial efforts have been weak and uncoordinated. This lack of synergy limits the central government's ability to develop effective policies to address the specific challenges faced by young people in Lithuania.

Local governments and schools

In the absence of a binding national legislative framework, local governments and schools have a disproportionate influence on the implementation of sexuality education initiatives. In

more progressive regions, such as Vilnius, some schools have introduced pilot programmes or specific workshops in collaboration with non-governmental organisations. However, these initiatives are exceptions and do not represent a national standard.

Rural areas face an even greater challenge, where cultural resistance and lack of educational resources exacerbate inequalities in access to reliable information. Sexuality education in these regions is often absent, leaving young people vulnerable to sexual health risks.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

In Lithuania, NGOs have been the main drivers of comprehensive sexuality education, filling the gap left by government policies. Organisations such as the Lithuanian Youth Information Centre have spearheaded projects targeting young people and educators, promoting interactive workshops and distributing educational materials. These efforts have addressed issues such as STI prevention, consent and respect for diversity, topics that are rarely addressed in the formal education system.

However, these initiatives face significant barriers, such as lack of public funding and opposition from conservative groups. Dependence on external funding limits the sustainability of the programmes, while their reach, while valuable, remains limited compared to the scale of national needs.

Educators

Teachers are key actors in the implementation of any education programme, but in Lithuania their capacity to teach sexuality-related topics is severely limited. The lack of specific training on how to approach sexuality education in an inclusive and scientific way has led to significant inconsistencies in the quality of teaching.

Many educators avoid teaching sensitive topics due to fear of controversy or pressure from conservative parents. This situation highlights the urgent need for in-service training

programmes that prepare teachers to address sexuality issues in a safe and respectful environment, ensuring that students receive appropriate and non-judgmental information.

Families and communities

Families and local communities play an ambivalent role in sexuality education in Lithuania. On the one hand, some parents support efforts to implement educational programmes, recognising the importance of preparing young people to make informed choices. On the other hand, a significant proportion of families, especially in rural areas, oppose comprehensive sexuality education, perceiving it as a threat to traditional and family values.

The support of local communities is crucial for the acceptance and sustainability of programmes. Awareness-raising campaigns targeting families could play a key role in overcoming cultural resistance by highlighting the benefits of sexuality education for young people's health and well-being.

Religion and religious institutions

Lithuania is a country where religion, particularly Catholicism, has a strong influence on social and political life. Religious institutions have been an active force in resisting comprehensive sexuality education, promoting an abstinence-based approach and traditional gender values.

While they represent a major barrier, they also have a significant influence on communities. A strategic approach could include dialogue with religious leaders to find common ground and promote programmes that respect both cultural values and young people's rights to evidence-based information.

International organisations

Entities such as UNESCO and WHO have been instrumental in setting international standards and providing technical guidance in the development of educational programmes in Lithuania. However, their impact has been limited by the lack of political commitment at the national level to fully adopt these recommendations.

Collaboration with these agencies could be intensified through pilot projects supported by international funding, demonstrating the benefits of comprehensive programmes and generating evidence to push for reforms at the national level.

Conclusions

Lithuania faces a complex situation regarding the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education programmes. Despite international commitments as a member of the European Union and the existence of standards set by bodies such as UNESCO and WHO, the country lacks a clear legislative framework to ensure universal access to sexuality education in schools. This lack reflects a combination of historical, socio-cultural and political factors that have conditioned the development of inclusive education policies.

The fragmentation of the Lithuanian education system with regard to sexuality has led to significant inequalities between urban and rural regions, where the influence of conservative values and lack of educational resources have further limited access to reliable information. In addition, the lack of adequate teacher training and reliance on NGO-led initiatives has resulted in an inconsistent educational landscape, where young people do not have the necessary tools to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health.

Sexual health indicators in Lithuania reflect the consequences of this gap. High rates of teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and discriminatory attitudes towards LGBTQ+

people underline the urgency for action. These challenges not only affect young people, but also have implications for the country's social and economic development, perpetuating structural inequalities and public health problems.

However, local initiatives and the efforts of non-governmental organisations demonstrate that it is possible to move towards a more inclusive and evidence-based model. These experiences should serve as a basis for designing national policies that integrate international recommendations and ensure comprehensive sexuality education for all young Lithuanians.

Overcoming cultural and political resistance will require a multisectoral strategy involving local governments, educators, families and communities, as well as technical and financial support from international agencies. The development of national legislation to make sexuality education compulsory, accompanied by investment in teacher training and inclusive materials, is a crucial first step.

Lithuania has an opportunity to align its education system with international standards and move towards a more equitable, healthy and diversity-friendly society. Ensuring access to comprehensive sexuality education is not only a human rights issue, but an investment in the future of its youth and the collective well-being of the country.

d. Ireland

Introduction

Sex education in Ireland reflects a mixture of developments and challenges stemming from its political, cultural and religious history. For much of the 20th century, the education system was deeply influenced by the Catholic Church, which limited the scope of sex education to basic notions of morality and reproduction. This restricted approach left a legacy that persists today, where discussions of sexuality remain, in many cases, taboo or controversial.

Relationships and sexuality education (RSE) was introduced in 1995 as part of the national curriculum, with the aim of providing information on sexual and reproductive health, consent and healthy relationships. However, a 2019 report by the Irish Parliament highlighted that the content taught and its implementation varies significantly between schools. This is partly due to school autonomy, which allows institutions, many run by religious organisations, to tailor programmes according to their ethical principles. This variability in approach has led to disparities in access to comprehensive and reliable information for young people.

Despite these limitations, Ireland has made progress in other areas related to sexual and reproductive rights. The legalisation of equal marriage in 2015 and abortion in 2018 marked important milestones in the recognition of human rights and gender equality in the country. However, these reforms have not fully translated into structural change in sexuality education, where gaps persist on critical issues such as sexual diversity, gender equality and prevention of sexual violence.

Young people in Ireland have pointed to these shortcomings in recent surveys, indicating that the sex education they receive lacks relevance and depth. Many have called for an updated curriculum to include topics such as gender identity, consent and the impact of pornography on relationships. This is particularly important in a context where access to unregulated information through the internet and social media has largely replaced formal education.

In addition, Ireland faces a particular challenge in terms of teacher training. Although CSR is included in the curriculum, many teachers feel unprepared to teach CSR in an inclusive and effective way, which reinforces the need for systematic and up-to-date training programmes.

Ireland has an opportunity to align its sexuality education policies with international standards such as those proposed by UNESCO and WHO. Reforming the current approach would not only ensure access to comprehensive sexuality education for all young people, but would also

contribute to addressing broader social issues such as gender-based violence, discrimination and disparities in sexual and reproductive health.

Background and Outcomes

Sex education in Ireland has its roots in an education system historically controlled by religious institutions, particularly the Catholic Church, which for decades influenced the content and pedagogical approaches to sexuality. This cultural and political legacy limited discussion of issues such as consent, sexual diversity and gender equality, reinforcing a focus solely on reproduction and abstinence. Despite legal and social advances in the country in recent decades, these influences still persist in many areas of the education system.

Historical and cultural context

Until the late 20th century, education in Ireland was closely tied to religious doctrines, which left out of the school curriculum any reference to sexuality that was not framed by traditional moral principles. The introduction of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in 1995 represented a significant change, seeking to incorporate sexual and reproductive health issues, albeit under an approach that still allowed schools wide autonomy to tailor content to their religious values.

The Irish Parliament's 2019 report found that this autonomy has resulted in great inequalities in the implementation of CSR programmes. While some schools, mainly in urban areas, have adopted more progressive and inclusive approaches, many rural and faith-based institutions have maintained a narrow focus, omitting key issues such as consent, gender-based violence and LGBTQ+ relationships.

Current situation

The current landscape of sexuality education in Ireland is mixed. On the one hand, RSE remains compulsory in the school curriculum, but its implementation lacks adequate supervision

and depends on the individual interpretations of school administrators. This has led to significant inconsistencies, with students in certain areas having access to comprehensive information, while others receive restrictive or moralistic teaching.

One of the main challenges identified in recent reports is the lack of specialised training for CSR teachers. Many teachers have expressed feeling uncomfortable or poorly trained to address sensitive issues, resulting in a superficial approach or omission of some content altogether. This perpetuates gaps in young people's knowledge of sexual and reproductive health, and contributes to problems such as misinformation and discriminatory attitudes.

Impacts on young people

The effects of these deficiencies are evident in a number of indicators of youth health and well-being in Ireland. According to data from the HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme (2021):

- A significant number of young people in Ireland lack basic knowledge about consent and healthy relationships.
- The incidence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among young people has increased, partly due to a lack of adequate education on safe practices.
- Gender-based violence and sexual harassment continue to be major problems, especially in school settings, where a lack of discussion about power dynamics and equity perpetuates these behaviours.

In addition, LGBTQ+ people face increased exclusion and discrimination due to the absence of inclusive content in most CSR programmes. According to a report by ILGA-Europe (2021), LGBTQ+ young people in Ireland report high levels of stress and stigmatisation stemming from lack of representation and acceptance in educational settings.

Recent initiatives and progress

Despite these barriers, in recent years there have been initiatives aimed at modernising and expanding sex education in Ireland. In 2019, the Department of Education initiated a review of RSE programmes, with the aim of ensuring that they include topics such as consent, equal relationships and sexual and gender diversity. This review aligns with Ireland's international commitments on human rights and sexual health.

In addition, organisations such as the HSE and the National Youth Forum have led awareness campaigns and workshops to complement the gaps in schools. These initiatives have proven to be effective in improving young people's knowledge of sexual and reproductive health, although their reach remains limited compared to the need at the national level.

Reflection on the results

Sexuality education in Ireland has advanced from its limited mid-20th century perspective, but still faces significant structural and cultural challenges that hinder its effectiveness. Inequalities in the implementation of RSE, combined with a lack of teacher training and a legacy of conservative values, have perpetuated significant gaps in the sexuality education of young Irish people.

The impact of these shortcomings is profound, affecting not only young people's physical and emotional health, but also their relationships and attitudes towards diversity and equity. While recent initiatives point in the right direction, stronger political commitment will be needed to ensure that all young people in Ireland have access to inclusive, comprehensive and evidence-based sexuality education.

Policy Recommendations

To address the current shortcomings of sexuality education in Ireland and move towards an inclusive, comprehensive and rights-based model, it is essential to implement a set of policies aligned with international standards such as those proposed by UNESCO and WHO. These recommendations address both the structural constraints and the cultural and social barriers that have hindered progress in sexuality education in the country.

Establish a uniform and binding legislative framework

The Irish government should create national legislation to regulate Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and make it compulsory in all schools, regardless of religious or cultural orientation. This legislative framework should ensure that minimum content includes topics such as consent, sexual and gender diversity, prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), gender equality and healthy relationships.

An example to follow is the Scottish model, where comprehensive sexuality education is compulsory and covers issues related to diversity and consent from an early age, ensuring that all students have access to a uniform base of essential knowledge.

Reviewing and updating the CSR curriculum

The CSR curriculum needs to be modernised to reflect Ireland's legal and social developments, such as the legalisation of equal marriage and access to abortion. This includes:

- Introduce specific modules on consent and equitable relationships, recognising the impact of gender-based violence and sexual harassment on young people.
- Expand the contents related to mental and emotional health, promoting skills such as assertive communication, empathy and conflict resolution.
- Ensure that the curriculum is inclusive of the experiences of LGBTQ+ young people, addressing gender and sexual orientation diversity as an integral part of sexuality education.

Establish mandatory implementation and monitoring standards

The current autonomy of schools in Ireland allows for significant disparities in how RSE is delivered. To ensure equity, the government should implement oversight mechanisms that monitor the quality and delivery of programmes across the country. These standards should be developed by the Department of Education in consultation with experts in sexual health, human rights and youth organisations.

In addition, additional funding should be provided for schools facing financial or logistical barriers, especially in rural areas, to ensure that they can meet national standards.

Investing in compulsory teacher training

Teacher training is a key priority to ensure the effectiveness of RSE programmes. Many teachers in Ireland have expressed feeling uncomfortable or unprepared to address sexuality issues in the classroom, which reinforces the need for structured and mandatory training.

This training should include:

- Updated knowledge on sexual and reproductive health, consent and gender equity.
- Pedagogical methods for dealing with sensitive issues in an inclusive and non-judgemental way.
- Strategies to foster safe and respectful environments that promote open dialogue among students.

Engaging communities and families

As cultural resistance remains a significant barrier in Ireland, it is crucial to involve families and communities in the implementation process. This includes awareness-raising campaigns that:

- Highlight the benefits of CSR for the health and well-being of young people.

- Demystify prejudices related to sexuality education.
- Encourage intergenerational dialogue on the importance of addressing sexuality in an open and respectful manner.

Programmes such as those developed by the National Youth Forum have shown that community participation can increase the acceptance and sustainability of educational initiatives.

Integrating sexuality education with health services

Sexuality education must be supported by easy access to sexual and reproductive health services, such as youth clinics, STI testing and counselling. This integration will ensure that young people not only acquire knowledge, but can also apply it in their daily lives with appropriate support.

In countries such as the Netherlands, this approach has proven highly effective in reducing rates of STIs and teenage pregnancy, while promoting more positive attitudes towards sexual health.

Implement national education campaigns

In addition to formal education in schools, it is critical to develop national campaigns that address issues such as consent, gender-based violence and sexual diversity. These campaigns can use digital platforms, social media and traditional media to reach a wider audience, including young people outside the formal education system.

The success of these policies depends on sustained political commitment and collaboration between multiple actors, including government, education communities, youth organisations and families. Reforming sexuality education in Ireland will not only ensure that young people are better equipped to make informed choices, but will also contribute to building a more equitable, inclusive and rights-respecting society.

Relevant Stakeholders

The implementation of comprehensive sexuality education in Ireland requires the collaboration of a number of key stakeholders. Each of these stakeholders plays an essential role in promoting, designing and implementing policies and programmes that respond to young people's needs and are aligned with international standards. In the Irish context, cultural and religious tensions add a layer of complexity that must be carefully managed to ensure an inclusive and rights-based approach.

Government ministries and public agencies

The Department of Education is primarily responsible for the design and implementation of the Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) curriculum in schools. Although the curriculum is mandatory, it has been criticised for allowing too much autonomy to schools, resulting in wide disparities in the quality and content of sex education provided. It is crucial that the Department play a more proactive role in monitoring and setting mandatory minimum standards to ensure uniform implementation in all educational institutions.

The HSE (Health Service Executive), through its Sexual Health and Unplanned Pregnancy Programme, is another key player in the promotion of sexual health in Ireland. This agency is responsible for developing educational resources, coordinating awareness campaigns and ensuring young people's access to sexual and reproductive health services. Closer collaboration between the HSE and the Department of Education could strengthen the link between sexuality education and health services.

Schools and teachers

Schools and teachers have a key role to play in the delivery of RSE programmes. However, in Ireland, many schools are run by religious organisations, which leads to significant variations in the way sexuality issues are addressed. In particular, Catholic schools tend to prioritise religious values over principles of inclusion and diversity, omitting issues such as sexual diversity or gender equality.

Teachers, for their part, face challenges related to lack of specific training and pressure to adapt content to local sensitivities. This underlines the need to provide mandatory training to enable them to address issues in a scientific, inclusive and respectful manner. Teachers must be equipped not only with technical knowledge, but also with pedagogical skills to manage classroom dynamics around sensitive issues.

Families and communities

In a society where traditional values still carry considerable weight, families and local communities can be both allies and obstacles to the implementation of CSR. Many parents have expressed concern about the inclusion of issues such as sexual diversity, reflecting a clash between traditional values and the demands of inclusive education.

It is essential to involve families in the design and implementation of programmes, promoting their understanding and acceptance. This can be achieved through community workshops, discussion forums and campaigns explaining the benefits of CSR for young people's health and well-being. The active involvement of communities is crucial to overcome resistance and build broad social support.

Youth and human rights organisations

Youth organisations, such as the National Youth Forum, have been key actors in advocating for more inclusive and relevant sexuality education in Ireland. These organisations have highlighted the shortcomings of the current system and have led initiatives promoting issues such as consent, equal relationships and sexual diversity.

Similarly, human rights groups such as Amnesty International and BeLonG To Youth Services have advocated for the integration of LGBTQ+ rights into the CSR curriculum, noting that the exclusion of these issues perpetuates discriminatory attitudes and negatively affects the mental health of LGBTQ+ youth.

Religion and religious institutions

The influence of the Catholic Church in the Irish education system remains significant. Approximately 90% of primary schools are run by Catholic bodies, which gives these institutions considerable control over content and approaches to RSE. This control has been a major obstacle to the implementation of inclusive programmes, as religious schools often exclude or limit topics such as sexual diversity, abortion and consent.

Despite this resistance, religious institutions could play a more constructive role by engaging in dialogue with government and civil society to find common ground between religious values and the needs of inclusive, evidence-based sexuality education.

International organisations

Entities such as UNESCO, WHO and the European Union have been instrumental in promoting international standards and providing technical guidance on sexuality education. Ireland, as a member of the European Union, is committed to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals, which include ensuring inclusive and quality education for all.

Technical and financial support from these bodies could be used to develop educational materials, teacher training programmes and awareness-raising campaigns, helping to overcome local resistance and improving the quality of CSR in the country.

In Ireland, effective implementation of comprehensive sexuality education depends on close coordination between these actors. While government and educational institutions have the primary responsibility, the active involvement of families, communities, youth organisations and international agencies is crucial to overcome cultural barriers and ensure an inclusive and equitable approach.

Conclusion

Ireland is at a crucial point in transforming its approach to sexuality education, aligning it with the social and legal advances the country has made in recent decades. Despite the inclusion of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in the curriculum since 1995, the current system continues to show significant gaps in its implementation and reach. These gaps perpetuate inequalities among young people, not only in terms of access to adequate information, but also in promoting inclusive and respectful attitudes towards diversity.

The impact of these constraints is profound. Rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) have increased among young people, and lack of knowledge about key issues such as consent and healthy relationships remains a persistent problem. Furthermore, the exclusion of content related to sexual and gender diversity particularly affects LGBTQ+ youth, exposing them to discrimination and social exclusion in educational environments that should be safe and equitable.

Recent legal developments, such as the legalisation of equal marriage and access to abortion, reflect a shift in Irish society that needs to be backed up by structural reforms in sexuality education. This includes a clear legislative framework that makes inclusive RSE mandatory, uniform implementation standards and monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance.

In addition, teacher training stands out as an urgent priority. Teachers need adequate tools and knowledge to address sexuality issues in a scientific, inclusive and culturally sensitive manner. This component is essential to overcome current barriers and provide students with sexuality education that not only informs them, but also fosters attitudes of respect, equity and responsibility.

Collaboration among various stakeholders is another key factor for success. From the Department of Education to local communities, youth and faith-based organisations, all have a role to play in creating a system that meets the needs of young people and respects the cultural specificities of the country. While resistance persists, initiatives such as those led by the National

Youth Forum and the HSE demonstrate that it is possible to move towards a more inclusive and effective model.

Ireland has the opportunity to position itself as a leader in promoting comprehensive sexuality education that reflects the values of equity and human rights. This effort will not only ensure that young people are better equipped to make informed choices, but will also contribute to building a fairer, more inclusive and healthier society for future generations.

e. Spain

Introduction

Sexuality education in Spain reflects a process of transformation marked by historical tensions, legislative advances and an ever-changing social context. Although the country has made significant progress in promoting sexual and reproductive rights, structural and cultural challenges persist that limit access to comprehensive, inclusive and evidence-based sexuality education.

Historically, issues related to sexuality have been stigmatised and controlled, especially during the Franco regime, when education was deeply influenced by Catholic doctrine. This approach restricted discussions on sexuality to issues of morality and reproduction, excluding key aspects such as consent, equal relationships or sexual diversity. It was in the 1980s, after the transition to democracy, that the need for sexuality education began to be institutionalised, albeit in a limited and physiologically focused way.

The approval of the LOGSE in 1990 marked a turning point by introducing sexuality education as a cross-cutting component in the educational curriculum. However, this approach has resulted in a fragmented implementation, relegating content to subjects such as Natural

Sciences or Biology, and omitting critical issues such as gender diversity, gender-based violence and affective education. According to Benito Seoane (2015), this model perpetuates a reductionist view of sexuality, treating it as a natural phenomenon that does not require deeper analysis.

Today, the picture is gradually changing. Law 4/2023, aimed at guaranteeing real and effective equality for trans people and the rights of LGBTQ+ people, establishes measures to incorporate content on sexual and gender diversity in all educational stages. This law underlines the importance of combating discrimination and promoting inclusion, marking a significant advance in the Spanish legislative framework. It also requires ongoing training for teachers and the incorporation of specific content in educational materials.

Despite these improvements, challenges remain. A recent report on young women's sexuality in Spain rated the quality of sexuality education in schools a 4.4 out of 10, highlighting that there are still important taboos and stigmas around issues such as sexual diversity, infertility or gender-based violence. This reflects the need to overcome cultural barriers and to consolidate a more holistic approach that allows young people to develop a healthy and respectful view of sexuality.

Spain, as one of the top-ranked countries in Rainbow Europe's LGBTQ+ legal equality index (2023), has the opportunity to lead in Europe with an inclusive and equitable sexuality education model. However, ensuring its success requires effective implementation of existing laws and a renewed commitment to overcoming the territorial and cultural inequalities that still characterise the education system.

Background and Outcomes

Sexuality education in Spain has a background marked by legislative changes, cultural tensions and the fragmentation of the education system. This section analyses the evolution of

its regulatory framework, historical and contemporary barriers, as well as the results of the policies implemented so far, highlighting both achievements and shortcomings.

Historical development and regulatory framework

Sex education began to be publicly debated in Spain in the late 1970s, in the context of the democratic transition. Prior to that period, under the Franco regime, issues related to sexuality were completely absent from the educational curriculum, reflecting a conservative and moralistic view of sexuality, deeply influenced by the Catholic Church.

It was with the approval of the LOGSE in 1990 that sexuality education was officially introduced in Spanish schools, although as a transversal approach and not as a specific subject. This model allowed content related to sexuality to be integrated into subjects such as Natural Sciences or Biology, limiting itself mainly to explaining the physiology of sexual organs, the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and the use of contraceptive methods. This approach, although necessary, was insufficient to address issues such as sexual diversity, consent or gender-based violence.

In recent decades, the debate on the need for more comprehensive sexuality education has been gaining momentum. The approval of the Organic Law for the Improvement of Educational Quality (LOMCE) in 2013 and its subsequent reform in 2020 with the LOMLOE introduced an emphasis on values such as gender equality and respect for diversity. However, these laws have failed to establish a uniform framework at national level, which has led to the autonomous communities playing a central role in the implementation of educational programmes, with great disparities in their approaches and content.

A significant change came with the passing of Law 4/2023, which establishes specific measures to ensure equality for LGBTQ+ people and promotes the inclusion of content on sexual and gender diversity at all levels of education. The law also requires that teachers receive specific

training and that educational materials reflect the diversity of sexual orientations, gender identities and family structures.

Persistent barriers and challenges

Despite legislative advances, the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education faces numerous challenges. One of the main challenges is the fragmentation of the Spanish education system. Competencies in education are devolved to the autonomous communities, which has led to significant differences in the quality and scope of sexuality education programmes. Some regions, such as Catalonia and the Basque Country, have adopted more progressive approaches, while others, such as Madrid or Castilla y León, have been reluctant to include content on diversity or gender equality.

Another major obstacle is the influence of conservative and religious sectors that have questioned the inclusion of issues related to sexual diversity and gender equality, labelling them as part of a "gender ideology". This opposition has generated a polarised environment that hinders the political consensus needed to move towards a more uniform and inclusive model.

In addition, the lack of adequate training for teachers is a critical problem. Many teachers lack the pedagogical tools and knowledge to address sexuality issues in an inclusive and scientific manner, resulting in limited or non-existent teaching on these issues in the classroom.

Impact on young people

Deficiencies in sexuality education have a direct impact on the health and well-being of young people in Spain. According to data from the Instituto de la Juventud (INJUVE, 2020):

- Rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), especially among adolescents and young adults, have increased over the past decade, reflecting a lack of effective prevention education.
- Many young people report that their sexuality education is limited to basic information and lacks relevant topics such as consent, equal relationships or the impact of pornography.
- Discriminatory attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people persist in school settings, underlining the need for education that fosters inclusion and respect for diversity.

Recent progress

Despite these limitations, Spain has made significant progress in the legislative recognition of sexual and reproductive rights. Law 4/2023 not only establishes the obligation to incorporate sexual and gender diversity in curricula, but also promotes awareness-raising campaigns and STI prevention programmes aimed at young people.

In addition, initiatives led by NGOs and youth groups have complemented the gaps in the education system by providing inclusive workshops and educational resources. These experiences have shown that young people are receptive to more comprehensive and contextualised sexuality education, which reinforces the need to expand these initiatives at the national level.

Spain has made remarkable progress in terms of legislation and recognition of rights, but the impact of these measures remains limited due to the fragmentation of the education system and cultural and political resistance. To ensure that young people can develop a healthy, respectful and fulfilling understanding of sexuality, it is essential to overcome these barriers and consolidate a more inclusive and uniform educational approach across the territory.

Policy Recommendations

In the Spanish context, the legislative framework around sexuality education has undergone important advances in recent decades, with an increasingly inclusive and respectful approach to student diversity (Bertomeu, 2016). However, the effective implementation of these regulations remains a key challenge to ensure the success of public policies and the improvement of young people's well-being. Below are a number of key recommendations aimed at improving sexuality education in schools, with the aim of creating an environment of respect, understanding and support for all students, regardless of their sexual, gender or family identity.

Creating spaces for dialogue and support

The creation of spaces for dialogue and support in schools is an essential strategy to promote an inclusive and respectful environment that favours coexistence and the emotional development of students. These spaces must be designed as safe and confidential environments, in which students feel comfortable to share their experiences, doubts and concerns regarding sexual, gender and family diversity, without fear of judgement or discrimination (Amnesty International, 2017). According to Sempere (2019), these spaces for dialogue allow students to empower themselves and develop a deeper understanding of their own identities, while learning to respect the diversity of others.

Specialised facilitators

Involving specialists in the field, such as psychologists, social educators or social workers, to lead these discussion groups is essential. The presence of experts in mental health and sexuality education ensures that conversations are professionally guided and that students receive quality information (Fernández et al., 2021). In addition, these facilitators should be trained to manage emotions and conflicts that may arise during the sessions, creating a safe space where all participants feel heard and understood (López & Rodríguez, 2020).

Inclusive themes

Sessions should address a range of topics that cover a diversity of experiences, from gender identity to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) to sexual and reproductive rights. It is essential that content is not limited to basic information, but includes critical approaches that promote reflection and mutual respect (Hernández & García, 2018). Sexuality education should go beyond the prevention of diseases and unwanted pregnancies, and should include an understanding of sexual identity and orientation as fundamental aspects of human development. According to Rodríguez and González (2019), this broad approach facilitates greater knowledge transfer, allowing students to understand the importance of diversity in all its aspects.

Emotional support

Emotional support should be a priority within these spaces. Students should feel supported not only in terms of information, but also in terms of their emotions and personal experiences. Creating an environment where students can express their feelings freely and respectfully contributes significantly to their emotional and psychological well-being (Marín et al., 2020). In addition, facilitators should be prepared to offer basic psychological support and direct students to external resources if necessary. In this sense, emotional education is presented as a cross-cutting aspect that reinforces young people's mental health and contributes to their comprehensive development (Caro & Ruiz, 2017).

Voluntary participation

It is essential to encourage students' voluntary participation in these spaces for dialogue and support, always respecting their privacy and autonomy. Attendance should be optional, so that students feel free to attend or not, without external pressure. In addition, the confidentiality of conversations should be guaranteed to create an atmosphere of trust (García & Soler, 2019). According to Gutiérrez et al. (2018), voluntariness in participation ensures that students are genuinely involved, which increases the effectiveness of educational interventions.

Continuous feedback

It is essential to establish mechanisms to collect continuous feedback from learners, facilitators and other members of the education community. This feedback allows for adjusting the approaches and methods used in dialogue spaces, ensuring that they adapt to the changing needs of learners (Pérez & González, 2020). Periodic evaluations and satisfaction surveys are useful tools to improve educational programmes and ensure their relevance and effectiveness over time (Sánchez et al., 2021).

Integration of educational technologies

The integration of educational technologies offers a unique opportunity to address sexual, gender and family diversity in innovative and accessible ways. Technologies can facilitate access to interactive educational resources and allow students to explore these topics in an engaging and modern format (García & García, 2020). Through digital tools, students can access personalised content, participate in online discussion forums and engage in educational activities outside the classroom, expanding the possibilities for learning and participation.

Development of educational applications

One of the most effective ways of integrating technologies is the development of educational apps specifically designed to address sexual and gender diversity. Collaboration with app developers can result in the creation of interactive tools that present these issues in an engaging and educational way. These apps can include games, simulations and multimedia content, which facilitate learning in a fun and effective way (Lopez, 2020). According to García et al. (2018), these tools allow for more dynamic learning, favouring the inclusion of students with different learning styles.

Interactive multimedia resources

The use of interactive multimedia resources, such as videos, simulations and audiovisual content, can be highly beneficial for exploring the diversity of experiences and perspectives. These resources allow students to experience and reflect on situations related to gender and sexual identity in a more immersive way, which fosters empathy and understanding (Herrera & Martínez, 2017). Audiovisual resources also provide an accessible and flexible way of learning, allowing students to review topics at their own pace (Sánchez & Pérez, 2020).

E-learning platforms

Online learning platforms can be an excellent tool to promote continuing education on sexual, gender and family diversity. These platforms offer courses and educational materials that are accessible to students, teachers and parents alike. Through them, content can be shared on sexual rights, prevention of gender-based violence and other essential topics to create a culture of respect and inclusion in schools (López & González, 2021). According to Pérez and Rodríguez (2019), these platforms also facilitate the participation of parents, who can access educational resources that allow them to better support their children's development in this area.

Active parental involvement

The active involvement of parents in the educational process is crucial to promote understanding and support at home. Information and awareness-raising programmes for parents need to be designed to address concepts related to sexual, gender and family diversity in a clear and accessible way. Parent education contributes to creating a supportive environment at home, which complements and reinforces what is learned at school (Pérez & Álvarez, 2019).

Information programmes

Information programmes should include written resources, informative videos and face-to-face sessions that facilitate understanding of complex issues related to sexual and gender

diversity. It is essential that these programmes are designed in a way that is accessible to all parents, regardless of their level of education or experience with these issues (Gómez & Sánchez, 2020). The key is to provide clear, practical and relevant information that enables parents to better understand their children's needs and effectively support their development.

Practical workshops

Designing practical workshops for parents can be an effective tool to ensure that information is tangibly applied in everyday life. These workshops should focus on specific topics, such as how to talk about sexual diversity at home or how to support children in the process of exploring their gender identity. Through these spaces, parents can acquire skills to handle sensitive conversations with their children in a respectful and empathetic way (Hernández & García, 2020).

Discussion forums

Finally, the creation of discussion forums among parents allows for the exchange of experiences and advice on how to address issues of sexual and gender diversity at home. These forums foster the creation of supportive communities among parents, which strengthens the emotional safety net for students (Fernández & Rodríguez, 2018). Parents can share their concerns, learn from each other's experiences and find collective solutions to address common challenges related to their children's sexuality education.

Relevant stakeholders

Effective implementation of comprehensive sexuality education in Spain requires coordination and collaboration among a variety of key stakeholders. Each stakeholder plays a crucial role in the design, implementation and monitoring of education programmes, as well as in promoting an inclusive and rights-based approach. The main stakeholders involved, their responsibilities and the challenges they face in the Spanish context are discussed below.

Central government and key ministries

The central government, through the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, is responsible for establishing the general guidelines for the school curriculum and ensuring that compulsory minimum content on sexuality education is included in all stages of education. However, the decentralisation of the education system in Spain has transferred much of this responsibility to the Autonomous Communities, which has led to significant disparities in the implementation of sexuality education programmes.

The Ministry of Equality plays a crucial role, especially in the implementation of Law 4/2023, which establishes specific measures to ensure the inclusion of sexual and gender diversity in school curricula. In addition, this ministry leads initiatives to combat discrimination and promote gender equality in education.

For its part, the Ministry of Health is responsible for coordinating sexual and reproductive health awareness campaigns, ensuring access to services for the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and working with the education system to integrate sexuality education with health services.

Regional governments

Autonomous communities play a central role in the adaptation and implementation of educational content at the regional level. While regions such as Catalonia and the Basque Country have adopted more progressive and inclusive approaches, others, such as Madrid and Castilla y León, have shown greater resistance to incorporating issues such as sexual diversity or gender equality in their educational programmes.

This regional disparity underscores the need for greater coordination between the central government and the autonomous communities to ensure equitable access to sexuality education throughout the country. In addition, autonomous governments have the capacity to promote specific programmes that respond to local needs, especially in rural areas where cultural and social barriers may be greater.

Teachers and school staff

Teachers are directly responsible for implementing sexuality education programmes in the classroom. However, in Spain, many teachers lack specific training on how to address issues of sexuality, diversity and gender equality in an inclusive and scientific manner. This lack of preparation leads to inconsistencies in the quality of sexuality education that students receive.

It is crucial that teachers receive ongoing training and pedagogical resources to enable them to deliver sexuality education content effectively. In addition, school staff as a whole, including counsellors and management teams, must be involved in creating a safe and respectful learning environment.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and youth groups

NGOs have played an essential role in filling the gaps in the formal education system in the area of sexuality education. Organisations such as the Federación Estatal de Lesbianas, Gais, Trans, Bisexuales, Intersexuales y más (FELGTBI+) have led initiatives to raise awareness and promote inclusive educational programmes that address issues such as consent, sexual diversity and equal relationships.

For their part, youth groups have been key actors in advocating for more comprehensive and relevant sexuality education. These organisations have raised the voice of young people in public debates, highlighting gaps in the current education system and proposing innovative solutions to address their needs.

Families and communities

Families and local communities have a significant impact on the perception and acceptance of sexuality education in Spain. Although many families support the inclusion of these contents in the school curriculum, some, especially in more conservative environments, show resistance due to cultural or religious concerns.

It is essential to involve families in the education process, providing clear information about the benefits of sexuality education and addressing any prejudices or fears they may have. Awareness-raising campaigns targeting communities can be effective tools for fostering greater social support.

Religion and religious institutions

Historically, the Catholic Church has had considerable influence in the Spanish education system, especially during the Franco regime. Although its control over educational policies has diminished, it remains a relevant actor, particularly in religiously oriented charter schools. These institutions often adopt a more limited approach to sex education, omitting topics such as sexual diversity or gender equality.

Despite tensions, it is possible to establish a constructive dialogue with religious institutions to find points of convergence to move towards more inclusive sexuality education, while respecting cultural sensitivities.

International organisations

Entities such as UNESCO and WHO have played a key role in promoting international standards in sexuality education, providing guidelines and technical resources that can be adapted to the Spanish context. In addition, the European Union has noted the importance of ensuring universal access to sexuality education as part of its commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Collaboration with these bodies can help Spain improve the quality of its education programmes, ensuring that they are aligned with global best practice and promoting equity across the country.

Reflection on stakeholders

The diversity of actors involved in sexuality education in Spain reflects the complexity of its socio-political context. To overcome existing barriers and ensure an inclusive approach, it is crucial to establish cooperation mechanisms between the central government, regional governments, NGOs, families and other key stakeholders. Only through effective collaboration and shared commitment will it be possible to ensure that all young people in Spain have access to comprehensive sexuality education that promotes health, respect and equity.

Conclusion

Spain is at a critical point in consolidating comprehensive sexuality education that reflects the legislative and social advances made in recent decades. Although the country has demonstrated a strong commitment to gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights through laws such as Law 4/2023, the implementation of these principles in education still faces significant challenges.

The fragmentation of the education system, resulting from the transfer of competences to the autonomous communities, has led to inequalities in access to inclusive, quality sexuality education. While some regions have adopted progressive approaches, others show marked resistance, perpetuating taboos and omitting essential content. This territorial disparity reinforces the need for a national legislative framework to ensure uniform minimum standards across the country.

Furthermore, shortcomings in teacher training and a lack of adequate educational resources limit the effectiveness of current programmes. Many young people in Spain continue to receive

superficial sex education, focusing on biological and preventive aspects, leaving aside crucial issues such as egalitarian relationships, consent, the impact of pornography and sexual and gender diversity. These shortcomings are reflected in problems such as the increase in sexually transmitted infections among adolescents and persistent discriminatory attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people.

Despite these barriers, Spain has a solid legislative and social basis to move towards comprehensive sexuality education. Recent legal reforms, such as LOMLOE and Law 4/2023, offer a unique opportunity to establish an inclusive, rights-based education model aligned with international standards. This will require a renewed political commitment that prioritises teacher training, the creation of inclusive educational materials and the promotion of awareness-raising campaigns involving families and communities.

Comprehensive sexuality education is not only a fundamental right, but also a powerful tool to promote health, equity and respect in society. Spain has the opportunity to position itself as a European benchmark in this area, but to achieve this, it must ensure that legislative advances are translated into effective and accessible policies for all young people, regardless of their place of residence or socio-cultural context.

5. Analysis of the surveys (From each country)

a. Italy

Youth Worker

Educators who participated in the survey have highlighted several strategies and approaches that they consider effective in sex education for young people. One of the most valued strategies is the use of interactive approaches, where young people actively participate in discussions. This type of teaching seems to facilitate greater understanding and engagement

with the topics covered. In addition, fostering an open dialogue environment is recurrently mentioned as a key methodology. This approach allows young people to feel more comfortable talking about sexuality, which ultimately contributes to deeper and more meaningful learning.

Peer education also emerges as an effective methodology. In this context, young people learn from other young people, which not only facilitates the transmission of knowledge, but also promotes an atmosphere of trust and acceptance. This strategy is particularly valued for its ability to make young people feel more understood and supported.

In terms of managing cultural and gender differences, educators emphasise the importance of being culturally sensitive. Adapting teaching to respect young people's diverse cultures and contexts is considered essential to ensure that everyone feels represented and respected in discussions about sexuality. This inclusive approach also embraces differences in gender and sexual orientation, which reinforces the need to personalise teaching to better address the individual needs of each young person, especially in contexts of diversity.

The use of technology and digital media is also a recurring theme. Many educators have integrated educational apps into their classes, which has made sexuality education more accessible and relevant to young people. In addition, the use of online platforms and social media is mentioned as an effective means of reaching young people in spaces where they feel more comfortable. Digital resources, such as videos and websites, complement these efforts by providing additional tools that educators can use to enhance understanding of the topics.

However, educators also face significant challenges. Cultural and social resistance is a major obstacle, especially in contexts where traditional norms may limit the effectiveness of sexuality education. In addition, many educators cite the lack of adequate and up-to-date resources as a persistent problem. This scarcity of materials hinders teaching and limits opportunities for innovation. Prejudice and stigma around sexuality are also cited as barriers that educators must overcome to be effective in their work.

Despite these challenges, several educators share positive experiences and success stories, highlighting the significant impact they have made on young people's understanding and behaviour regarding sexuality. These experiences are a testament to the potential of well-implemented sexuality education. In addition, some educators mention that they have begun to implement innovations in their practice, constantly seeking to improve the effectiveness of the sexuality education they provide.

In short, educators are adapting and developing innovative strategies to address the challenges they face in sexuality education. Despite the barriers, there is a strong commitment to creating inclusive and effective learning environments, reflecting a continued dedication to improving sexuality education for young people.

Youth

Analysis of the results of the survey on sexuality education among young people provides valuable insight into how students perceive the education they receive and what aspects they consider most relevant for their personal and educational development.

One of the first points to note is the diversity in perceptions of the teaching methods employed in educational institutions. Many students describe the teaching methods in their environment as experiential, based on learning through direct experience, or interactive, favouring group discussions and collaborative projects. However, not all young people are convinced of the effectiveness of these methods; some express doubts as to whether they really help them in their learning, indicating a disconnect between the methodology and the students' individual expectations or needs.

In terms of the perceived effectiveness of these methods, the survey reveals that a significant number of students are unsure whether the teaching methods used are effective for their learning. This uncertainty could be related to the lack of personalisation in teaching, where

generalised approaches do not always respond to the specific needs of individual learners. Those who do not find the methods effective often prefer more personalised approaches, which are better adapted to their interests and ways of learning.

The results also shed light on the extracurricular activities that young people consider most useful for their development. Artistic activities, such as drama or music, along with science projects and volunteering, are highly valued by students. They see art as a way of expressing their individuality and creativity, while science projects are appreciated for their ability to foster critical and analytical thinking. Volunteering, meanwhile, is recognised as an opportunity to develop social skills and empathy, key elements for personal growth.

The reasons behind the preference for these activities centre on their ability to offer holistic development. Students value activities that not only complement their academic training, but also contribute to their personal growth, allowing them to develop practical, social and emotional skills that they consider essential for their future.

Despite the diversity of opinions and experiences, there is one constant: students are looking for a more personalised and meaningful education. They want their education to go beyond the traditional classroom, integrating experiences that truly resonate with their personal interests and needs. This demand reflects a growing awareness among young people of the importance of an education that prepares them not only for academic success, but also for life in general.

In summary, the results of this survey underline the need to rethink and adapt teaching methods in educational institutions, ensuring that they are more personalised and relevant to students. Young people value activities that allow them to express themselves and develop practical skills, and feel that a greater connection between learning and their personal interests could significantly improve their educational experience.

b. Lithuania

Youth workers

Introduction

This report unveils the insights gathered from a questionnaire administered as part of the "Positive Outlook Developing: Sexual Identity and Education" project. Specifically designed for sexual education specialists, educators, and youth workers, the survey sought to capture their perspectives on youth sexual education and development. The findings presented herein are based on 51 anonymous responses.

Methodology

The questionnaire distribution employed the following methods:

- **Email Correspondence:** Tailored questionnaires were dispatched via email to various sexuality education-related organisations, with a specific focus on engaging non-governmental organisations (NGOs), healthcare professionals, youth workers, teachers, and social workers. The emphasis placed on anonymity and confidentiality aimed to encourage candid responses.
- **Telephonic Communication:** Personalized calls were made to key contacts within the targeted organisations.
- **Live Events Participation:** Actively participating in live events focused on sexuality education provided a unique opportunity for direct interaction with sexuality education specialists, educators, and youth workers. This approach facilitated on-site participation, fostering real-time engagement and enriching the depth of responses.

Demographics

The majority of respondents identified as youth workers, encompassing various titles such as Social Worker. Other notable professions include Sexual Health Consultants, Medicine Doctors, Street-Based Social Workers, Methodologists for Youth Work, and Client Consultants in Erotic Goods Stores, reflecting a comprehensive spectrum of expertise. Additionally, roles such as Educators and Project Coordinators highlight the varied responsibilities and contributions of individuals engaged in youth-related initiatives.

In the surveyed group, respondents' ages range from 20 to 60 years old, with the majority falling between 23 and 34 years old. Females constitute approximately 69.6%, while males make up around 30.4% of the respondents. In total, there are 51 responses.

Regarding the respondents' experience in the field (see Figure 1), the majority (around 57%) reported 1 to 5 years of experience. Notably, around 22% fall within the 6 to 10 years category, showcasing a considerable mid-range experience, while 15% have less than one year and 6% boast over 10 years.

63% of respondents have received sexual education training (see Figure 2), highlighting a substantial portion with expertise in the field. It is also noteworthy that those who did not receive training in sexuality education were mostly youth workers, suggesting an area for improvement.

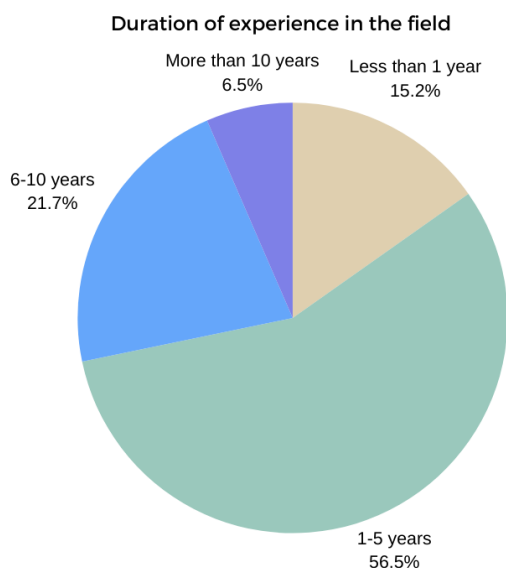


Figure 1: Experience

Have you received sexual education training?

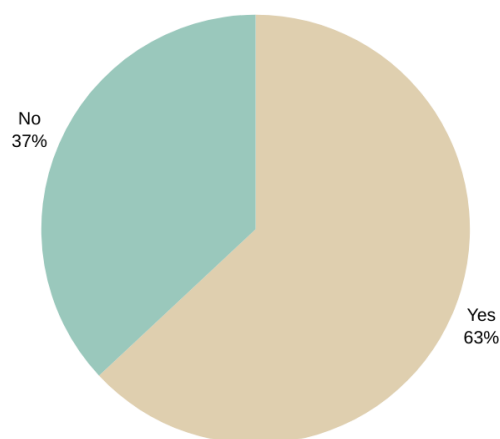


Figure 2: Training

Main findings

Training and resources

Those who underwent sexuality education training reported participating in workshops and engaging in self-training, while academic training was the least commonly received. Fortunately, regardless of the format, all respondents commonly gave overwhelmingly positive feedback, expressing the effectiveness and relevance of the training for their work with young people. Many highlighted the practical applicability of the knowledge gained, emphasizing its impact on daily interactions and their ability to address youth-related issues. Some respondents specifically mentioned the importance of staying updated on evolving topics.

Besides the training itself, respondents also identified other factors that would highly improve their work in the field; key suggestions include:

- **Evidence-Based Approaches:** Emphasize methods grounded in facts, avoiding religious biases.
- **Youth Workers Training:** Tailor education to the specific needs of youth workers for more effective engagement.
- **Hands-On Workshops and Youth Involvement:** Promote interactive workshops involving young people for an engaging learning environment.
- **Broadening Perspectives through Professional Lectures:** Offer accessible lectures by experts from various fields to expand professionals' horizons, especially in native languages.
- **Certification Programs for Continued Professional Development:** Establish courses in sex education, concluding with certificates to validate and encourage ongoing learning.
- **Addressing Stigma in Smaller Towns:** Conduct events and training in smaller towns to combat societal taboos surrounding sexual education.
- **Parental Involvement:** Equip parents with tools for discussing sexual health with their children, fostering a supportive environment.

Main challenges

The respondents face various challenges in the field of sexual education. Concrete examples include:

- **Taboos and Lack of Formal Education:** The formal education system often shies away from comprehensive sexual education, and the existence of taboos makes it challenging to introduce this subject in traditional institutions.
- **Stigma and Hate Speech:** The presence of societal stigma, especially in post-Soviet countries, results in hate speech and negative comments, particularly when addressing gender and sexuality spectrums.
- **Disinformation and Stereotypes:** Dissemination of misinformation and prevalent stereotypes about sexual education poses a significant challenge.

- **Parental Resistance:** Parental resistance, fueled by unfounded fears and conservative beliefs, hinders effective communication about sexuality between parents and children or within the community.
- **Resource and Training Gaps:** Limited financial resources and insufficient training opportunities for educators hinder the implementation of innovative and effective sexuality education programs.

Effective strategies

In addressing the challenges of sexual education, respondents proposed effective strategies for engaging youth:

- **Factual and Age-Appropriate Conversations:** Emphasize discussions rooted in facts, age-appropriate information, and medical approaches instead of relying on social norms. Incorporate activities that debunk myths to minimize the stigma surrounding sexual education.
- **Diverse Educational Methods:** Utilize various methods such as lectures, private talks, group discussions, and prevention consultations. Place a strong emphasis on interactive workshops, real-life examples, and engaging activities to enhance understanding.
- **Safe and Inclusive Environments:** Create environments that are safe, non-judgmental, and inclusive, fostering an atmosphere where youth feel comfortable discussing sexual education topics openly.
- **Integration of Technology:** Leverage technology, including Virtual Reality (VR) for enhanced engagement, social media platforms for widespread dissemination, and interactive tools like Mentimeter and e-roulette for engaging discussions. Online platforms like "Nepatogaus kino klasé" and YouTube can be harnessed for digital content and educational videos.

- **Parental Involvement:** Promote active parental involvement in sexuality education, recognising the crucial role parents play in supporting and supplementing these discussions.

In addressing cultural, gender, and sexual orientation differences, respondents highlighted the importance of recognizing diversity and maintaining an unbiased attitude. Strategies ranged from incorporating various cultural perspectives to fostering understanding through events, seminars, and projects involving representatives from different backgrounds.

Resources and tools

Recognizing the significance of both online and offline resources in sexuality education, educators highlighted the value of diverse materials, including:

Books:

- "Viva la Vagina" by Nina Brochmann, Ellen Stokken Dahl
- "Come as You Are" by Emily Nagoski
- "The Female Brain" by Louann Brizendine

Websites:

- teenergizer.org
- scarleteen.com
- plannedparenthood.org
- sexetc.org

Videos:

- Tea and Consent (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZwvrXVavnQ>)
- Menstruation Animation (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_xP9oN4UvMQ)
- Gender Roles in Friends (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZ0fb15LcE0>)

Other Resources:

- TEDx "The Birds and the Bees are Just the Beginning".
- JRA ""Lytiškumo ugdyškumo ugdymo praktinis gidas"".

Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of sexuality education practices and challenges revealed a multifaceted landscape. The report has identified challenges in educating the youth, such as taboos, stigma, and misinformation, often intertwined with cultural and societal norms. Additionally, while a majority of workers in the field receive sexuality education and find it extremely effective, some youth workers have not yet received it, highlighting a gap.

Given this, the report places a significant focus on sharing effective strategies when educating and talking with the youth. By emphasizing factual and age-appropriate conversations, utilising diverse educational methods, creating safe and inclusive environments, integrating technology, and promoting parental involvement, educators can foster a more open and supportive atmosphere for youth.

Youth

Introduction

This report unveils the outcomes of a questionnaire within the "Positive Outlook Developing: Sexual Identity and Education" project. Surveying 53 young individuals, the findings will inform the development of a methodology to enhance sexuality education for the youth.

Methodology

This survey attempted to capture diverse perspectives on sexuality education from the youth demographic, aged 16 to 31:

- **Email Correspondence:** Questionnaires were sent via email to youth organisations, schools, NGOs, and youth centers, emphasizing anonymity and confidentiality.
- **Telephonic Communication:** Personalized calls to key contacts clarified survey objectives, addressed concerns, and encouraged participation.
- **Live Events Participation:** Engaging in live events focused on sexuality education facilitated direct interaction with the target audience, promoting on-site participation.
- **Social Media:** Active promotion on social media platforms and involvement in online communities ensured a broader reach, capturing a diverse and inclusive respondent pool.

Demographics

The survey encompassed participants aged to 31, with the majority falling within the 16 to age group (see Figure 1). This age range was selected to capture the viewpoints of young individuals currently navigating critical phases sexual development and education.

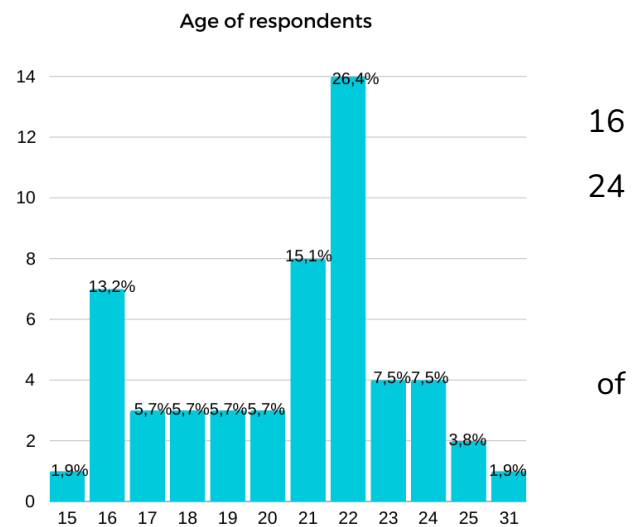


Figure 1: Age

The gender distribution among respondents revealed a notable majority of women, constituting approximately 60% of the sample. Male respondents accounted for around 38%, while around 2% of respondents identified as 'other. (see Figure 2).

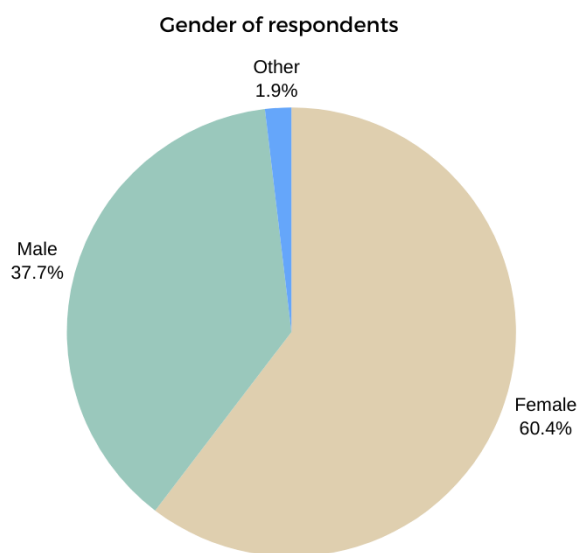


Figure 2: Gender

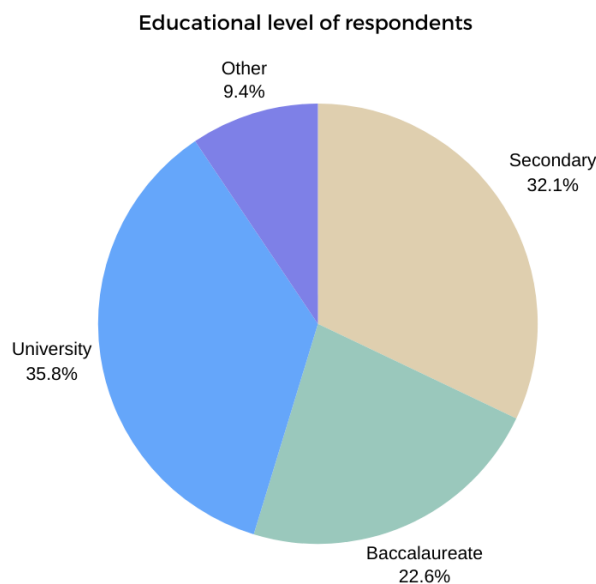


Figure 3: Education

Analyzing the education levels of respondents highlighted diverse academic backgrounds. The breakdown is as follows (also see Figure 3):

- 32% had a secondary education
- 9% reported 'other' educational backgrounds
- 36% were university-educated
- 23% held a baccalaureate degree

Main findings

Perception of pedagogical approaches

Survey results reveal that young people in Lithuania are divided about the effectiveness of current sexuality education teaching methods in their educational institutions. The vast majority harbor doubts, with only 37% considering it effective (see Figure 4).

Are current sexuality education teaching methods effective?

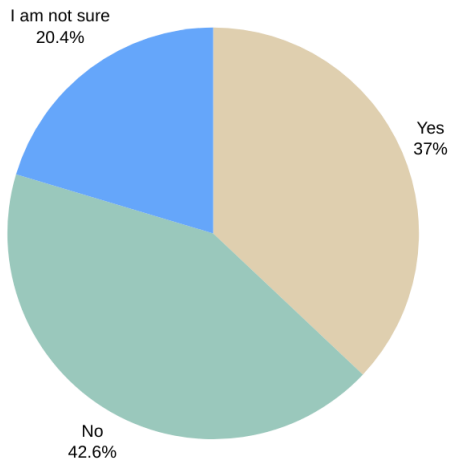


Figure 4: Effectiveness

In fact, the problem might lie in traditional and not sufficiently interactive and inclusive ways of teaching in general. The results showcase that learning methods are identified as follows (multiple-choice answers were possible):

- Traditional (lectures, textbooks, written exams) - 72% - 72%.
- Interactive (group discussions, projects) - 43% - 43%.
- Technological (use of electronic devices, online platforms) - 38%.
- Experiential (experiential learning) - 13%.
- Customized (tailored to individual needs) - 15% - 15%.
- Other - 6% Other

The main shortcomings of current teaching methods

92.5% of the surveyed youth believe that sexuality education should be mandatory in high schools. However, as indicated above, many find it ineffective. Hence, let's take a glance at the most commonly agreed-upon shortcomings:

- **Lack of Interactivity and Engagement:** Several respondents highlighted the non-interactive nature of teaching methods, expressing a desire for more engaging approaches such as group projects and practical tests.
- **Insufficient Teacher Training:** Some participants pointed out that teachers themselves may lack sufficient education on the subject, contributing to ineffective delivery of sexuality education.
- **Taboos and Lack of Openness:** Many respondents mentioned a general lack of openness among teachers, suggesting that they are often hesitant or uncomfortable discussing topics related to sex. This contributes to an environment where some teachers avoid certain subjects.
- **Limited Content Scope:** Criticisms were raised regarding the narrow focus of topics covered, with an emphasis on basic anatomy and STDs. Participants expressed a desire for more comprehensive discussions, including healthy relationships, abortion, and the impact of stereotypes.
- **Outdated Material and Approaches:** Concerns were raised about outdated teaching materials and superficial lessons. Some respondents felt that topics like same-sex intercourse were left untouched or discussed inadequately.

Less commonly mentioned themes in the survey include the recognition of non-formal sector initiatives, often led by student organisations, that contribute to sex education. However, these efforts are not consistently integrated into the official curriculum. Some respondents expressed skepticism about the real-life applicability of the knowledge gained in sex education, while others raised concerns about the inadequacy of testing methods to assess students' understanding of sexual education concepts. Additionally, a few participants highlighted the

issue of brief and superficial lessons, emphasizing that discussions often lack depth, covering textbook content without facilitating comprehensive understanding. Another less common theme was the acknowledgment that societal stigmas and discomfort surrounding discussions about sex contribute to a lack of open communication.

Suggestions for improvement

Building on the shortcomings, respondents offered valuable suggestions for enhancing sexuality education in Lithuania, including regular teacher training, increased use of interactive activities, and integration of real-life examples. Recommendations also emphasized the need for more projects and discussions, practical application, and a relevant, inclusive curriculum. Respondents called for early introduction of sex education, open discussions, and professional involvement. Overcoming societal stigmas and addressing a wider range of topics, along with emphasizing consequences and responsible behavior, were also highlighted. The consensus reflects a collective call for comprehensive improvements across various aspects of sexuality education in the country.

To achieve these improvements, the majority of respondents highlighted their preference for engaging in activities outside the classroom. This particularly included practical workshops, sports, physical activities, artistic and cultural pursuits, and volunteering. All these preferences suggest the need for interactivity and diversity in teaching methods.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this survey has successfully gathered valuable data from the targeted youth demographic (aged 16 to 31). The findings indicate a consensus, with over 92% expressing the view that sexuality education should be mandatory. However, a notable observation emerged as a significant portion of respondents found current sexuality education methods to be ineffective. The report delves into the main shortcomings identified in Lithuanian

teaching methods in this domain, including a lack of interactivity, insufficient coverage of diverse topics, discomfort among educators, and brief, superficial lessons. In light of these challenges, respondents provided insightful suggestions for improvement, emphasizing the need for more interactive teaching methods, a broader curriculum, and a shift in the mindset of educators towards a more open and inclusive approach. These recommendations will be integral in shaping the methodology for future initiatives aimed at enhancing sexuality education for the youth in Lithuania.

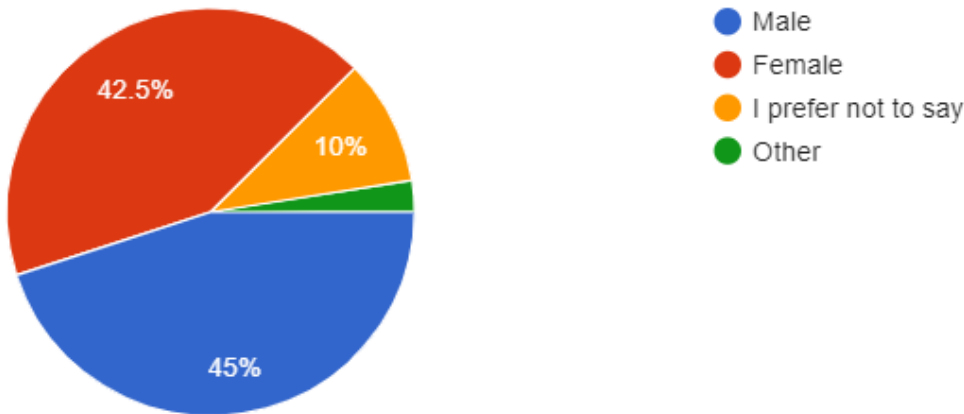
c. Ireland

Youth workers

This questionnaire aims to find out the opinion of educators and youth workers in relation to sexuality education for young people. The results will be used to develop a methodology to promote better sexuality education among young people.

18% of the participants in the survey are childcare workers, 20% describe themselves as educators, 22% are students and 40% are youth workers.

The age of the respondents vary from 19 to 39 with majority of 25 years old - 20% followed by 29 years old - 13% .

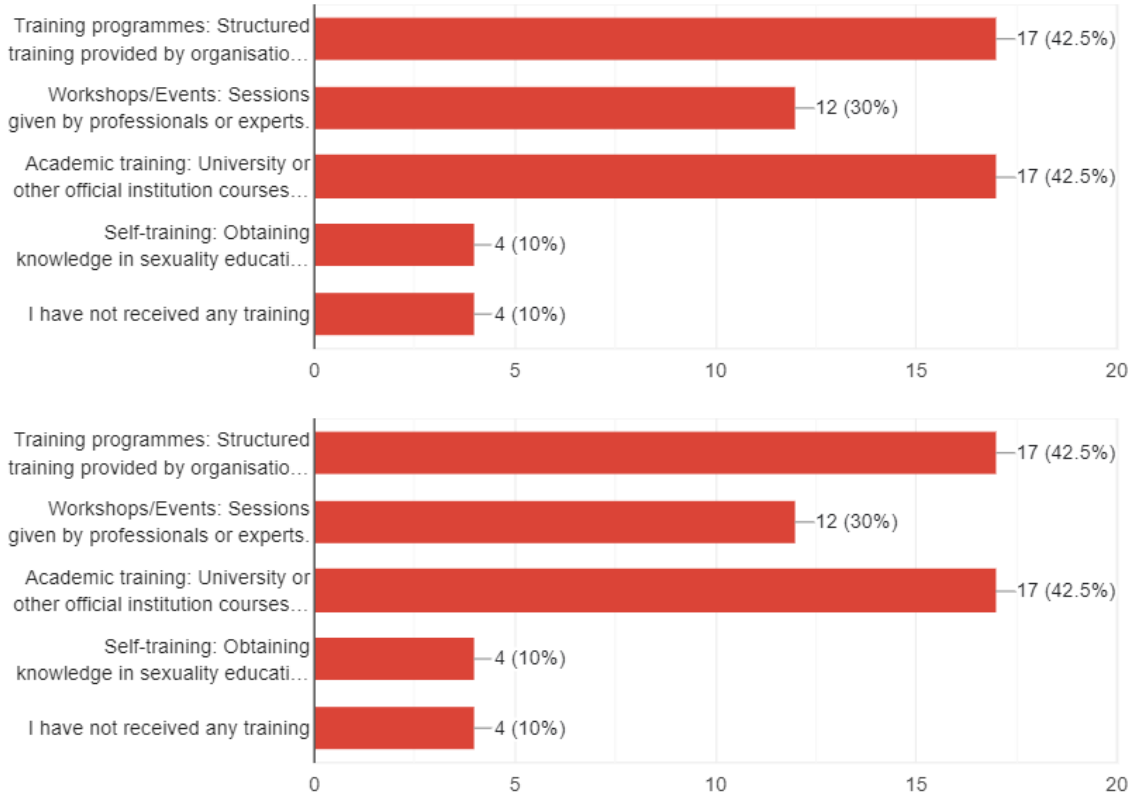


Male and female representatives are almost equal with 45% vs. 42.5%, 10% of the participants prefer not to mention their gender.

The majority has been working as an educator or youth worker for less than a year - 57.5% and 40% have been working as an educator or youth worker between 1 and 5 years. 2.5% have been working longer than 5 years.

The majority of the respondents confirm, that they have received specific training in sexuality education - 87.5% 12.5% have not.

Asked what type of training in sexuality education they have received the 87.5% of respondents who answered the previous question with "yes" explained (they can choose more than one option), that they have received structured training, academic training, and workshops, as well as self trainings opportunities or all of the above.

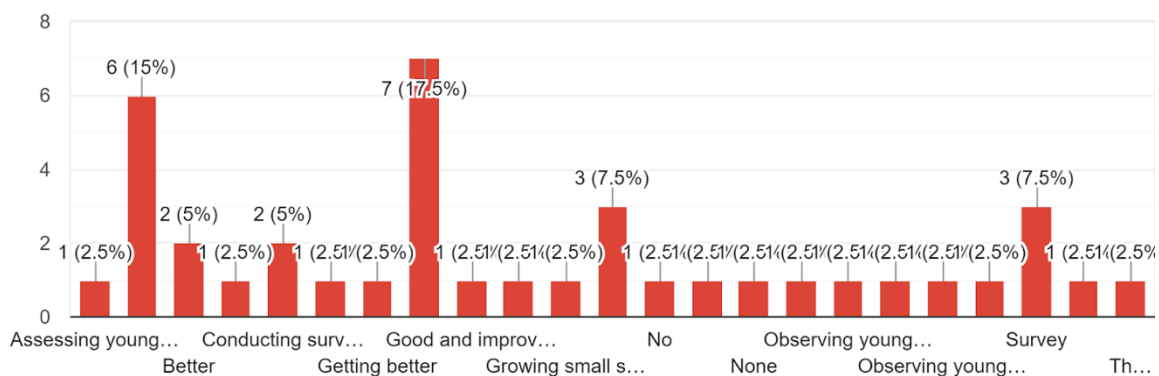


The most difficult question for the participants was: "How do they assess the effectiveness of the sexuality education training they have received so far in addressing young people's needs?"

The answers vary from negative to positive with equal frequency.

How do you assess the effectiveness of the sexuality education training you have received so far in addressing young people's needs?

40 responses



The respondents believe that more personnel, professional learning standards for sex education, and effective tools for displaying some ideas would help them improve their experience in the field of sex education.

They would like to have Community-based interventions: Community-based interventions can be effective in promoting healthy sexual behaviors among young people. These interventions can involve community leaders, religious leaders, and other stakeholders in promoting healthy behaviors and providing support to young people. They can also involve the provision of health services, such as HIV testing and counseling, and the distribution of condoms and other contraceptives.

Effective strategy is to engage parents and caregivers in the process of sexuality education. Parents and caregivers can play an important role in supporting young people's sexual health and well-being by providing accurate information, answering questions, and creating a safe and supportive environment for discussion.

It is important to create a safe and supportive environment for young people to learn about sexuality. This can include creating a classroom environment that is inclusive and respectful of diversity, providing opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and discussion, and using interactive and participatory teaching methods.

The specific methodologies or activities they have used to promote effective and understandable sexuality education for young people include using PA systems, engaging parents and caregivers, Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), providing visual learning materials to explain and also giving the students more talking time.

The youth workers and educators address cultural, gender and sexual orientation differences in their sexuality education for young people by community involvement, peer education, gender-sensitive CSE and promoting gender equality and empowerment.

Asked if they used technology or digital media (such as apps, online platforms or social media) in their sexuality education work the majority confirms and explain how they have incorporated them into your educational approach.

Mobile apps can be used to provide young people with information and resources related to sexual and reproductive health and rights, including contraception, STI testing and treatment, and HIV prevention and care.

Online platforms: Online platforms can be used to deliver sexuality education to young people. For example, online courses, webinars, and video tutorials can be used to provide information about sexual health, relationships, and consent.

Webinars and podcasts. Webinars and podcasts can be used to provide young people with information and resources related to sexual and reproductive health and rights, and to promote positive attitudes and behaviors related to sexuality.

Interactive games: Interactive games can be used to teach young people about sexual and reproductive health and rights, and to promote positive attitudes and behaviors related to sexuality.

Among the educational resources or materials they have found useful in their work, the respondents mention books, videos, apps, and websites and also add that the World Association for Sexual Health (WAS) provides resources for sexuality education, including guidelines for sexuality education in schools and training programs for sexuality educators.

The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) provides a range of resources for sexuality education, including lesson plans, webinars, and policy briefs.

They recommend Advocates for Youth: Advocates for Youth provides fact sheets on sexuality education. The fact sheets cover topics such as the benefits of sexuality education, the components of comprehensive sexuality education, and the impact of sexuality education on young people's health. Planned Parenthood: offers a range of resources for sexuality education, including lesson plans, webinars, and training programs. Also more resource personals to be employed and giving them work in various schools to reach out to young people every time.

The educators state that it should be an everyday activity and the resource personnel should always be ready to answer questions where needed.

Youth

This questionnaire aims to find out what are the views of the young people on the pedagogical approaches used by schools and their preferences for the delivery of activities related to sexuality education. The results will be used to develop a methodology to promote better sexuality education among young people.

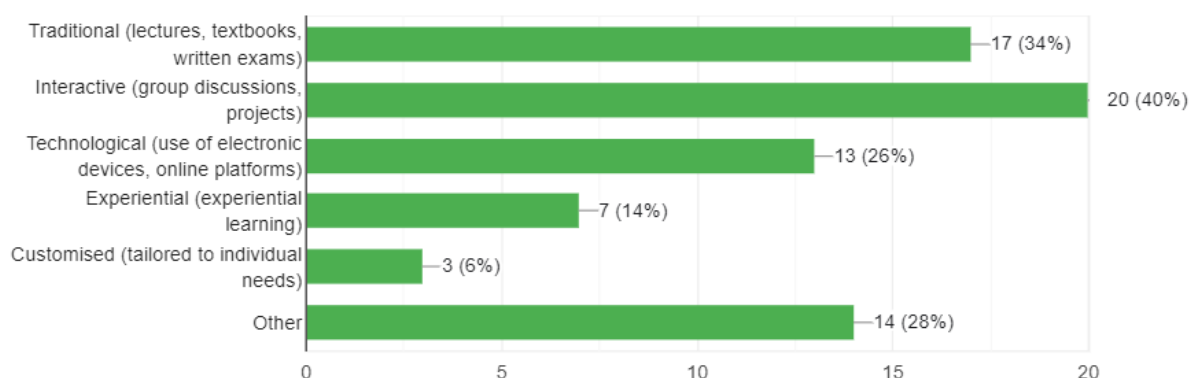
Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 35, with the highest proportion of participants in their 20s at around 40%. 36% of participants were male, 30% were female, 28% did not specify a gender, and 6% of participants identified their gender as "other".

18% of the participants in the survey have a secondary educational level, 8% are Baccalaureate , 28% have university degree and 46% defined their educational level as "other".

34% of the respondents describe the teaching methods used in their educational institution as "traditional", 40% think the methods are interactive, 26% find the methods are technological (which means they use electronic devices, online platforms). 14% of the participants say the methods are experiential and 6% think the methods are customized (tailored to individual needs).

In your opinion, how would you describe the teaching methods used in your educational institution (you can choose more than one option)?

50 responses



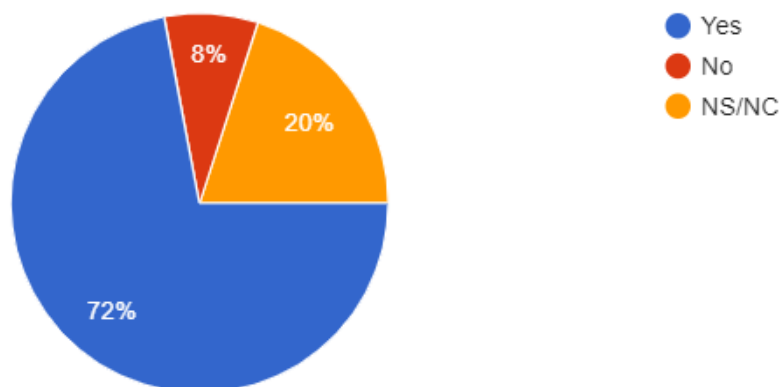
Asked if they feel that the teaching methods used in their educational institution are effective for their learning, 78% confirm with "yes", 6% deny with "no" and 10% say, they are not sure. The participants, who answered with "no" or "not sure" explain the main shortcomings of these teaching methods - they are not individualized and it is difficult to ask anonymous questions, also they need modern material to improve scientific knowledge.

According to the respondents, the aspects of current education they think should be improved to provide a more enriching and effective educational experience are related but not limited to: technology, internet and forums and their effective using; Learning and skills for life; work and sustainable development; Human values; The social aspect; Promoting students engagement

and providing adequate teachers training; Ability to ask anonymous questions and through discussions. Also addressing Myths and stigmas This is very important because there's a lot of myths and stigmas (Mostly affected by cultural backgrounds) and this should be addressed well. The method of teaching should be more interactive and age appropriate.

The majority of the participants - 72% believe that sex education should be mandatory in high schools. 20% are not sure and 8% think that sex education should not be mandatory in high

Do you believe that sex education should be mandatory in high schools?

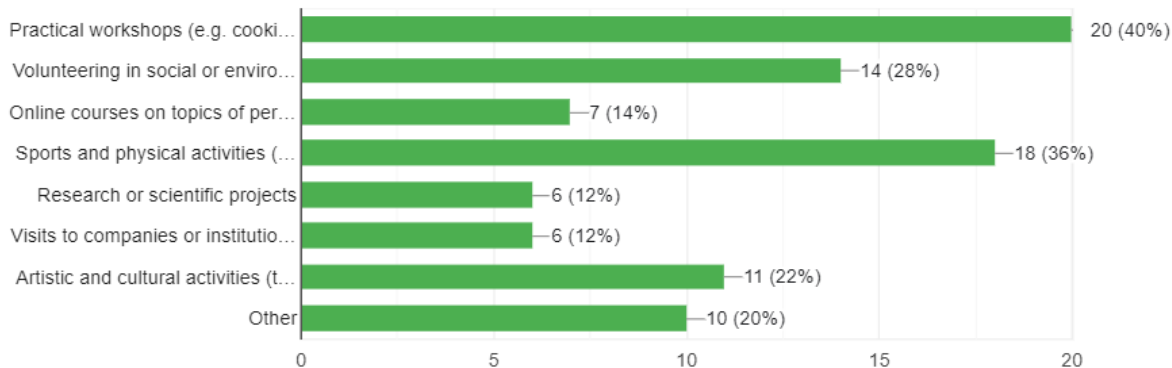


schools.

If the respondents have the opportunity to participate in educational activities outside the classroom, they would like to do: practical workshops - 40%, Sports and physical activities 36%, volunteering - 28%, followed by artistic and cultural activities - 22%, other activities - 20%, online courses - 14%, research or scientific projects - 12% and visits to companies and institutions - 12% (participants can choose more than one option).

Imagine that you have the opportunity to participate in educational activities outside the classroom. What kind of activities would you like to do? (You can choose more than one option)

50 responses



Based on their opinion, these activities could be beneficial to their educational and personal development, because These activities provide a balance in the current lifestyle. Going to artistic and cultural activities soothes the creative soul and volunteering provides a great sense of purpose. Students who participate in extracurricular activities have greater academic success, greater character development, especially in the areas of time management and leadership skills, more positive social development, and greater interest in community involvement.

Learning experiences outside the classroom are forms of experiential learning, which are rooted in the simple principle that "experience is the best teacher". Under this framework, learning outside of the classroom is an active process, wherein students encounter authentic problems, construct novel hypotheses, test for real solutions, and interact with others to make sense of the world around them.

Outdoor learning can have huge benefits on student mental health and academic performance. Students are often calmer and better able to focus when learning in nature, and teachers have reported better behaviour and social interactions with fewer disciplinary issues.

In conclusion, participants confirm that comprehensive sexual health education can help young people avoid negative health consequences, communicate about sexuality and sexual health, and make informed decisions regarding sex and their sexual health.

d. Spain

Youth Worker

The results of the survey on sexuality education in Spain show a diverse and complex picture, reflecting both significant progress and persistent challenges in implementing effective programmes.

One of the strategies most valued by educators in Spain is open dialogue and the creation of safe spaces where young people can freely express their doubts and concerns about sexuality. This approach is fundamental in a context where, despite social advances, taboos and resistance persist in certain sectors of society. Educators stress the importance of creating an environment of trust that allows students to address these issues without fear of judgement or stigmatisation.

Peer education has also been widely recognised as an effective methodology. Programmes where young people lead or co-design the activities have proven to be particularly successful with issues related to gender identity and sexual orientation. This approach not only facilitates learning, but also fosters empathy and mutual respect among students.

In terms of managing cultural and gender differences, educators in Spain face specific challenges due to the cultural diversity present in classrooms. Cultural inclusion is a recurring theme, and educators stress the need to adapt their materials and approaches to reflect and respect the multiple identities present in their students. Educators' ability to be culturally sensitive and to

adequately represent the experiences of all young people is seen as crucial to the success of sexuality education.

The use of technology and digital media is emerging as a central element in sexuality education in Spain. Educators have successfully integrated educational apps, online videos and interactive resources into their programmes, making sexuality education more accessible and relevant to young people. These digital tools have been used to complement traditional teaching and to reach students on their own terms, using platforms and media that are familiar and appealing to them.

However, the results also indicate the presence of important challenges. Cultural and social resistance remains an obstacle in certain regions of Spain, especially in areas with a more conservative orientation. Educators report limitations in the content they are allowed to teach and a lack of institutional support for more inclusive and progressive programmes. This resistance often comes from both communities and families, complicating the implementation of more comprehensive and effective sexuality education programmes.

Another significant challenge identified is the lack of adequate educational resources. While there are a variety of materials available, many educators feel that these are not sufficiently up-to-date or do not fully reflect the realities and needs of today's young people. The need for more relevant and inclusive resources that address the complexities of sexuality in the contemporary context is highlighted.

Despite these challenges, Spanish educators share positive experiences and success stories in implementing sexuality education. They highlight improvements in young people's understanding and attitudes towards crucial issues such as consent, sexual diversity and sexual health. These developments underline the significant impact that well-designed and implemented sexuality education can have.

In summary, the survey results reflect a strong commitment on the part of educators in Spain to continuously improve and adapt their approaches to sexuality education, facing challenges with creativity and innovation. However, there is also evidence of the need for greater institutional support and updated resources to continue advancing in this crucial field for the comprehensive development of young people.

Youth

The results of the survey on sexuality education among young people in Spain show a diverse perception of the quality and relevance of the teaching methods used in their educational institutions. Many students describe these methods as predominantly theoretical and structured, with a strong focus on the transmission of knowledge through lectures and traditional teaching materials. However, there is also a gradual incorporation of more interactive approaches, allowing students to actively participate in group discussions and activities.

Despite this combination of methods, a significant number of learners express doubts about the effectiveness of these approaches for their learning. Many feel that the sexuality education they receive is too generalised and does not effectively address individual needs and concerns. This perception is particularly strong among learners who feel that their sexuality education should be more connected to the everyday realities and personal experiences of young people.

In terms of extracurricular activities, Spanish students highlight the value of artistic activities, such as theatre and music, along with science projects and volunteering initiatives. These activities are seen as key opportunities for the integral development of young people, allowing them to explore their creativity, enhance their critical thinking and contribute to society in a meaningful way. Art is especially valued as an avenue for self-expression and emotional development, while science projects are appreciated for their ability to foster analytical and problem-solving skills.

Volunteering emerges as a crucial activity for many students, as it allows them to develop social skills and a sense of community responsibility. Young people who participate in these activities report that they feel a greater sense of purpose and connection to their environment, which strengthens their personal and social development.

In addition, students highlight the need for more personalised and relevant education. They want their sexuality education not only to be limited to theory, but also to include discussions on practical and current issues that will help them face real-world challenges. Young people express a strong desire for sexuality education to address issues such as sexual diversity, consent, and emotional health in a more direct and accessible way.

In terms of challenges, many students mention that the sexuality education they receive often lacks connection to their personal experiences and current social realities. Some feel that topics are covered in a superficial or outdated approach, which limits their ability to apply what they learn in their daily lives. In addition, there is a growing demand for greater integration of technology and digital media in sexuality education, as young people feel that these tools can make information more accessible and engaging.

In summary, the survey results reflect a mixture of satisfaction and dissatisfaction among young Spaniards in relation to their sexuality education. While some methods and activities are valued positively, there is a general consensus on the need for education that is more adapted to students' individual realities and needs. Young people are looking for sexuality education that not only informs, but also empowers and prepares them to face the challenges of the contemporary world effectively.

6. Opinion of experts (summary of the meeting with experts)

The expert meeting provided a valuable space for analysis and discussion on the current state of sexuality education for young people, especially in contexts where religious influence and cultural dynamics limit access to comprehensive sexuality education. Through structured dialogue, participants identified key barriers, analysed systemic gaps and proposed strategies to address existing shortcomings, highlighting the importance of inclusive, evidence-based sexuality education as an essential tool for young people's health, well-being and social equity.

Identifying barriers and gaps in sexuality education

Experts highlighted that the level of sexuality education in countries with a strong religious influence is considerably low. This limitation not only affects the quality of the information provided, but also restricts access to key topics, such as the correct use of contraception and the prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). In these regions, educational programmes tend to be scarce, superficial and, in many cases, non-existent, leaving young people vulnerable to sexual and reproductive health risks.

A structural lack within education systems was also identified. Even where sexuality education is present, its scope is often limited, focusing exclusively on biological aspects or the use of barrier methods of contraception, such as condoms. This reductionist approach omits essential issues such as consent, communication in relationships, gender equity and mutual respect, which are fundamental to building healthy relationships and preventing gender-based violence.

Another critical point pointed out was the absence of an educational culture that addresses not only safe sexual practices, but also the understanding of interpersonal relationships from a holistic perspective. The experts emphasised that sex education should not be limited to physical or preventive practices, but should incorporate affective, emotional and ethical elements that enable young people to understand and build respectful, healthy and consensual relationships.

Recommendations and proposed strategies

As a result of the discussion, the experts agreed that it is necessary to address these shortcomings from a systemic and strategic perspective, focusing on the following lines of action:

1. **Awareness-raising and political commitment:**

One of the main points of consensus was the need to work with political levels to prioritise comprehensive sexuality education in education systems. This political commitment should be translated into the inclusion of specific content in school curricula, ensuring that it is compulsory at all stages of education. Programmes should include topics such as consent, equitable interpersonal relationships, contraceptive methods and STI prevention.

To achieve this, it was proposed to foster spaces for dialogue between sex education experts, policy makers and community leaders, especially in religious contexts, to overcome cultural resistance and generate consensus on the importance of sex education.

2. **Broadening the focus of sexuality education:**

It is crucial that sexuality education evolves beyond the biological and preventive aspects, integrating a vision that encompasses:

- **Consent:** Teaching young people to understand and respect personal boundaries and those of others, and to build relationships based on mutual respect and communication.
- **Interpersonal relationships:** Providing tools for young people to develop communication skills, empathy and conflict management in their relationships.
- **Sexual and gender diversity:** Include content that reflects the realities and experiences of different sexual identities and orientations, fostering a culture of respect and inclusion.

3. **Strengthening teacher training:**

Experts underlined that teachers play a key role in the implementation of sexuality education programmes. However, in many cases, they do not have the necessary training

to address these issues in an inclusive and evidence-based manner. There is a need to design ongoing training programmes for teachers, focusing on pedagogical skills, strategies for dealing with sensitive issues and the management of classroom dynamics.

4. **To complement formal education**, it is essential to develop awareness-raising campaigns targeting young people, families and communities. These campaigns should demystify taboos around sexuality, encourage respect for diversity and promote access to reliable information and resources.

Conclusions of the discussion

The meeting concluded that ensuring comprehensive sexuality education is an urgent priority to address existing gaps and promote the healthy development of young people. Experts emphasised that this task requires a multi-sectoral approach, involving governments, educational institutions, families and civil society.

Implementing sexuality education programmes that include topics such as consent, contraception, STI prevention and interpersonal relationships will not only contribute to improving young people's sexual and reproductive health, but will also have a positive impact on building a more equitable, respectful and violence-free society.

To move in this direction, the experts proposed establishing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure the quality and effectiveness of the programmes implemented. In addition, they stressed the need to create an inclusive and safe educational environment where young people can explore and understand their sexuality freely and without prejudice.

The meeting stressed that comprehensive sexuality education should not be seen as a luxury, but as a fundamental right and an essential tool for the well-being of young people and social cohesion. Implementing these measures will not only benefit the younger generations, but will contribute to building a fairer and healthier future for society as a whole.

7. Needs identified

Systematic analysis of sexuality education in various European contexts has revealed a number of needs that are essential to ensure a comprehensive, equitable and effective approach. These needs reflect persistent gaps in education systems and cultural and structural barriers that affect the implementation of education programmes that comprehensively address sexual and reproductive health and relationships.

Firstly, the absence of a clear and binding regulatory framework is one of the main shortcomings identified. In many countries, sexuality education does not have a coherent regulation that ensures its systematic inclusion in educational curricula. This generates significant inequalities, as its implementation is subject to local, political or even religious decisions. This regulatory vacuum perpetuates a limited and fragmented approach that does not adequately respond to the needs of young people, particularly on issues such as consent, power dynamics in relationships, and sexual and gender diversity.

Moreover, current educational content tends to focus exclusively on biological or preventive aspects, such as the use of contraceptive methods and the prevention of sexually transmitted infections. While these are important components, their predominance has relegated other essential aspects of sexuality education, such as understanding emotions, building equitable and healthy relationships, and promoting values of respect and empathy. This results in incomplete education that does not comprehensively address the multiple dimensions of sexuality and its implications for young people's personal and social development.

Another key need identified is the strengthening of teacher training. Educators are key actors in ensuring that sexuality education is delivered effectively and sensitively, but in many cases they lack the necessary preparation to address these issues. This lack of training not only limits their ability to deliver the content, but also reinforces traditional and stigmatising approaches that perpetuate inequalities and prejudices. Designing evidence-based, culturally sensitive and culturally appropriate ongoing training programmes for teachers is essential to overcome this barrier.

There is also an urgent need for inclusive and accessible educational materials. These resources should reflect the diversity of young people's experiences and identities, ensuring representation of different sexual orientations, gender identities and family structures. The lack of such materials not only limits the reach of sexuality education, but also perpetuates discriminatory and exclusionary attitudes in educational settings.

At the societal level, cultural resistance and taboos around sexuality were identified as significant barriers. In many contexts, especially those with a strong religious influence, sexuality education remains a controversial topic, making its acceptance and implementation difficult. To overcome this resistance, it is imperative to develop awareness-raising campaigns that target not only young people, but also families and communities. These campaigns should encourage open dialogue about sexuality, demystify prejudices and highlight the benefits of comprehensive sexuality education for individual and collective well-being.

Linking sexuality education with sexual and reproductive health services also emerges as a critical need. Young people require not only information, but also practical access to resources such as contraception, STI testing and counselling. Integrating these services with educational programmes can ensure that the knowledge gained translates into healthy and responsible behaviour.

Finally, the evaluation and monitoring of educational programmes was highlighted as a key aspect to measure their impact and ensure their effectiveness. Establishing clear indicators and monitoring processes will allow identifying areas for improvement and adjusting educational strategies to respond to the changing needs of young people and social dynamics.

These identified needs underscore the importance of adopting a comprehensive and multidimensional approach to sexuality education that not only addresses biological and preventive components, but also incorporates social, emotional and cultural elements. By ensuring quality and equity in education programmes, it will be possible not only to improve sexual and reproductive health indicators, but also to promote more inclusive, respectful and equitable societies.

8. Conclusions

Analysis of sexuality education in various European contexts reveals a complex reality, influenced by cultural, political and social factors that condition both access to and quality of educational programmes. Despite progress in some countries, inequalities persist, directly affecting sexual health, gender equity and the comprehensive development of young people.

In countries where religious influence is significant, sexuality education faces greater limitations. In these contexts, programmes are often reduced to biological or reproductive notions, excluding key issues such as consent, equitable relationships and sexual diversity. This not only perpetuates stigma and taboos, but also exposes young people to avoidable risks, such as unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and discriminatory attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities.

The lack of a uniform and compulsory regulatory framework is one of the most significant barriers identified. The absence of clear legislation limits the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education programmes, leaving their scope and content to the discretion of educational

institutions or, in some cases, to resistance from conservative sectors. On the contrary, in countries where programmes are mandatory and aligned with international standards, such as those proposed by UNESCO and WHO, significant improvements are observed in indicators related to public health and social equity.

The role of teachers and their training emerges as a key factor in ensuring the quality of programmes. Lack of pedagogical preparation and up-to-date knowledge on sexual and reproductive health issues affects the ability of educators to transmit information in an inclusive and evidence-based manner. Investing in teacher training is an indispensable strategy to overcome this barrier, ensuring that young people receive appropriate information that is free of bias and adapted to their needs.

Another relevant aspect is the need for inclusive educational materials that reflect the diversity of young people's experiences and identities. The inclusion of content on sexual orientation, gender identity and diverse family structures is essential to combat discrimination and foster attitudes of respect and empathy. However, in many contexts, these issues continue to be treated superficially or even excluded, perpetuating structural inequalities.

From a societal perspective, the findings underline the importance of awareness-raising campaigns aimed not only at young people, but also at families and communities. Sexuality education cannot be limited to the classroom; it must be integrated into a collective effort that promotes intergenerational dialogue and destigmatises sexuality as a natural aspect of human development. Such campaigns, especially in settings where taboos are strongest, are essential to change attitudes and create a supportive environment for the implementation of comprehensive education programmes.

In addition, access to sexual and reproductive health services is an essential component that must be complemented by sexuality education. The availability of contraceptive methods, STI

testing and specialised counselling is crucial for young people to be able to practically apply the knowledge acquired in the classroom, ensuring their physical and emotional well-being.

In short, ensuring comprehensive sexuality education requires a multidimensional approach that combines political action, social awareness-raising and the implementation of inclusive, evidence-based education programmes. Sexuality education not only contributes to individual well-being, but also has a positive impact on social cohesion, gender equity and respect for diversity.

This analysis concludes that sexuality education should be considered an essential component of public policy, not only as a preventive measure, but also as a tool to promote the holistic development of young people and to build more equitable, healthy and respectful societies. Overcoming existing barriers will depend on sustained commitment and collaboration between governments, educational institutions, civil society organisations and communities. Only through this collective effort will it be possible to guarantee the full exercise of sexual and reproductive rights for future generations.

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