

GEN POL

Gender & Policy Insights

Policy Paper

CAN EDUCATION STOP ABUSE?

**Comprehensive Sexuality Education
Against Gender-Based Violence**

Foreword by Dr Lilia Giugni, GenPol CEO

In January 2017, GenPol launched a call for contributions on the topic of sexuality and relationship education as a tool to prevent gender-based violence. About 50 researchers, practitioners, educators, and gender equality activists from across the European Union enthusiastically responded and were divided into eight multi-disciplinary working groups, all led by a convenor and supported by an external area expert and the GenPol team. For five months, the eight groups interacted online and discussed multiple facets of GenPol's first international conference's central theme: from the state-of-the-art of sexuality education in Europe to the notion of sexual consent; from real-life teaching practices in formal and informal environments to successful case studies. A few teams specifically reflected upon the needs of vulnerable groups, focusing on the intersections between sexuality, disability and gender-based violence, as well as LGBT+-friendly sexuality education, and strategies to empower sexual trauma survivors. Online abuse and revenge porn, and the dangers of stereotypes reinforcing toxic notions of masculinity were also dealt with.

In June 2017, the participants of these groups gathered at the Cambridge Judge Business School for GenPol's first international conference, and were joined by UK-based experts and stakeholders in the field. Each group presented a paper, which summarised the results of their collective research and months-long discussions. Keynote speakers included Oxford academic Kerrie Thornhill, Cambridge Rape Crisis Centre's director Norah Al-Ani, educator and gender equality activist Dolly Ogunrinde, as well as award-winning journalist and sexual education speaker Alix Fox, and entrepreneur Ky Hoyle, founder of the first British feminist sex store. They all delivered inspirational contributions.

This policy paper builds on the papers that were presented, and the collaborative, truly

empowering atmosphere which was created that day. The original inputs have been re-worked into a new document, and complemented by fresh research carried out by our team and Research Associates network. The paper outlines GenPol's innovative approach to intersectional, consent-centred sexuality education, and carefully unpacks the relationship between educational efforts and gender-based violence prevention. It also celebrates the vital work of sexuality education and gender equality advocates across the European Union, while identifying needs yet to be addressed and proposing careful recommendations.

As the #metoo and #breakingsilence campaigns have recently shown, individuals and organisations worldwide are increasingly hungry for social change and gender parity. At GenPol we are immensely proud to be part of this broad, international movement of activists and experts, and offer this paper as our first contribution to the long-term struggle for gender justice.

Lilie Gwon

Executive Summary

GenPol's first policy paper examines the linkage between sexuality education and gender-based violence and proposes that comprehensive and inclusive teaching can help challenge and prevent abusive behaviours.

The paper exhaustively reviews sexuality education provisions from across the European Union. After introducing its main objectives, methodology and working definitions, it discusses the variation in content, actors and delivery methods among national educational programmes. Five country case studies (Sweden, Poland, UK, Italy, Germany) help make sense of national differences and shed light on the role played by educational initiatives from the civil society. The document ends with a wide-ranging analysis of the impact of comprehensive sexuality education (or lack thereof), and a list of innovative recommendations, to be implemented at local, national and European level.

Together with the report issued by the European Parliament in 2013, GenPol's policy paper is one of the very first studies assessing the quality and influence of sexuality education across all EU Member States. It is also the first piece of research to systematically link sexuality education with gender-based violence prevention, while most existing analyses focus on tackling unwanted pregnancy and STIs. Our paper also pays special attention to inclusivity matters and makes a point to acknowledge the multiple ways in which sexuality and gender intersect with issues of race, religion, class, and disability. In doing so, it puts forward the argument that addressing any form of discrimination and vulnerability is a prerequisite to tackling violence against women. It also develops a nuanced understanding of sexual consent, and uses it as the cornerstone of its sexuality education framework.

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Introduction: gender-based violence across the EU and the preventive role of education

Lilia Giugni, Ellen Davis-Walker, Nathalie Greenfield, Chiara De Santis, Antonia Sudkaemper, Iole Fontana, Venera Dimulescu

Over 50 million European women have experienced physical, psychological and/or sexual violence in their lifetimes ¹.

In 2014, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) undertook the first (and, as of 2017, only) comprehensive EU-wide study into violence against women (VAW). What emerged from the report is a picture of extensive abuse across the EU: one in three women (33%) has experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15 ²; nearly half (43%) of women in the EU have experienced some form of psychological violence by a current or former partner ³; and one in twenty (5%) has been raped at least once ⁴.

VAW, defined by Article 3a of the Istanbul Convention as “all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women”⁵, is clearly a widespread and substantial problem in our continent.⁶ VAW takes many overlapping forms of which sexual assault, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, intimate partner violence, and sexual harassment are just some examples. It is rooted in the denial of fundamental rights to women, and is a direct violation of the EU Charter of fundamental rights with respect to dignity and equality.⁷

¹ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), Violence against women: an EU-wide survey. Results at a glance. (Vienna: FRA, 2014) p.17

² It must be emphasised that serious obstacles to data collection, due to the many unreported instances of VAW caused by fear of retaliation and social shame, mean that the statistical data gathered by the FRA is a conservative estimate. The reality of the scale of VAW in Europe is likely to be much broader than current data suggests (see FRA (2014) p.16 and European Parliament, The Issue of Violence Against Women in the European Union, (Brussels: EU, 2016), p.24).

³ Ibid., p.11

⁴ The definition of rape used for the FRA survey requires the use of physical force. It is framed thus because in a number of EU jurisdictions, the legal definition of rape has this requirement. If this stipulation was removed, the figure reported would likely be far higher

⁵ Council of Europe, Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), (Istanbul: Council of Europe, 2011), article 3a

⁶ The term ‘violence against women’, or VAW, will be used throughout to refer to the specific form of gender-based violence suffered by women. This is partly because of the parameters of existing data (the only EU-wide study into gender-based violence has compiled data on VAW – see FRA (2014)) and partly because gender-based violence, understood by the European Institute for Gender Equality as “violence which is directed against a person because of that person’s gender” (EIGE, (2015) p.3), disproportionately affects women. When 97% of female sexual violence victims suffer at the hands of men, and 67% of the perpetrators of physical violence against women are men (FRA (2014) p.21), it is clear that the issue at stake is one of systemic violence against women.

⁷ European Commission, Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2012/C 326/02), (2000), available here: <<http://www>.

Importantly, gender-based abuse also intersects violence and discrimination motivated by race, class, power differences, sexual identity, and orientation. Evidence from across the world suggests that non-white, LGBT+, poorer women are all statistically more likely to experience violence in their life time⁸.

Education on sex, relationships, and gender is increasingly regarded as crucial to addressing the complexities of VAW. In fact, recent research conducted across the globe shows that young people who have access to effective sexuality education are more likely to make autonomous, healthy, and informed romantic and sexual choices⁹. Similarly, educational programmes that are LGBT+ inclusive and sensitive to matters of race and disability have been shown to reduce hate crimes and instances of discrimination¹⁰.

However important comprehensive sexuality education is as a means to combating VAW, the link between education and violence remains under-researched and largely neglected. On the one hand, there is very little detailed, EU-wide data on either the provision of inclusive educational programmes or their impact on the fight against VAW across Europe. On the other hand, successfully delivering educational tools in this area, especially when incorporating a specific focus on the prevention of abuse and discrimination, often eludes policy-makers and other stake-holders.

At GenPol, we work to address this gap and intervene at the intersection of policy reform, gender-based violence prevention, and educational change. In addition, we advise on the development of a novel educational framework (both in and beyond formal establishments), and explore solutions that can be exported across organisations at a local, national, and international level.

Building on this, our first policy paper provides an overview of sexuality education provision across the EU. Part 1 opens by investigating the content of national programmes, before parts 2 and 3 move on to methods of delivery and the actors involved respectively. Part 4 specifically highlights similarities and differences within and across European countries, and examines monitoring and evaluation practices. Finally, part 5 explores the linkage between sexuality education initiatives and the prevention of gender-based violence, whilst part 6 offers GenPol's recommendations towards effective and inclusive sexuality education in Europe. Throughout the text, five case study boxes provide greater insight into educational norms in Sweden, Poland, the UK, Germany and Italy. These countries have been selected for the breadth of practice that they illustrate.

It is worth pointing out that, due to data availability, the paper concerns itself with the EU's 28 Member States (including the United Kingdom, still an EU country at the time of writing); references to 'Europe' can be taken to be synonymous with the European Union. The term 'sexuality education' is used throughout to refer to the educational provision on sex, gender and relationships across the Member States, in order to maintain consistency with the terminology employed by key international bodies in this field. It must be noted that this broad overview has drawn upon the only comprehensive,

europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf> [accessed 21/06/2017].

8 https://www.jstor.org/stable/23719502?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

9 Jawkes (2002) 'Preventing Domestic Violence', in British Medical Journal 324: 253-4; Bott, Morrison, Ellsberg (2005), World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3618; Anna Kågesten, Susannah Gibbs, Robert Wm Blum, Caroline Moreau, et al., 'Understanding Factors that Shape Gender Attitudes in Early Adolescence Globally: A Mixed-Methods Systematic Review', PLOS One, 11:6 (2016).

10 Advocates For Youth, Comprehensive Sex Education: Research and Results, (2009), available online at: <<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/storage/advfy/documents/fscse.pdf>> [accessed 01/10/2017]; Brook, PSHE Association, and Sex Education Forum, Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) for the 21st Century, (2014) available online at: <<https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/sites/default/files/SRE%20for%20the%2021st%20Century%20-%20FINAL.pdf>> [accessed 01/10/2017].

European-wide sources of information available: national and international education policies. They should ideally be triangulated with similar research into the NGOs and teacher/parent organisations working in each Member State in order to provide a fuller picture of how sexuality education is delivered in each country, but such data is not available on an EU-scale (or, indeed, on a national scale for many countries). The five case studies, however, have been specifically designed to meet this need, and to offer an at least partial assessment of grassroots' educational initiatives at this stage.

1. Sexuality education: content

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Lilia Giugni, Ellen Davis-Walker, Nathalie Greenfield, Giulia Nicolini, Iole Fontana, Samanta Picciaiola, Katharina Nussbaum, Annika Spahn, Ilaria Todde, Emrys Travis, Natalia Skoczylas, Venera Dimulescu, Francesca Di Nuzzo, Antonia Sudkaemper, Waithera Sebatindira

1.1: A note on terminology

With the disparity in provisions, actors, and methodology across EU Member States that is highlighted by this report, comes a striking variation in the terminology used to refer to sexuality education as a discipline. This appears to be an important signifier of the subject's content and the ideological focus that informs its teaching. For example, the recent British campaigns to make 'Relationships and Sex Education' a mandatory part of the UK's curriculum clearly demonstrate a desire to touch upon the relational and ethical components of human sexuality. By contrast, the labelling of national programmes as 'Family Life Education' in Poland reflects a focus on reproduction and social structure, and does not address sexual rights or the complexities of sexual pleasure (see case studies here below). However, as highlighted in our Recommendations section, language and definitions are an important part of inclusive, nuanced, and ultimately effective educational initiatives.

With this in mind, it is worth introducing one of the most popular and complete definitions of sexuality education used internationally, to use as a benchmark against which to assess European provisions. Here below we provide the notion of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), as spelled out by the International Planned Parenthood Federation's (IPPF) outline¹¹:

"A rights-based approach to Comprehensive Sexuality Education seeks to equip young people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values they need to determine and enjoy their sexuality – physically and emotionally, individually and in relationships. It views 'sexuality' holistically and within the context of emotional and social development. It recognises that information alone is not enough. Young people need to be given the opportunity to acquire essential life skills and develop positive attitudes and values."

11

IPPE, IPPF Framework for comprehensive sexuality education, (London: IPPF, 2010) p.6

Equally important to acknowledge is UNESCO's addition that CSE must adopt "an age-appropriate, culturally relevant approach to teaching about sexuality and relationships by providing scientifically accurate, realistic, non-judgmental information."¹² These two statements clearly recognise young people as sexual beings, and sexuality education as a vital tool that enables them to make safe, mutually respectful, and informed choices, ultimately helping tackle any form of sexual or gender-motivated abuse.

Another useful concept is that of consent education, which has gained increasing prominence in academic, legal, and therapeutic contexts¹³, especially in the Anglo-American world. Building on the work of consent education advocates from across the world, GenPol defines sexual consent as "the active process of willingly and freely choosing to participate in sexual activities of any kind". We maintain that this notion implies "a shared responsibility for everyone engaging in, or willing to engage in, sexual interaction with someone else, as well as the freedom to make one's choices without being forced, manipulated, intentionally misled or pressured". Therefore, consent education emphasises the idea that all sexual partners should be seen and treated like a whole, separate, person, rather than an object someone is doing things to¹⁴.

Our review of European educational practices shows how interpretations of what sexuality education should consist of differ across the continent, and often fail to implement international good practices and golden standards.

1.2: Sexuality education: inclusion in national curricula, comprehensiveness, and incorporation of VAW-prevention as an educational objective

Sexuality education in some form is mandatory by law in nearly all EU countries. Current exceptions to this are Bulgaria, Cyprus, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and the UK, though this latter is currently in the process of making sexuality education a mandatory part of the national curriculum (for further details, see case study here below)¹⁵.

Most Member States seem to regard sexuality education in school as an appropriate means of teaching young people about the bodily elements of sex, and as a suitable preventive measure to combat unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections¹⁶. Whilst this framework forms the baseline for sexuality education content, only some Member States build on it to include relational and social facets of sexuality.

Accordingly, in most countries where sexuality education is taught, the subject is timetabled into biology lessons¹⁷, and fails to address issues of sexual consent, healthy relationships and the prevention of gender-based violence. Only in states where sexuality education is taught separately in the curriculum, such as Sweden, does there appear to be

12 UNESCO Emerging evidence, lessons and practice in comprehensive sexuality education: a global review 2015, (Paris: UNESCO, 2015) p.7

13 Ehrlich, Susan Lynn. Representing rape: Language and sexual consent. Psychology Press, 2001; Beres, Melanie A. "Spontaneous' sexual consent: An analysis of sexual consent literature." *Feminism & Psychology* 17.1 (2007): 93-108.

14 This specific definition of consent is highlighted in the sexuality education module that GenPol created in 2017 for the German NGO Serlo (available online at <https://en.serlo.org/78329/consent-why>).

15 European Parliament, Policies for Sexuality Education in the European Union (Brussels: EU, 2013)

16 Ibid., p.8; WHO, Standards for sexuality education in Europe, (Cologne: WHO, 2010)

17 European Parliament (2013)

an increased focus on the psychosocial aspects of sexuality¹⁸. Significantly, quantitative and qualitative research unanimously shows young people to welcome such approaches, which meet IPPF's and UNESCO's CSE standards¹⁹.

However, as Figure 2 makes clear, relational components are lacking in many Member States' education programmes. More specifically, the Nordic and Benelux countries are widely recognised as providing the most comprehensive sexuality education, integrating issues of sexual consent and formally incorporating the prevention of VAW as an educational objective. France and Germany also incorporate the notions of sexual rights and abuse-prevention into their teaching practices. In the Eastern and Southern states, instead, psychosocial aspects of sexuality are widely ignored, even though a wide range of civil society actors work to raise awareness on these topics, at the national and local level.^{20 21}

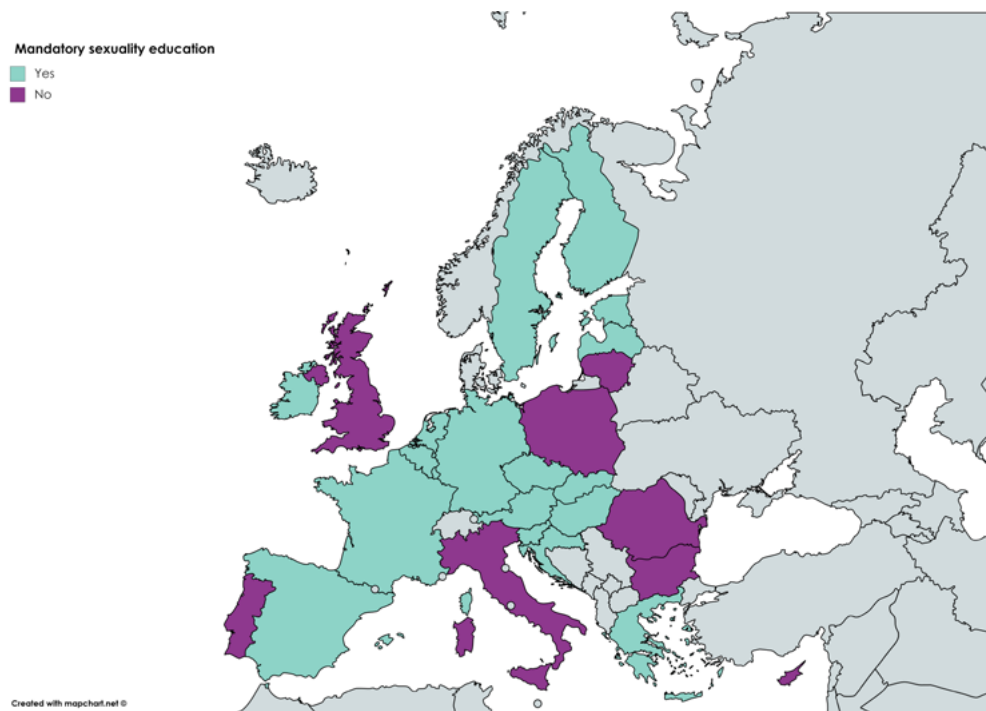


Figure 1

Source: European Parliament (2013)

18 Racheal Parker, Kaye Wellings, and Jeffrey V. Lazarus, 'Sexuality education in Europe: an overview of current policies', *Sex Education*, 9 (2009), 227-242, p.240

19 Ibid.

20 WHO (2010); European Parliament (2013); UNESCO; Parker et al.

21 European Parliament (2013), p.8

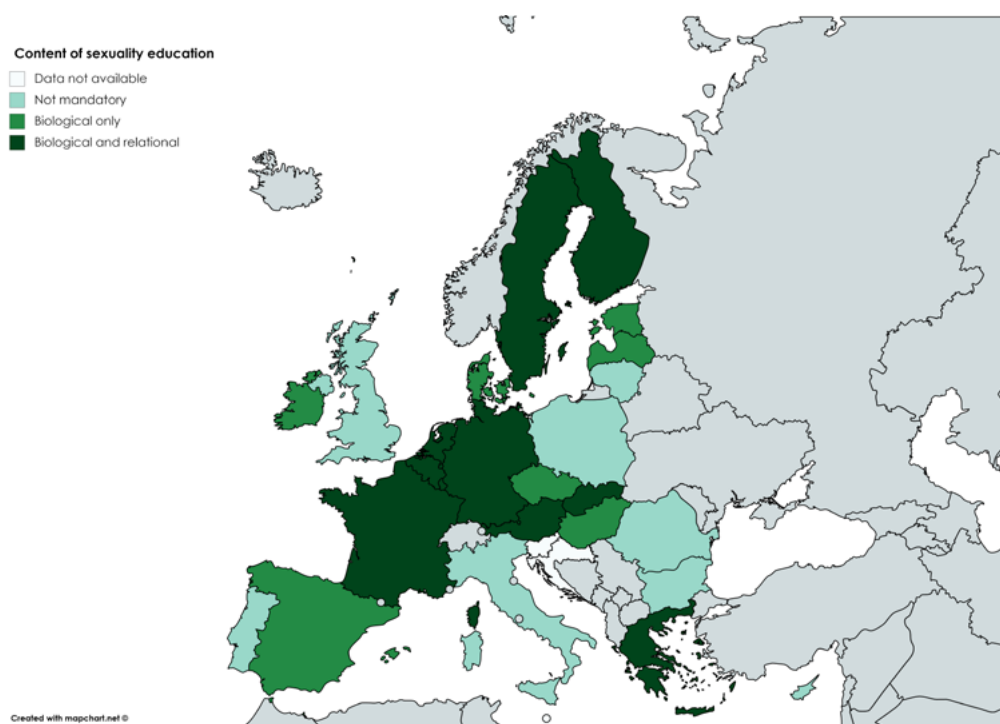


Figure 2

Source: European Parliament (2013)

1.3: LGBT+ inclusivity in current provisions

No country in the European Union is fully inclusive of LGBT+ people, and this is reflected in Member States' sexuality education programmes, where they exist. As stated by the Centre for American Progress, "sex-education materials often assume students are heterosexual and non-transgender. Many sex-education curricula do not mention sexual orientation or gender identity at all, while some that do discuss it only in a negative light."²² As will be seen, the same is true in varying degrees across the European Union.

The biological, reproduction-centred ethos of most existing sexuality education programmes tends to neglect issues specific to LGBT+ students, and it is rare even for relational components of programmes to allude to sexualities that fall outside of heteronormative parameters. This is unsurprising when the globally recognised frameworks on sexuality education content, which serve as guidelines for the European Union Member States, do not speak of LGBT+ inclusivity: for instance, the above-mentioned UNESCO sexuality education framework does not mention the words 'LGBT', 'lesbian', 'gay', 'bisexual', or 'transgender' once²³.

Not only does the heteronormative content of existing sexuality education provision prevent LGBT students from accessing the information and skills they need to stay healthy, but it also contributes to their social exclusion and to the abuses that are

²² Hannah Slater, 'LGBT-Inclusive Sex Education Means Healthier Youth and Safer Schools', (2013), available online at: <<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbt/news/2013/06/21/67411/lgbt-inclusive-sex-education-means-healthier-youth-and-safer-schools/>> [accessed 07/06/2017].

²³ IPPF (2010), European Parliament (2013), UNESCO (2015), WHO, Standards for sexuality education in Europe, (Cologne: WHO, 2010).

perpetrated against them. In particular, as outlined LGBT+ women are amongst the main targets of violence and discrimination, and no educational initiative aimed at VAW-prevention should neglect to address their specific needs²⁴.

1.4: Inclusive sexuality education and ‘intersectional’ concerns

Even in the most virtuous Member States sexuality education programmes still largely fail to acknowledge the impact that race, religion, and language, as well as differences in physical ability, wealth, and power have on our sexual lives²⁵.

As emphasised by the World Health Organisations and expert networks such as the UK-based Sex Education Forum, not only should sexuality education take into account the different cultural sensitivities²⁶ that characterise Europe’s increasingly multicultural societies, it should also explicitly address the sexual rights and needs of those who find themselves at the intersection of different racial, religious, cultural and class differences, celebrating individuality and equal rights while raising awareness of the risks faced by those belonging to vulnerable groups. In order to empower young people to recognise, negotiate, and practice safe sex, eventually preventing discrimination and abuse, sexuality education programmes should also problematise power dynamics at play in sexual encounters, and acknowledge and discuss disabled people’s sexuality.

Finally, the integration of contents related to the prevention of cyber-abuses is a work in progress in most Member States, often in cooperation with local and national law enforcement agencies. This includes increasing awareness of the abusive nature of practices such as online sexual bullying, and preventing gender-based violence in the form of revenge porn (i.e. diffusion through digital media of sexually explicit material, sometimes as a form of revenge against former sexual partners²⁷).

As discussed, Member States differ widely in terms of their approach to sexuality education content. The case studies below illustrate two extremes. Sweden, a country in which mandatory sexuality education has both biological and relational components, adopts one of the most inclusive attitudes of any Member State and explicitly aims to tackle VAW. Poland, known for its conservative stance on women’s self-determination, offers a very mixed picture²⁸. Its national educational programmes shun all mention of sexual orientation and gender identity, while encouraging abstinence and traditional marriage.

However, Polish gender-equality and sexual rights activists are involved in intense advocacy efforts and numerous grassroots initiatives.

24 <https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/HRC-AntiTransgenderViolence-0519.pdf>; https://www.measureevaluation.org/prh/rh_indicators/womens-health/sgbv;

25 For an exhaustive examination of the concept of intersectionality, meant as the interaction of multiple identities and experiences of oppression and discrimination, see, for example, Davis, K. (2008) ‘Intersectionality as buzzword. A sociology of science perspective on what makes a feminist theory successful’, in *Feminist Theory*, vol. 9(1): 67–85. 1464–7001.

26 WHO, *Youth Sex Education in a Multicultural Europe*, 2006, accessible online at: <https://publikationen.sexualaufklaerung.de/index.php?-docid=1111> [last accessed on December, 22, 2017]; Brook, *Position Statement- Relationship and Sex Education*, 2015, accessible online at: <https://www.brook.org.uk/about-brook/brook-position-statement-relationships-and-sex-education> [last accessed on December, 22, 2017].

27 See for example UK Government, ‘Revenge porn: The Facts’, accessible online at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/405286/revenge-porn-factsheet.pdf [last accessed on December, 22, 2017].

28 See FRA (2013) p.15

Case study: Sweden

Sweden is widely considered a pioneer in sexuality education provision²⁹. The first EU Member State to establish compulsory courses in 1955, Sweden regards sexuality education as a means to guarantee a healthy population. No opt-out clauses exist in Swedish schools³⁰. Minimum standards for Sweden's programmes are set by the Swedish National Agency for Education, and stipulate that education should cover anatomy, gender, relationship management and abuse-prevention³¹. Swedish NGOs also play a pivotal role in supporting national educational initiatives, from the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education to the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights.

The Swedish model is believed to be one of the most effective and inclusive to date, demonstrated in part by its very low rates of HIV infection and unwanted pregnancy³². Its focus on equality and matters of sexual consent, and healthy negotiation practices also make it a model for those who regard sexuality education as a crucial tool to tackle VAW³³.

Speaking of the place of LGBT+ rights in the Swedish national response to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), author Nilunger Mannheimer states: "In Sweden, a national strategy for equal rights and opportunities regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression has been present since 2014, together with continuous efforts for prevention of HIV.³⁴" Sweden's inclusivity of LGBT+ issues in sexuality education stems from a national campaign against HIV that was targeted at LGBT+ youth³⁵, and though there is expected backlash against Sweden's inclusive approach (Swedish sexuality education has been the subject of more than one negative article (see Prospero, 2015, for a recent example), the country continues to treat the subject holistically and promotes one of the most open, honest, and inclusive approaches in Europe.

29 European Parliament (2013), p.30; Parker et al., p.239

30 Ibid

31 Parker et al., p.239

32 Bonolo Kelefang, 'Sexuality education in Sweden. A study based on research and young people's service providers in Gothenburg', (2008) available online at: <https://gupea.ub.gu.se/bitstream/2077/17923/1/gupea_2077_17923_1.pdf>

33 Bonolo Kelefang, 'Sexuality education in Sweden. A study based on research and young people's service providers in Gothenburg', (2008) available online at: <https://gupea.ub.gu.se/bitstream/2077/17923/1/gupea_2077_17923_1.pdf> [accessed 09/06/2017].

34 Nilunger Mannheimer et al., (2016)

35 Nilunger Mannheimer et al., (2016)

Case study: Poland

Sexuality education in Poland was regionally implemented in 1966, and until 1980 about 1,500 schools taught a subject based on preparation for ‘family life’³⁶. Yet the economic and social crisis in Poland in the late 1970s, and the concordat between the state and the Catholic Church, saw the Church’s influence on sexuality education (or lack thereof) grow stronger. Despite Poland being one of the first countries to legalise abortion in 1956, family planning services and sexuality education in the country suffered as the Church’s influence on the state increased³⁷. Consequently, sexuality education was taken out of the school curriculum and only taught on a voluntary basis.

Since 2009, sexuality education is non-obligatorily carried out in schools, but is considered to largely reinforce strict gender roles³⁸. The focus remains on family roles and values, homosexuality is rejected, and information on STIs and contraception is often misleading³⁹. All sexuality education textbooks present the Catholic Church’s view of human sexuality, employing non-scientific language⁴⁰, and, as young people are considered non-sexual beings who would be sexualised by sexuality education, many topics remain taboo⁴¹. Furthermore, the information that young people receive is often coloured by their religious leader’s or teacher’s personal opinions regarding gender roles and identities⁴².

For example, LGBT+ orientations are not taught to be valid sexual identities or practices, and single parenthood is not tolerated⁴³.

36 European Parliament (2013), p.26; Parker et al., 237

37 Ibid.

38 Ponton, ‘Report of the Ponton Group of Sex Educators: What does sex education really look like in Poland? (2009) available at: <http://ponton.org.pl/sites/ponton/files/what_sex_education_poland_ponton_report_2009.pdf> [accessed 01/10/2017].

39 European Parliament (2013), p.26

40 Parker et al., p.238

41 European Parliament (2013), p.27; Maria Wozniak, ‘Sexuality education in Polish schools’ (2015), available online at: <www.researchgate.net/profile/Maria_Wozniak/publication/302973146_Sexuality_Education_in_Polish_Schools/links/5734898808aea45ee83ac7cb/Sexuality_Education-in-Polish-Schools.pdf> [accessed 03/10/2017]

42 European Parliament (2013), p.27.

43 Ibid

Lessons are often sex-segregated, and each group is taught solely about its own sex, thus perpetuating strong gender stereotypes and leading to a lack of information about other genders. Moreover, much teaching is abstinence- only, focusing on the negative consequences sex before marriage can have ⁴⁴. According to Polish NGO Lambda, the primary textbook used to deliver family life education contains prejudicial information about homosexuality, and, among other things, discusses drinking, violence, and family dysfunction as causes of LGBT identities ⁴⁵. Importantly, this framework spreads erroneous information on the causes of domestic violence and other forms of gender-based abuse, shifting attention away from the role played by stereotype-inducing education, toxic notions of masculinity and insufficient awareness of women's basic rights ⁴⁶.

In 2006, a bill was introduced by the then Minister of National Education, Roman Giertych, trying to prohibit people who “propagate homosexuality” from working in schools ⁴⁷. In June of the same year, the CEO of the National In-Service Teaching Centre was dismissed for having allowed the publication of the textbook ‘Kompas’, prepared by the Council of Europe and suggesting that LGBT+ people should be invited as speakers in schools to discuss sexuality matters ⁴⁸.

These conservative attitudes, however, are actively challenged by a number of feminist and sexual health charities or activist groups, campaigning to increase awareness of women, LGBT+ and youth's sexual rights. The activities of organisations such as Feminoteka, the Federation for Women & Family Planning, Ponton, and the Gender Equality Observatory include curriculum development and advocacy at a local, national and EU level.

44 Mirosława Makuchowska and Michał Pawłęga (eds.), *Situation of LGBT Persons in Poland. 2010 and 2011 report.*, (Warsaw: Lambda Warsaw, Campaign Against Homophobia, Trans-Fuzja Foundation, 2012)

45 Ibid., p.189

46 Ibid., p.191; see also Ponton (2009).

47 Lambda, p.13; Wozniak, p.77.

48 Meller Aleksandra, Lydia Downing, Johanna Lieser, 'Hate in the Headlines: Media Reactions to Homophobic Rhetoric in Poland', (2007), available at: <http://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledgebase/164-hate-in-the-headlines-media-reactions-to-homophobic-rhetoric-in-poland> [accessed 11/06/2017].

2. Sexuality education: methods

2. Sexuality education: methods

Lilia Giugni, Ellen Davis-Walker, Nathalie Greenfield, Chiara De Santis, Dolly Ogunrinde, Caitlyn Merry, Tobias Mueller, Tamara Macfarlane, Elyssa Ryder, Clare Stanhope

Formal classroom-based teaching remains the most common method for delivering sexuality education programmes across the EU. Importantly, there is huge discrepancy as to when young people begin their sexuality education, from aged 5 in Portugal to aged 14 in Spain. When teaching young kids visual aids are commonly used, including audio-visual supports, as are resources extrapolated from mass media and the internet. More creative methods, such as theatre and art-based workshops, are occasionally used as didactic tools⁴⁹.

The methods used to deliver sexuality education tend to hinge on the body or person delivering it. Though primarily delivered in a classroom setting by a teacher, other actors involved in sexuality education provision are typically Ministries of Health and Education, family planning organisations, NGOs (which are sometimes brought in by statutory agencies such as education boards), teachers, parents, and healthcare or social work professionals.

In most Member States (see figure below), teacher-led education is often biology-based and prescriptive in approach, with little room designated for student-led learning (even though the classroom environment remains an important space for asking questions and discussion). Where actors external to the education system, such as NGOs, are involved, educational provision tends to move away from formal teaching and is more interactive, including activities such as sexual health seminars (Sweden), sexual health campaigns (the UK) and counselling (Germany)⁵⁰. Across several Member States (UK, Italy), professionals from Rape Crisis Centres and Women's Centres also contribute to the educational effort, offering training and raising awareness on the gender stereotypes that inform gender-based violence.

Alternatively, NGOs sometimes lead workshop sessions on their own premises, and their scope is frequently more comprehensive, and their methods less didactic, than the traditional classroom approach (this happens, for instance, in Germany, France, Italy, Poland, Romania, and the UK). Research has shown that whilst formal teacher-led learning remains common, young people have a preference for a more interactive approach, such as that exemplified by Sweden's sexual health seminars, and sexuality education has been proven to be more effective when it establishes links with local sexual health services⁵¹.

49 Parker et al; European Parliament (2013); WHO

50 WHO (2010); European Parliament (2013); see upcoming box on Germany.

51 Parker et al., p.240

The government department responsible for sexuality education provision (where it is government-led) is indicative of the Member State's approach to the topic. In most countries, sexuality education is housed within the Ministry for Education (or equivalent thereof), but this can be in cooperation with another department. For example, in the Czech Republic, sexuality education is coordinated by the Ministries of Education and of Youth and Sports, demonstrating an emphasis on youth development, while in Finland, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is involved, bringing the aforementioned psychosocial components to the fore along with physical and emotional health⁵².

Finally, a few contributions from the private and media sector are also worth examining. Feminist sex stores such as Sh! in the UK or Other Nature in Germany make a point of including elements of sexuality education in their business mission and delivering educational content in their ads or products. Media projects that use digital technologies to share sexuality education content, including websites like the Belgian "Alles over seks" ("Everything about sex") as well as popular YouTube videos, podcasts, and blogs, explicitly aim to reach out to European digital natives.

Case study: United Kingdom

In 2017, the UK approved legislation that will make Relationship and Sexual Education (RSE) compulsory from September 2019. Through amendments to the Children and Social Work Bill ⁵³, the Government introduced the teaching of RSE as a requirement for all secondary schools in the country, while Relationship Education will be taught already in primary school. The amended regulation represents an important step forward, since schools run by local authorities were, so far, the only ones that offered sexuality education to their pupils ⁵⁴.

The reform came after years of pressure from sexual rights campaigners such as feminist activist Laura Bates ⁵⁵, supported by British NGOs, rape crisis centres, local government bodies, and a large number of parents and young people. In particular, civil society actors had long demanded a reform of the current statutory guidance for RSE, which was introduced in 2000 and is becoming increasingly outdated according to the Government itself. Useful guidelines towards a new and more effective RSE teaching have been produced, for example, by Family Planning Associations (FPA), the British member of IPPF. FPA's extensive reports (policy briefings, nation-wide surveys and recommendations)⁵⁶ all support statutory RSE and highlight the role of holistic sexuality education in increasing awareness on the importance of healthy and safe relationships. Important contributions have been authored, too, by Sex Education Forum and Brook, two leading sexual health charities. They both promote SRE as a compulsory subject

⁵³ <https://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/childrenandsocialwork.html>

⁵⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/schools-to-teach-21st-century-relationships-and-sex-education>

⁵⁵ <https://www.change.org/p/education-secretary-and-minister-for-women-and-equalities-justine-greening-make-sex-and-relationships-education-sre-compulsory-in-all-schools>

⁵⁶ <https://www.fpa.org.uk/influencing-sexual-health-policy/sex-and-relationships-education>

and offer in-depth, evidence-based analyses of sexuality education programmes, together with extensive guidelines for different stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and local policy-makers ⁵⁷. Interestingly, most proposals from Britiss-established sexual health charities also concern themselves with effective teaching and delivery methods. For instance, published materials include resources and advice to help teachers design and deliver their own RSE curriculum, check-lists and FAQ sections for educators, and user-friendly information to be consulted directly by young people ⁵⁸.

In recent years, matters of sexual consent have also gained prominence in the British public discourse. In particular, the alarming incidence of sexual assault cases in British university campuses has attracted national attention. Thanks to the efforts of feminist and human rights student activists, this has led to the introduction of so-called ‘consent workshops’ in several British universities, including Cambridge, Oxford, Bristol and SOAS in London. These innovative initiatives target undergraduate students and are often delivered by peers, including university Women’s Officers and older students (see, for example, the Good Lad Initiative in Oxford and Cambridge, where male students and sportsmen talk consent with their younger college- and team-mates). Another interesting model stemming from British universities are the seminars offered by Sexpression UK, a student-led charity that runs informal but comprehensive sexuality education in local communities. Despite raising some controversy, especially in the case of gender-segregated workshops, these initiatives were

⁵⁷ See, for example, <https://www.brook.org.uk/our-work/sre-supplementary-advice>; <http://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/resources.aspx>.

⁵⁸ See, for example, <http://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/resources/practice.aspx>.

hugely influential in pushing educational institutions to adopt more stringent sexual harassment and assault policies and provide support to survivors.

Overall, it is now crucial that the UK integrates existing efforts into a coherent approach to be applied nationwide. The consultation process launched by the British Government at the end of 2017 in order to inform future statutory RSE guidance is a promising point of departure. It is vital, however, that stakeholders at all levels, including sexual rights and gender equality activists, gender-based violence professionals, and above-all the students themselves are actively involved in this procedure.

Testimony: an on-the-ground account from Dolly Ogunrinde, British education and gender equality activist

Young boys, particularly those from underprivileged socio-economic backgrounds, mature within the confines of a carefully sculpted, toxic conceptualisation of masculinity. They are told that in order to grow into ‘real’ men they must remain strong and unemotional, unless that emotion is one of anger and violence to be deployed as a means of resolving their problems.

Working for a London-based educational outreach charity that focuses on disadvantaged young people has given me a unique insight into the world of Relationship and Sex Education (RSE), in both formal and informal educational environments. I have seen how this form of toxic masculinity manifests in boys as young as seven, as well as the long-term damage that it causes as these boys mature into adults and form their own relationships. It is crucial that we, as formal and informal educators, question the consequences of societal notions of masculinity and actively create frameworks that teach students to respect themselves and others around them.

In the UK, however, a growing part of the student population has long lacked access to these learning opportunities. Not only did the RSE provisions in the national curriculum focus on biological elements and reproductive health, neglecting issues such as consent, sexual violence and pleasure; academies (of which 62% of secondary schools

fall under) were not legally bound to follow the government's RSE guidelines, instead they were 'encouraged' to do so. A 2009 YouGov survey accurately displayed the social consequences of students not receiving adequate RSE, stating that only 27% of young female respondents were able to recognise non-physical forms of violence as domestic abuse.

From September 2019, age-appropriate RSE will become compulsory for all British schools; including primary schools and academies. This is certainly a first step towards a broader, long-term process of cultural change, but it is vital that provisions are taken to provide teachers and educators with appropriate training. Furthermore, RSE should not only be incorporated into Physical, Social and Health Education (PSHE) lessons. Issues of consent and gender based violence should and can be explored in the context of English, citizenship education, history, economics and geography classes. Finally, one should bear in mind that adapting the national curriculum is only a partial solution to the problem, as young people learn in both formal and informal environments. Therefore, all those who interact with youth in a professional and personal capacity have a role to play in empowering the next generation to make the right decisions.

3. Sexuality education: actors

3. Sexuality education: actors

Lilia Giugni, Ellen Davis-Walker, Nathalie Greenfield, Chiara De Santis, Dolly Ogunrinde, Caitlyn Merry, Tobias Mueller, Tamara Macfarlane, Elyssa Ryder, Clare Stanhope

In each Member State the provision of sexuality education is shaped by key social and political actors who define the legal, pedagogical and financial terms of its delivery ⁵⁹. These are primarily teachers, NGOs and other social workers, as well as Ministries for Health and Education. Supranational bodies and international organisations may have some influence over the social and political views of these actors, and the creation of multi-lateral commitments and groups can generate a certain degree of momentum for improving the status quo.

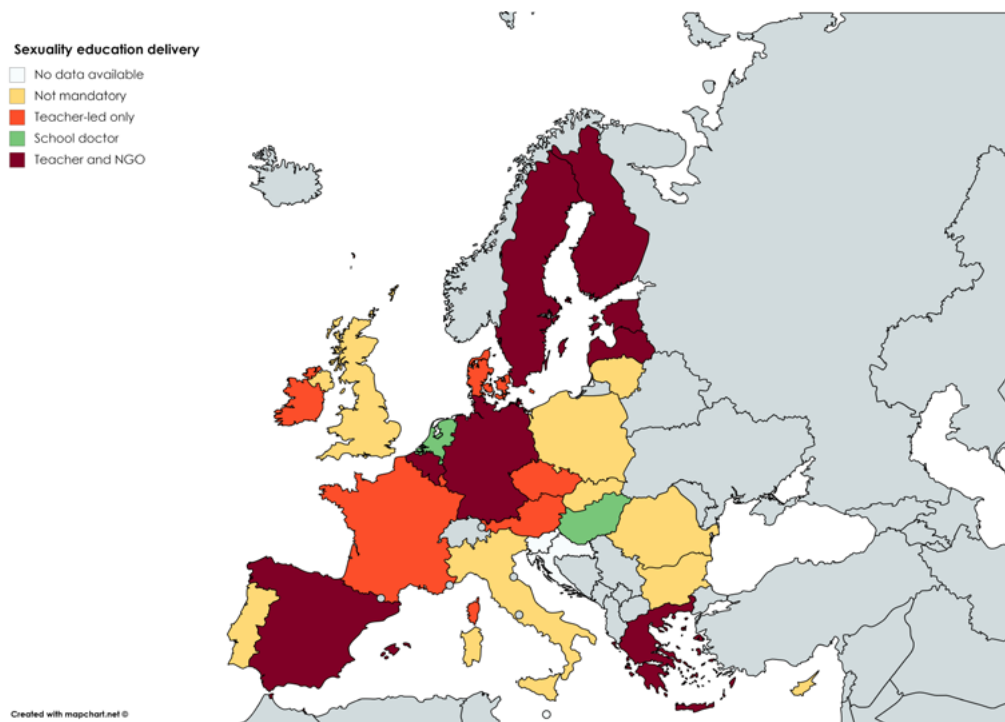


Figure 3

Source: European Parliament (2013)

59 European Parliament (2013), p.7

3.1: Parents

Parents are often the first informal providers of sexuality education. In some countries, parents are also more formally involved in education; for example, in Austria, they take part in the provision of sexuality education at school⁶⁰. The involvement of parents, who are seen to have a right to contribute to how their children learn about sex and sexuality, is deemed to be one of the ‘five indicators’ for effective sexuality education according to the European Parliament’s FEMM Committee⁶¹. Parental support is also thought to be essential to the success of school-based sexuality education provision, especially when touching upon issues of sexual consent⁶². However, in many socially conservative and religious Member States such as Poland and Italy, some parents’ groups have been vocal in their objections against the public provision of sexuality education⁶³.

3.2: Teachers

The quality and content of sexuality education naturally depends on the direct providers of educational courses: teachers themselves. In a number of countries, including Ireland and Luxembourg, much of the responsibility for provision lies with individual teachers, and may depend on their personal views and religious beliefs (as seen above with the example of Poland, as well as in Slovakia, where sexuality education is often taught by religion teachers, including priests and nuns). Further, in many countries, teachers lack adequate training in educating young people on sex, gender, and relationships, and are simply not in a position to comfortably provide comprehensive and neutral information covering topics such as sexual consent and abuse-prevention, sexual orientation, and gender identity⁶⁴. The effectiveness of teachers’ roles and their impact on young people is thus limited, and sexuality education provision within individual countries is often inconsistent.

3.3: Civil society and NGOs

In a significant number of EU Member States, governments either work with national or international NGOs to deliver sexuality education, or civil society organisations have stepped in to fill a gap in the state provision of education (see figure 3). For example, in Belgium, the government has subcontracted sexuality education to civil society organisations, while in Germany collaboration with NGOs in delivering education is written into national policy. These NGOs differ in their aims and approach, contributing to the element of variability which characterises sexuality education provision both across the EU and in individual Member States. For instance, in France many of the participating NGOs are religious⁶⁵.

Family planning associations, such as the different European branches active within IPPF, have often been instrumental in introducing sexuality education to national policy, and in providing staff and teacher training. They also organise a wide range of education

60 Ibid., p.8

61 Ibid., p.45

62 UNESCO (2015)

63 Italy is a notable example of such parental resistance, as will be seen later in this paper.

64 European Parliament (2013).

65 Parker et al., p.234

activities, including peer education and advocacy campaigns⁶⁶. In addition, health professionals may participate too, in shaping and delivering educational programmes (for example, as experts to be consulted in the crafting of curricula), or as guest speakers in schools, as it happens in Estonia and France. The same applies, as we saw, to Rape Crisis Centres social workers. In countries such as the UK and Italy, these gender-based violence professionals are involved in both consent education advocacy and actual teaching in local schools or their own premises, usually with a specific focus on VAW prevention. Finally, as above-mentioned, private sector actors including feminist sex stores and ethical sex toy companies have often contributed to sponsor sexuality education initiatives.

Accordingly, the box on NGO's role in sexuality education provision in Germany and Italy here below highlights the impact of civil society in filling the gaps left by national educational systems.

3.4: National governments and international bodies

International organisations such as the United Nations have a limited amount of influence over the policies of national governments. They may, however, exert pressure on governments through advocacy and non-binding commitments and agreements.

The WHO and UN agencies have published research reports on sexuality education and organised multilateral summits on the topic with the participation of different Member States. For example, in 2010 the WHO released a set of guidelines on sexuality education stemming from a multi-lateral conference, while UNESCO published in 2015 a global review on comprehensive sexuality education, offering advice to national governments on improvements to be made.

Finally, as we saw, several international bodies have started to advocate for the inclusion of VAW prevention measures into sexuality education programmes, introducing objectives such as teaching young people about mutual and self-respect, healthy-relationship management and sexual consent ⁶⁷.

3.5: The EU

The EU has no policy-making competencies when it comes to sexuality education, given that national education systems are the mandate of individual Member States. Further, issues such as LGBT+ rights or women's rights (LGBT+ marriage or access to abortion, for example) often fall, too, in areas of law which are considered national competencies, such as Family Law. However, given that the EU is composed of its Member States, it still has the potential to influence national policy frameworks, and provides guidance to Member States on shaping educational provision. As a result, the EU is mainly able to contribute to the provision of sexuality education under the aegis of public health initiatives, which tend to have a narrower focus on disease and reproduction.

EU institutions, however, are currently seeking to encourage international research and

⁶⁶ European Parliament (2013), p.17

⁶⁷ Giugni, Davis Walker, Greenfield, Drabot, Serini, Dawson, Nation, Guercio, Reale

exchanges in this domain. In particular, initiatives such as the creation of the Gender Equality Institute and Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality provide the opportunity for decision-makers to retrieve and exchange best practices.

Case study. Germany: NGOs and state-provided sexuality education.

The education system in Germany is federally organised. After reunification, the 1995 Pregnancy and Family Aid Act (SFHÄndG), which is still applicable today, introduced mandatory national sexuality education programmes, though the federal states were left with responsibility for as to how they should be carried out. The Act stipulates that sexuality education should be taught holistically, dealing not only with biological and medical views, but with emotions, relationships, and sexual ethics. It also requires government institutions to collaborate with NGOs offering a range of activities and information about sexuality education for young people ⁶⁸.

A successful example of public/third sector partnership is provided by Pro Familia, the main NGO provider of sexual and reproductive health services in Germany. A founding member of the IPPF, it was established in 1952 and is affiliated with several international bodies in the field of sexuality education ⁶⁹. The key groups that the NGO works with are teachers, teenagers and young adults, children, parents, and human resources managers. They use a wide range of methods in their services, including gestalt pedagogy, theatre pedagogy, role play, and psychodrama. They also provide gender-specific counselling. Pro Familia plays a significant role in supplying to schools both materials and sexuality education experts who have been specially trained in delivering these programmes to children and teenagers. Schools

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.19

⁶⁹ <<http://www.profamilia.de/pro-familia.html>> [accessed 07/07/2017]

can choose to visit one of Pro Familia's counselling centres, or to have a specialist visit the school and deliver a classroom lesson. The resources that Pro Familia makes available online are also useful as supplements to classroom teaching, which is important in light of the fact that many school teachers do not receive sufficient training. The NGO's approach to sexuality education is described on their website, and they work on four guiding principles: respect, equality, tolerance, and solicitude, explicitly focusing on VAW prevention. They also aim to take into account the wide range of cultural backgrounds of their 'clients'.

This is all the more important considering there is still some resistance to inclusive sexuality education in Germany. For example, in 2014, the state government of Baden-Württemberg attempted to adopt a more diverse approach to its teaching syllabus, which prompted a public outcry. What started as an online petition gathering 200,000 signatories warning against the educational, moral, and ideological development of children, turned into demonstrations involving the so-called Demo für alle (demonstration for everyone), Besorgte Eltern (worried parents), fundamentalist and evangelical Christians, and right-wing political parties like the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland - alternative for Germany). The fear that talking about LGBT+ identities would turn children gay and/or sexualise them highlights that sexuality education is central to the question of acceptance of LGBT+ people ⁷⁰.

⁷⁰ Burkhard Jellonek, 'Vorwort', in Elisabeth Tüider, and Martin Dannecker, (eds.), *Dans Recht auf Vielfalt. Aufgaben und Herausforderungen sexueller Bildung* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2016), pp.7-12

education. However, due to the federal structure of German education and, thus, the federal structure of the NGO, the content of its work varies from state to state. Each German region has a separate section of the Pro Familia website, with information on location-specific services, the expertise of regional staff, news and events listings. Some regional pages provide a wide range of information on topics such as the prevention of STIs and contraception. Others provide information specific to LGBT+ youth. For example, the Bremen page provides information on issues such as masturbation, virginity, sexual orientation, sexual abuse, gender stereotypes, and communication and responsibility in relationships. Finally, some regions provide information on counselling centres and telephone hotlines, which offer advice and support in cases of sexual violence involving children and young people. The case of Pro Familia brilliantly exemplifies the critical role that NGOs can have in the provision of information on sex, relationships, reproduction, and gender to young people.

Case study. Italy: civil society filling the void of non-existent state provisions

Italy is one of the few EU Member States where no sexuality education provision exists across school curricula ⁷¹. In 2015, the Italian Government timidly attempted to take things a step forward, inviting primary and secondary schools to prevent, and educate about, any forms of violence and discrimination. However, due to widespread protests from religious and conservative groups, these dispositions have never been translated into specific regulations, leaving each individual school board free to decide on the matter⁷². Overall, in a country famous for its highly sexualised and objectifying media, whether or not schools should provide children and young adults with formal guidance on sexuality and relationships is still a highly controversial topic. Furthermore, as emphasised by a recent study, the voices of Italian young people (namely the main beneficiaries of educational programmes) are almost completely absent from this debate ⁷³.

Despite the lack of state provisions, several educational initiatives take place across Italy in informal settings. At the local level, groups of parents and teachers, together with small NGOs and anti-violence or rape crisis centres, carry out independent projects in their own communities. In central Italy, for example, the Bologna-based cultural association Falling Book, in collaboration with the parents' network Genitori Rilassati ('Relaxed Parents') and the local Study Centre for

71 IPPF European Network, 2009; European Parliament, 2013.

72 Decreto Buona Scuola, 2015

73 Alloni, Centrone & Viola, 2017.

secondary school teachers, and organises events around the theme of gender-based violence prevention. More specifically, they work to raise awareness of stereotype-inducing mechanisms, anti-homosexual violence and abuse against women and girls, and to eradicate these since childhood.

Local initiatives also intersect with the work of gender equality activists, campaigners, and educators at the national level. Nation-wide feminist network Non Una Di Meno, for instance, supports the idea that a process of cultural transformation is necessary to combat gender-based violence. After mobilising thousands of women who took to the streets of Rome on November 25th 2016 and March 8th 2017, these activists called for a number of changes to key areas of Italian policy and society, including, most notably, education. They suggested revising school books to remove gender stereotypes and represent men and women more equally, for instance by showing people of different genders in various professional roles. Similarly, the educational festival Educare alle Differenze ('Educating around differences') has emerged as a prominent hub for educators and civil society actors interested in promoting gender and sexuality education and preventing discrimination and abuse.

Whilst these projects demonstrate the liveliness and commitment of the Italian civil society, their pro-activeness is not appropriately met by Italian institutions. Not only do educators, NGOs and activists badly

mapped, and the resources they produce should be made available to others on a national basis. At the same time, recent research reveals how Italian teenagers, tired of seeing sex treated as a taboo at the societal level, deem schools as the most appropriate space for sexuality education, and an essential complement to the existing bottom-up initiatives ⁷⁴. Over the last few years, similar concerns have been voiced by nation-wide campaigns calling for the formal inclusion of sexuality education into school curricula. These include a petition sponsored by left-wing MP Celeste Costantino in collaboration with several rape crisis centres, and the online advocacy campaign #ascuoladiconsenso, led by a group of 100 experts, activist and professionals rallying around the feminist charity F Come ⁷⁵.

⁷⁴ Osservatorio Nazionale Adolescenza, 2016; Alloni, Centrone & Viola, 2017

⁷⁵ See www.fcome.org.

4. Variation in sexuality education across the EU: towards effective monitoring and evaluation practices

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Lilia Giugni, Ellen Davis-Walker, Nathalie Greenfield, Chiara De Santis

As shown in the previous sections, there is much variety in sexuality education provision across EU Member States. To begin with, the legal and pedagogical framework of sexuality education is often shaped by the social and political views of individual countries and communities, which can change as political and institutional actors are replaced ⁷⁶. Cultural and religious issues also play key roles in influencing the financing and content of sexuality education. Crucially, these differences should be taken into account when designing monitoring and evaluation phases of national and local educational programmes.

4.1: Variation within and across European countries

VVariety in sexuality education provision is twofold: not only is there little consistency between Member States, but adopting a national focus allows us to see that there is often little consistency within individual countries, too. Even in states such as Germany or France, where sexuality education is mandatory, quality and content of provision can vary internally depending on factors such as the location and type of school (urban or rural area; state or private sector), the teacher delivering it (experience and personal views), the local health services involved, and the support of parents and local community actors. Such factors influence all educational provision, but can be exaggerated in the case of sexuality education because of educators' lack of training on the subject, the different degree of importance accorded to it, and persisting taboos on the subject of sex⁷⁷.

More specifically, domestic as well as international variability tends to be affected by:

Religious, cultural and geographical differences: In a number of EU countries religious observance is relatively high, and different churches and religious groups exercise significant influence over societal attitudes, especially in Southern and Eastern states.

⁷⁶ European Parliament (2013), p.7

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.11; WHO (2010)

As observed in our Polish and Italian case studies, national and local religious institutions may block or strongly influence the provision of sexuality education in schools, such that it only focuses on abstinence or family planning, or that it ignores LGBT+ and women's rights issues⁷⁸. They can also restrain the provision of, or education about, sexual health services, as still happens, for example, in Cyprus, Latvia and some Italian regions. This is not to say, however, that religious values and effective sexuality education are incompatible. In fact, recent studies provide a few interesting examples of good-quality sexuality education programmes implemented in religious schools across the EU⁷⁹.

Related to religious values are broader social and cultural norms, such as patriarchal ideas about the place of men and women in society, and their relationship with sex and violence. Further, the growth of migrant populations in countries such as France and Germany has coloured social and national debates and approaches to sexuality education, which explains why some populations are more inclined to pursue opt-out clauses than others⁸⁰.

Finally, in a number of countries, sexuality education is only provided in urban areas, where there may be more funding or personnel available to support teaching provisions and the topic of sex may appear less controversial⁸¹. This is particularly evident in sparsely populated countries such as Greece, where resources are concentrated in urban provinces.

Funding: Securing sufficient funding is a major obstacle to implementing good quality sexuality education, especially in the countries which have most recently joined the EU and whose GDP is lower than the former EU-15 countries.

Funds are needed to train educators, cover the expenses of external experts such as NGOs and health professionals, purchase teaching materials, and create a suitable, safe and confidential environment for the lessons. Following the 2008 global economic recession, educational funding has also suffered from cuts to the public sector as part of austerity measures. As a result, most EU countries have seen a decline in the financing of sexuality education.

4.2: A note on monitoring and evaluating sexuality education

Monitoring and determining the quality of sexuality education provision is challenging, even when comprehensive educational offering is compulsory.

Many national, government-funded reports rely on quantifiable measures such as the number of lessons and programmes delivered at a local, regional, and national level, or the number of students involved, occasionally including surveys that assess the participation and degree of satisfaction of the young beneficiaries⁸². Very often, and in line with research from academic institutions and international bodies, they use indicators

78 Parker et al., p.241

79 See, for instance, the successful educational review carried out in a Catholic primary school in Bristol, UK, described in Sex Education Forum & RSE Hub (2013), Relationship & Sex Education; a briefing for councillors.; RSE Hub (2013), Sex Education Self-Review Framework, accessible online at www.rsehub.org.uk.

80 European Parliament (2013)

81 Ibid.

82 See, for instance, UK Education and Training Inspectorate, 'Relationship and Sexuality Education in primary schools', available online at <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/relationships-and-sexuality-education>; French report 'Rapport relatif à l'éducation à la sexualité', available online at http://www.haut-conseil-egalite.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/hce_rapport_sur_l_education_a_la_sexualite_synthese_et_fiches_pratiques-2.pdf;

such as the decline in unwanted pregnancy and STI rates to evaluate the success of existing educational programmes. However, from these measurements we can hardly glean the impact of relational and anti-abuse components, which are acknowledged to be an essential part of comprehensive sexuality education. As we saw, many existing reports are also unable to evaluate sexuality education initiatives taking place outside formal school teaching, or to account for regional and local differences within the same country. Furthermore, not all evaluation processes of national educational programmes do explicitly state their benchmarks for measuring high-quality content⁸³.

On a brighter note, useful advice and materials regarding successful ways to monitor and measure the quality and impact of sexuality come from NGOs and experts' networks such as the UK-based Brook and Sex Education Forum. These include helpful definitions of age-appropriate, good quality sexuality education; self-review frameworks to assess individual school provisions; and case studies of local scrutiny reviews. Importantly, these documents clearly state that effective sexuality education should: "be inclusive in terms of gender, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, culture, age, religion or other life experience"; "include the development of skills to support healthy and safe relationships"; "nurture personal values based on mutual respect and care"; and "ensure that young people are well-informed about their rights"⁸⁴. These principles are used as a benchmark against which to evaluate existing educational programmes.

Building on this, in the Recommendations section, we will offer our own suggestions towards effective sexuality education monitoring and evaluation.

83 'See, for example, the French report 'Rapport relatif à l'éducation à la sexualité', available online at http://www.haut-conseil-egalite.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/hce_rapport_sur_l_education_a_la_sexualite_synthese_et_fiches_pratiques-2.pdf [last accessed on December 22, 2017].

84 'Sex Education Forum & RSE Hub (2013), Relationship & Sex Education; a briefing for councillors.; RSE Hub (2013), Sex Education Self-Review Framework, accessible online at www.rsehub.org.uk.

5. The impact of sexuality education on gender-based violence

5. The impact of sexuality education on gender-based violence

Lilia Giugni, Ellen Davis-Walker, Nathalie Greenfield

There is currently little quantifiable data to statistically link the provision of high-quality sexuality education with reduced rates of VAW across Member States, mostly because collection and analysis of data on VAW is complex and politically sensitive. To begin with, the potential of sexuality education to contribute to the fight against violence cannot be quantified without a systematic and thorough evaluation of existing levels of abusive behaviours. The creation of the European Institute for Gender Equality, founded in 2007 in part to gather data on VAW in Europe, is a welcome and important innovation, but further improvements must be made in order to overcome this core stumbling block.

Second, the broad impact of consent-focused, comprehensive sexuality education is best measured in the long-term, and in many Member States it is still hard to retrieve longitudinal data. Finally, it is important to understand that raising awareness on the nature and dynamics of gender-based abuse and empowering women to speak up is likely to at least temporarily increase the number of reported assaults and gender-motivated crimes. In fact, current research on VAW builds on the assumption that numerous cases of crimes against women still go unreported⁸⁵. This also explains why reported rates of domestic violence and sexual assault are comparatively higher in countries such as Sweden or the Netherlands, where students' satisfaction with sexuality education programmes is very high and women's empowerment is at the centre of national policy making, than, say, in Poland or Italy⁸⁶.

However, there are multiple alternative ways to understand the specific linkage between effective sexuality education and the prevention of gender-based violence. These include both unpacking this relationship qualitatively, and scrutinising available quantitative data in search for specific evidence regarding the prevention of practices and behaviours related to gender-based abuse. Here below are a few examples of such research practices.

5.1: Preventing violence by deconstructing gender norms

First, holistic approaches to sexuality education, which integrate psycho-social aspect of one's sex and relationship life, can be said to challenge pervasive gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms, recognised as a key-factor behind VAW. Importantly, recent qualitative

⁸⁵ See European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), Violence against women: an EU-wide survey (Vienna: FRA, 2014).

⁸⁶ Ibid.

research demonstrates how exploring aspects such as mutual and self-respect, bodily autonomy, reproductive rights and choices, positively influences the way in which young men and women perceive themselves and their relationships⁸⁷. This includes, for example, explicitly teaching women that their needs and desires are equal to those of men's, and inviting men to reflect on the risks associated with toxic masculinity⁸⁸, and oppressive gendered and racially-based relations of power⁸⁹.

Compelling evidence also proves that the ages of 11 to 14 are critical in shaping gender-related attitudes. As helpfully illustrated by US public health scholar Anna Kågesten, if gender stereotypes are not challenged in adolescence, the mental and sexual health of young people can be threatened, as these cultural norms and beliefs become cemented⁹⁰.

With this in mind, promoting positive attitudes toward gender equality and preventing gender-based violence should be formally recognised as objectives of nationwide sexuality education programmes across the EU. As above-mentioned, this is currently the case only in the Benelux and Scandinavian regions.

5.2: Preventing violence by challenging inaccurate or misleading information

Second, the formal introduction of holistic sexuality education in school curricula and the enhancement of high-quality contributions coming from the civil society can help reduce the impact of other, potentially harmful, sources of information available to young people, many of which reinforce the systemic inequalities underpinning VAW.

To begin with, the mainstream media plays an important part in how young people learn about sexual norms and expectations, from films which give young people an insight into sexual behaviour, to magazines which provide advice to young people on relationships⁹¹. Significantly, magazines and TV shows that teenagers cite as key triggers for peer discussions were rarely produced with an educational purpose. Much of the mainstream media is also coloured by patriarchal values, and does little to counter popular beliefs that are harmful to women, such as the notion that women are providers of sex for men or that boys should pursue macho-like behaviours⁹².

Yet recent developments in technology mean that it is to a variety of often inaccurate online sources that young people turn for information on sex today. In particular, online porn has been proven to play an increasing role in shaping young people's ideas about sex. A recent study conducted by Middlesex University (UK) found that over half of 11-16 year olds watch porn, and that around half of them believe it is a realistic depiction of sex⁹³. Given that 88.2% of the scenes in the most popular porn videos contain

87 For a few examples of recent research in the field, see the literature review provided by Anna Kågesten, Susannah Gibbs, Robert Wm Blum, Caroline Moreau, et al., 'Understanding Factors that Shape Gender Attitudes in Early Adolescence Globally: A Mixed-Methods Systematic Review', PLOS One, 11:6 (2016)". See also Peacock, D., & Levack, A. (2004). The men as partners program in south africa: Reaching men to end gender-based violence and promote sexual and reproductive health. International Journal of Men's Health, 3(3), 173.

88 The concept of toxic masculinity was developed in the fields of criminology and criminal psychology. It involves the "need to aggressively compete and dominate others and encompasses the most problematic proclivities in men" (Kupers, T. A. (2005), Toxic masculinity as a barrier to mental health treatment in prison. J. Clin. Psychol., 61: 713–724.

89 Kågesten et al., 2016

90 See, for example, Jones, Biddlecom, 2011; Osservatorio Nazionale Adolescenza, 2016.

91 Iris Brey, Sex and the Series, (Mionnay: Libellus, 2016) p.49.

92 Alloni et al, 2017.

93 Middlesex University, NSPCC, Children's Commissioner, Online Pornography: young people's experiences of seeing online porn and the impact that it has on them, (2016), available online at: <https://www.mdxc.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/223280/Online-Porno-

physical aggression against a woman, and that these videos focus almost entirely on male pleasure⁹⁴, we can see how exposure to mainstream porn may influence the sexual practices of young people in ways that are especially detrimental to women⁹⁵. Other equally worrying ways in which new technologies affect the sexual development of young people include, as discussed, cyber-abuse and cyber-bullying.

If introducing comprehensive sexuality education in schools appears as a powerful antidote to the harmful sexual norms and expectations presented by non-classroom sources, it is equally important that digital, user-friendly educational content is used aside more traditional teaching methods, in order to effectively challenge erroneous information.

5.3: Preventing violence by promoting inclusivity

Third, CSE, with its focus on equality, acceptance and inclusivity, is instrumental to improving the lives of LGBT+ people and other vulnerable groups. Ending abuse against any minority or historically discriminated-against group is of course an important social goal in itself. However, it is worth remembering once again that LGBT+ women, as well as those belonging to minority groups, are disproportionately more exposed to various forms of violence and abuse. In other words, fighting homophobia, transphobia and discrimination, and more generally, promoting inclusivity at all levels is a crucial step towards eliminating VAW.

Importantly, research constantly links holistic, gender-sensitive sexuality education to lower levels of discrimination against LGBT+ people. For example, the afore-mentioned 2013 FRA study reported that 60% of respondents in Poland (a country whose curricula do not cover issues of sexual orientation) reported being discriminated against because of being LGBT+⁹⁶. The corresponding figure in Sweden (where sexuality education touched upon sexual orientation, equality and consent) is 35%. Though it is clear that sexuality education alone cannot combat discrimination and violence (strong anti-discrimination laws and sensitised law-enforcement agencies and institutions are also key), it can promote tolerance and understanding of diversity. The neglect of LGBT+ and inclusivity topics in sexuality education sends a clear message regarding those whose health and happiness - or even existence - is considered valid.

Finally, as reported by national authorities such as the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, schools are often the principal location of hate crimes against LGBT+ people⁹⁷. This implies that they are also important arenas for the preventative work against harassment and hate crimes, and violence of all forms.

[graphy-and-Young-People-CYP-Version.pdf](#)> [accessed 21/06/2017], p.4; p.7

94 Ana Bridges et al., 'Aggression and Sexual Behaviour in Best-Selling Pornography Videos: A content analysis update', *Violence Against Women* 16:10 (2010) 1065-1085, p.1065; see also <<http://www.culturereframed.org/>> [accessed 21/06/2017]

95 Middlesex University, NSPCC, Children's Commissioner, Online Pornography: young people's experiences of seeing online porn and the impact that it has on them, 2016, available online at:

<https://www.mdx.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/223280/Online-Pornography-and-Young-People-CYP-Version.pdf> [accessed 21/06/2017], p.4; p.7. See also Ana Bridges et al., 'Aggression and Sexual Behaviour in Best-Selling Pornography Videos: A content analysis update', *Violence Against Women* 16:10 (2010) 1065-1085, p.1065.

96 Kulik, 2015; European Commission, 2017.

97 The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, About LGBT+ Youth, (2012), available online at:<www.mucf.se/sites/default/files/publikationer_uploads/wwwomungahbhtghalsaeng.pdf> [accessed 21/06/2017].

Conclusions

This paper has provided an overview of sexuality education in the EU, taking into account its content, methods, actors, evaluation, and potential impact. Five case studies looking at Sweden, Poland, Italy, Germany and the UK have highlighted the approaches of these different countries, and provided examples of good practice, as well as of sexuality education which is far from meeting the IPPF's or UNESCO's benchmarks for CSE.

As we showed, not only does comprehensive sexuality education - vis-à-vis, say, abstinence programmes - dramatically reduce teen pregnancy rates and levels of STDs⁹⁸, it also has the potential to challenge heteronormative, patriarchal values and norms, and thus to tackle the power dynamics that lie at the root of women's rights abuses. There is convincing evidence to suggest that compulsory sexuality education, complemented by civil society-led initiatives, can, and should, be part of the solution to eradicating gender-based violence, yet the EU-28 as a whole are far from this goal.

We also discussed a number of important obstacles that will continue to stall progress in this area unless change is pursued. First, we illustrated how the variation in social and cultural norms, including some forms of religious influence, can significantly impede Member States' ability to deliver holistic sexuality education across their territories, and, indeed, deliver any sexuality education at all. This is particularly acute with respect to LGBT+ inclusivity and other intersectional concerns⁹⁹. Second, we acknowledged that a second difficulty is economic, as greater financial commitment from both national and local governments and individual schools must be made for effective teaching provisions. We also pointed out that data collection is another key obstacle to the use of sexuality education to target violence.

98 See Kirby, 2008

99 UNESCO, p.34

There are, however, a number of promising measures being taken across the EU to promote comprehensive sexuality education, as well as to tackle violence against women. Most notable of these is the above-mentioned Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), a legally-binding instrument signed so far by 44 countries and ratified by 22, with a strong focus on prevention. More specifically, ratifying countries commit to take action to tackle misogyny and stereotypes about gender, improve training for professionals working with both victims and perpetrators of violence, and address gender equality through education. The Convention also encourages working with local, national and trans-national NGOs to achieve these goals, recognising their crucial work¹⁰⁰ .

The introduction of compulsory sexuality education in the United Kingdom from Fall 2019 is also encouraging news, as are the many grassroots initiatives taking place across the EU, which this paper has carefully described.

In summary, there is evidence that to promote concrete, widespread change to sexuality education provision in Europe, a constant and systematic collaboration between policy-makers, gender-based violence and health professionals, researchers, educators, activists, and other stakeholders is needed. At GenPol, we believe that change manifests itself through demand, negotiation and above all the search for innovative solutions to pressing real-world problems. The invaluable work of comprehensive sexuality education advocates, and all those practitioners who continue to experiment and exchange educational solutions in order to combat systemic inequality, is vital to its delivery. Our Recommendations Section, in the following pages, builds on these principles and summarises GenPol's approach to comprehensive sexuality education and gender-based violence prevention.

Recommendations

1- EU-wide provisions: active shift towards data-gathering and coordination of best practices

- Insufficient data collection across the EU inhibits an assessment of the magnitude, impact, and social context of gender-based violence, and of the preventive role of educational initiatives. As this paper has highlighted, the creation of the European Institute for Gender Equality represents an important step in the right direction. However, further measures should be taken, starting with increasing EU-level funding opportunities to support national data gathering efforts, through quantitative as well as qualitative methods. The Institute for Gender Equality should also more formally liaise with national universities and experts' networks to regularly produce and exchange data on gender-based violence. All databases should be made publicly available for consultation and translated into the most-widely spoken EU languages.
- The trans-national exchange of best practices, something that the EU has long encouraged in other policy domains, is also crucial to achieving widespread change across the continent. Existing initiatives such as the above-mentioned Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality provide an initial forum for decision-makers to exchange successful practices. Yet this is to be encouraged at multiple levels of governance. Not only should good practices in the field of education and VAW prevention be exchanged between governmental agencies, but also across schools, universities and civil society networks. To facilitate this coordination effort, an ad-hoc, EU-sponsored online platform should be created and made accessible to all practitioners in the field. This should include a multi-lingual best practices database, covering cases at a national, regional and local level, as well as the best teaching materials, in written, audio or video format. Ideally, all digital materials should be translated (or subtitled) in every official EU language.
- Many social issues – including education – remain a national competence in the EU, and thus outside of the EU's legislative remit. This means that providing uniformly high-quality sexuality education will be difficult to achieve. Once again, GenPol highlights

the importance of the Istanbul Convention, of its focus on prevention and education, and positive approach to the involvement of NGOs. Yet this legal instrument should be used to push for the development and implementation of EU-level provisions on this matter. These renewed advocacy efforts should be carried out by European level organisations such as the IPPF European Network and European Women Lobby, in close collaboration with national and local NGOs and civil society networks across the continent. The concerns expressed by young people, as the main target of sexuality education, should be given as much visibility as possible. Advocacy and the above-mentioned process of evidence-gathering should proceed simultaneously, and constantly inform each other.

2- Research-informed educational change: researching more in-depth the link between sexuality education and gender-based violence

- As discussed, assessing the linkage between the effective provision of sexuality education and the fight against gender-based violence is a statistical challenge. This is due not only to the lack of comprehensive, longitudinal data on VAW across the EU, but also to the fact that countries with little gender-sensitive education are often those where less crimes against women are reported, because survivors feel too intimidated to speak up. In this report, we unpacked this linkage qualitatively, illustrating how education can help prevent behaviours that are likely to give rise to violence in the long-term. We need, however, more fresh studies to help us identify and refine the best educational programmes towards violence-prevention. These include: in-depth (qualitative or mixed-method) case studies, investigating the impact of specific educational initiatives through semi-structured interviews, small surveys and focus groups with participants; experiment-based inquiries, measuring, for example, the increased understanding of sexual consent ethics after a given course; studies involving former sex offenders or VAW survivors as research participants, and reconstructing how they evaluate their sexuality education history.
- EU-level and national funding opportunities should be created to support research on this specific topic. EU bodies such as the Institute for Gender Equality should cooperate with national universities, academics' and experts' networks, as well as with international organisations such as IPPF European Network. They should aim to establish trans-national research teams and advisory panels, organise regular exchanges, fund scholarships, conferences, publications and other research costs.

3- The ideal sexuality education curriculum: national legislation, age, methodology, content and evaluation

- As above-mentioned, the WHO, UNESCO, and IPPF have all independently produced extensive frameworks that should ideally inform sexuality education teaching across the world, and so have trans-national NGOs and experts' groups. Building on these guidelines we recommend the following provisions:

Legislation: sexuality education should be made mandatory, without an 'opt out' clause.

Age: ideally, sexuality education should begin from birth, with parents communicating with their children from their early years on the human body, human relationships, and intimacy, and then continue at repeated intervals throughout primary and secondary education. As shown by the success of consent-based workshops across British universities, educational provisions for young adults beyond school age should also be reinforced, and involve student unions and local grassroots groups.

Methods and actors: sexuality education should be delivered as part of the school curriculum by specially trained adults, and include the intervention of external, specialised professionals from the fields of sexual health and gender-based violence prevention. External specialists could deliver the actual lessons, or be involved in the training of school teachers, depending on the national and local context. In all cases, though, educators should be suitably trained, motivated and supported, and their instruction should cover issues of confidentiality and safety. Coordination between schools, local authorities, NGOs and advocates networks, would also help reducing training costs, as it is demonstrated by successful German and Scandinavian practices. It is equally crucial to provide young beneficiaries with user-friendly but accurate media resources which can be accessed outside school hours.

Content and overall ethos: educational programmes should meet the aforesaid criteria of Comprehensive Sexuality Education as provided by IPPF and UNESCO, incorporating both physiological and relational aspects. They should be informed by a sex-positive ethos, but specifically incorporate the concept of sexual consent, and a VAW prevention focus. Curricula should take into account the needs of LGBT+ youth and all vulnerable and historically-discriminated against groups, and challenge violence-inducing gender stereotypes and toxic models of masculinity. This approach would see different aspects of sexuality education fall under the remit of different teachers, making it a multidisciplinary subject. Teaching materials and resources could be retrieved from national and international data-bases provided by international sexual health organisations.

- The efficacy of sexuality education programmes should be carefully monitored and evaluated against the benchmark provided by the afore-mentioned criteria. In collaboration with the NGOs and groups involved in local teaching initiatives, all schools should propose evaluation surveys to teachers, students and their families. Questionnaires should be designed to specifically assess the extent to which sexuality education teaches young beneficiaries to challenge existing gender stereotypes, develop self-confidence and assertive communication skills, and treat others with respect. Preferably, external partners would carry out every 2-5 years a review of schools' sexuality education programmes, using qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups. Local city councils and universities could help funding these efforts.

4- Inclusive educational provisions: addressing vulnerability, special needs and any forms of discrimination

- LGBT+ youth are entitled to a discrimination-free sexuality education setting, in and outside their schools. Inclusive sexuality education is also important for heterosexual, cisgender, and non-intersex youth, as questioning existing gender roles and the privileges attached to them helps promote tolerance and inclusivity. As suggested by LGBT+ rights and sexual health NGOs, this can be done through the inclusion of LGBT+ themes in classroom discussions and textbooks, the involvement of LGBT+ guest speakers, and the incorporation of LGBT+ related themes in subjects other than sexuality education. For schools to become environments that are safe for LGBT+-students, school teachers should also be trained to intervene in discriminatory situations.
- Sexuality education should touch upon issues of racially-based sexual assault, fetishism and sexual stereotyping. Teaching material should include voices and stories of non-white, religiously and culturally diverse people. Themes related to the intersections between religion and sexuality should be openly and respectfully discussed in a safe and non-judgemental manner, while holding to gender-equality principles.
- The sexuality of physically and mentally disabled people should be honestly and explicitly acknowledged in sexuality education teaching. As for educators working with students or young adults with disabilities, making no assumptions and creating a safe and comfortable atmosphere for a conversation that promotes intimacy is key. Sexuality education should also include a detailed emphasis on the role of consent in physical and sexual interactions with people with different forms of disability.
- Strategies to support survivors of sexual assault and other traumas must be incorporated in sexuality education provisions. Schools should team up with local hospitals, and, whenever available, rape crisis centres and mental health charities, to establish collaborations and referral systems. Sexuality education curricula should treat in an age-appropriate manner the topic of abuse and trauma, challenging victim-blaming attitudes and encouraging survivors to feel safe in the classroom setting. It should also be clearly recognised that assault and trauma may certainly impact one's sexuality, but that survivors, if they so wish, can gradually reclaim their sexual lives, and should be supported throughout this process.

5- New forms of gender-based violence: tackling online abuse through effective sexuality education

- In order to tackle cyber bullying and online sexual abuse, many Member States need new laws to protect victims of violence and enable safer, human rights focused digital interactions. Nevertheless, sexuality education programmes can contribute by helping students understand existing laws and explicitly teaching them about boundaries and rights in the digital world. Effective lessons can be delivered in collaboration with local police authorities, rape crisis centres and anti-digital-violence activists. These organisations can also offer effective one-off training to school-teachers and parents, who often face the challenge to keep up with fast-changing new technologies.

- In particular, sexuality education programmes need to deal with issues like consent and confidentiality in the context of email exchanges, online forums and social networks. Young internet users also need to be carefully taught the lack of control they have in the online distribution of data, as well as the psychological trauma that follows the online abuse.

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