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Sexual Education in Europe  
between Evidence and Ideology

edited by Miłosz Hodun,  
Michał Sawicki, Michał Tęcza



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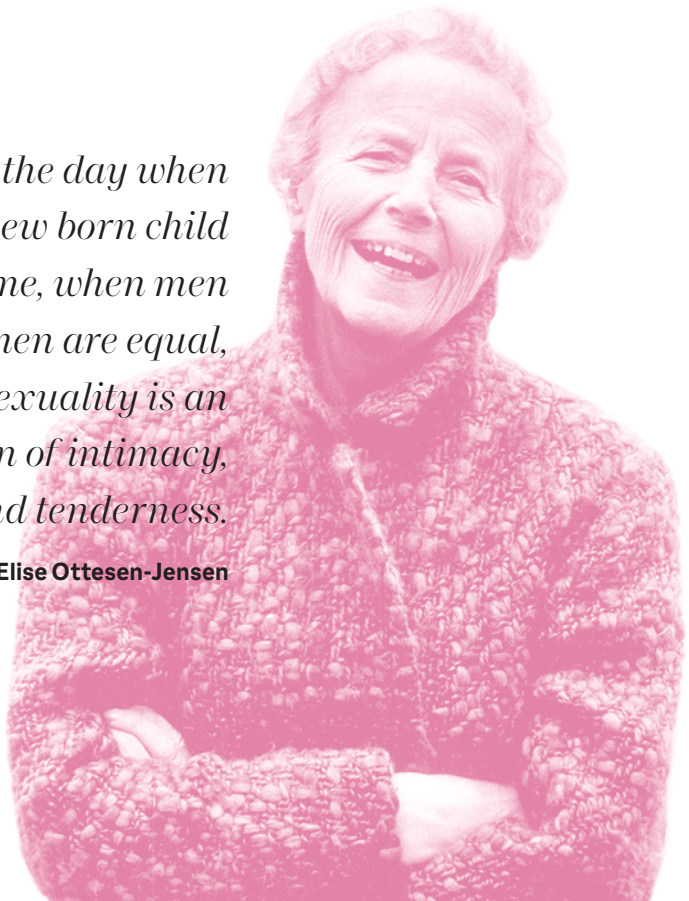
*Sweden introduced, being the first country in the world to do so, compulsory sexuality education in 1955. This event was never controversial domestically, even though at that time it had attracted some international attention. How can the fact that Swedish sexuality education keeps an unquestioned position in the country's public opinion be explained from a historical perspective? The simple answer would be that it is about creating health, and it is a matter of building a society that takes into account both — the needs of an individual and the society itself.*

**from chapter 1**



*I dream of the day when  
every new born child  
is welcome, when men  
and women are equal,  
and when sexuality is an  
expression of intimacy,  
joy and tenderness.*

**Elise Ottesen-Jensen**



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## Publishers

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## Introduction

by the Editors

It is rare when parents and politicians are so determined to influence school curriculum. In mature, western democracies the curricula are created by experts; they are the result of consensus on what young people should know to safely function in society, to develop and positively influence their environment. School is meant to provide information and skills based on accurate knowledge and experience. Adjustments to curricula happen and are absolutely natural in a pluralistic society, especially the one existing in the ever-changing world such as ours, where science develops and information accumulates at unparalleled speed. It is, however, extremely uncommon to see public opinion moved by large-scale campaigns — fueled by public and private funds — to erase an entire subject from public schooling.

This is exactly what is happening with sexual education. In many parts of Europe, the fight against sexual education became a part of an ideological war. The attacks against it are not based on science, only opinions and beliefs. Its opponents aim to completely ignore the sexual education's area of interest, which is equipping people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to realise their health, well-being and dignity; or to exchange scientific and holistic approach

for a completely insufficient prosthesis, heavily steeped in ideology and accepted by political and religious leaders. The fate of sexual education is one of a kind. Such movement against other subjects, for example, physics or geography, would be unimaginable. Although, we can also find examples in these areas. Flat Earth theories are gaining supporters, and demand removing globes from schools... Comparing flat-earthers with opponents of evidence-based sexual education can seem inappropriate or even shocking at first. But, in the end, the aim of both groups boils down to the same thing — rejecting knowledge in favour of irresponsible and destructive beliefs. Fanatical campaigns presenting sexual education as the very source of adolescent misfortune and educators as potential paedophiles is not much different from spreading conspiracy theories such as QAnon<sup>1</sup>. Both phenomena are dangerous for individuals and society. Liberal democracies should stand against falsehoods and manipulation regarding factual sexual education with the same determination as they should fight fake news and disinformation as a whole.

The positive influence of sexual education is undeniable. It is the most effective form of protecting children from sexual violence, as it makes them more assertive and positively affects their psychosexual development. It helps build their self-confidence. It also serves as an answer to dangers stemming from technological development, such as pornography, sexting and cyberstalking. Conducted properly, factual sexual education correlates with an increase in tolerance and respect for other people's boundaries.

Despite it, many politicians, cynically and ignoring long-term consequences, have been using the topic of sexual education in a ruthless popularity race and thoughtlessly exploiting it for the needs of their electoral projects. Any topic touching upon the human body and including the word "sex" is abused

## 6

<sup>1</sup> QAnon is a far-right conspiracy theory alleging that a cabal of Satan-worshipping cannibalistic pedophiles is running a global child sex-trafficking ring and plotting against Donald Trump.



by populists. A number of right-wing, quasi-authoritarian governments in Europe have employed anti-gender discourse<sup>2</sup>, characterised by opposition to women rights, minority rights, reproductive rights, etc. In Romania, for example, in 2020 group of MPs known as the Parliamentary Prayer Group, succeeded in significantly limiting a progressive bill on making sexual education mandatory in schools, renaming it “health education”<sup>3</sup>. Similar tendencies are also noticeable in the so-called Old Europe countries, for example, Austria<sup>4</sup>.

However, the current situation in Poland, where ultra-conservative activists have threatened educators with prison sentences, currently symbolises the ideologisation of education across Europe. It is because of this situation in Poland that Projekt: Polska Foundation together with Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom ran in 2019–2020 a series of sexual education projects. As a part of the “EdNet” project, study visits took place in Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn. Educators, sexologists and public policy experts from Warsaw exchanged their experiences with representatives from Latvian ‘Papardes zied’ Association and Estonian Sexual Health Association, as well as regional, national and European politicians. As a result, flexible cooperation of organisations on the eastern and southern coast of the Baltic Sea has been established. It will be used to coordinate activities that aim to promote factual sexual education and exchange of information about the activities of its opponents. An international course in the use of modern online tools in sexual education has been a part of “Building a European network of minority rights activists, sexual education experts and policy-makers to protect LGBTI rights” project. It aimed to support educators from Western and Southern Europe during the difficult time of lockdown and provide necessary skills to those in countries where sexual education based on WHO standards can be provided only outside of schools.



- 2 Köttig, M., Bitzan, R., Pető, A. (Eds) (2017). *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan
- 3 Turp-Balazs, C. (2020, June 23). Romania's conservatives take an axe to gender equality and sex education. *Emerging Europe*. Retrieved from [www.emerging-europe.com, bit.ly/3cfcAYO](http://www.emerging-europe.com, bit.ly/3cfcAYO)
- 4 Mayer, S. (2016). *Conservatism gone populist: The discourse on 'gender-ideology' in Austria*. Presentation at ECPR General Conference Charles University in Prague. Retrieved from [www.ecpr.eu, bit.ly/3pf3oHM](http://www.ecpr.eu, bit.ly/3pf3oHM)

The project also included two fact-finding missions to Sweden. Polish experts had an opportunity to observe the work of representatives from the most important European NGOs devoted to minority and reproductive rights — RFSU and RFSL<sup>5</sup>. Additionally, to fulfil one of the project goals, Polish experts have analysed in detail — during discussions with representatives from Amnesty International, “Fatta!” group<sup>6</sup>, liberal Members of Parliament and local authorities — implementation process of Swedish “consent law”<sup>7</sup>.

Both projects included a number of courses on modern sexual education for Polish teachers, youth workers and other professionals, who are in constant contact with adolescents. Dozens of participants, especially from small towns, are now using the knowledge and skills they gained in their everyday work. For most, taking part in the project was the only chance they had to obtain or further (update) their qualifications in sexual education, as Polish state not only does not provide such courses but actively opposes the transfer of knowledge from specialised NGOs to state employees.

This publication is the final result of the aforementioned projects. Its goal is to explain the main problems and challenges of sexual education in Europe to those unfamiliar with it. The publication helps understand why public, compulsory and knowledge-based sexual education is so important for any modern society. It provides factual arguments in discussion with proponents of erasing sexual education from curricula and points out the most important topics concerning human sexuality that have significant consequences for society. It presents benefits of introducing sexual education



5 The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Rights (Swedish: *Riksförbundet för homosexuellas, bisexuellas, transpersoners och queeras rättigheter*, RFSL) was founded in 1950 and is one of the oldest LGBT+ organisations in the world. *Read more* about RFSL history: [www.rfsl.se, bit.ly/39bLGPK](http://www.rfsl.se/bit.ly/39bLGPK) *Read more* about RFSU in Chapter 1.

6 Fatta (Swedish: *Get it*) is a social movement organised by non-profit networks Femtastic and Crossing Boarders that primarily focuses on fighting sexual violence and has successfully pushed for sexual consent legislation ([www.fatta.nu](http://www.fatta.nu)).

7 Swedish consent law (*Samtyckeslagen*) says that sex without consent is rape, even when there are no threats or force involved. In other words, it says that the lack of consent is enough to constitute a crime. The law entered into force on July 1, 2018.

in schools early and (also economic) costs of ignoring it by the authorities.

This publication is a result of cooperation between experts not only representing various areas, such as psychology, sexology, pedagogy, linguistics, political science and law, but also coming from various parts of Europe – from Sweden to Portugal. The result lets readers observe sexual education through many perspectives, facilitating a complete understanding of the subject matter.

Each chapter is devoted to a key question and additionally introduces knowledge from the area of sexology in a socio-political context. The first two chapters analyse two completely different paths that can be taken by governments of the given countries. On the one hand, Jack Lukkerz presents how Sweden became a worldwide leader in effective sexual education, which is followed by liberal and progressive governments around the world. “Sex ed in Sweden has always been seen as a valuable element in building a stable and healthy society, and as this short review shows, sexuality education in a broader perspective has been part of a Swedish society for at least the last 100 years”. It evolved in the spirit of humanism, in a favourable political atmosphere and without religious brakes, always considering the development of individuals and society.

On the other hand, Miłosz Hodun shows what happens when right-wing populists are in power, and the sexual education curriculum is entirely dictated by the Church and its allies in Parliament. “The ideologisation of the public space in Poland (...) has given the ruling party the tools to impose their values on the whole society. In an ideologised state there is no room for discussion or arguments, and science becomes just one of the possible opinions. Sex education, too, has fallen victim to ideologisation, being stripped of content developed

by authorities on medicine or psychology, and supplemented with unprovable claims, statements and ideas of the binding doctrine”, he writes. Poland serves as an example of a country where the limited successes in creating sexual education were completely destroyed. Benefits of factual sexual education, such as help in fighting against the destructive phenomenon of paedophilia, were sacrificed for current political infighting.

And there are multiple benefits of sexual education. Michał Sawicki and Michał Tęcza analysed them. The two seasoned educators bring our attention to the negative consequences stemming from the lack of reliable resources about sexuality. Tabooisation of sex, yielding under the pressure of stereotypical gender roles in sex, distorted body image, unwanted pregnancies, increase in sexually transmitted infections, pornography addiction... These are just a few examples from the long list of problems. Each of them means suffering for an individual, which seems obvious, but a significant number of them also have severe consequences for families or society itself. The cost of negligence in sexual education is enormous and none of the countries can afford it. A good education helps decrease the number of sexual assaults, and limit the funding needed in, for example, pediatric psychiatry, which in many countries is grossly underfunded, or treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, which could be reduced through proper prevention in sexual health. The treatment for HIV-positive patients is still very expensive – for example, in Germany, the cost per patient per year is over EUR 20.000. And this is just a tip of the iceberg...

In another article, the authors prove that good sexual education must react to the current challenges. Because of societal changes and technological progress, educators and sexologists are confronted with new problems every day. Some of them were unknown and not even named a few years

ago. Phenomena such as “sexting”, “grooming” or “chemsex” are becoming more widespread, also affecting children and adolescents. Consequently, investing in effective sexual education means including funds for training educators and creating stable cooperation between teachers and psychologists, doctors, practitioners and researchers. Otherwise, sexual education could become “history of sexuality”, rather useless when it comes to reaching its goals. Then, the return on investment will be unsatisfactory, providing additional arguments for opponents of factual education.

Among challenges of modern sexual education is also the issue of language. As Nelson Mandela once said, “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart”. Language is the main tool in sexual education; it lets us reach the goal of teaching respect towards others. Modern sexual education adopts methodology which puts individuals and their needs at the very centre. It embraces language that is free from stereotypes, all forms of discrimination, and negative messages. The authors of the chapter discussing language, Sergio Marín Zapata and Bárbara L. Monllor Taltavull point out that “language is important to gender equality and gender rights. There is evidence that countries with gendered languages face more gender inequality than those with gender-neutral ones and, similarly, hyper-gendered languages may struggle more with inclusive speech than the rest”. They go on to add that policymakers must understand the need for generalising language and gender to achieve the influence of wider social structures.

The last chapter, by Miguel Areosa Feio, shows, taking Portugal as an example, how important are the institutional bases that allow continuous work under any political circumstances. According to Feio, sexual education is among the subjects that

are most vulnerable to attacks from populists. He suggests that such legal and organisational frameworks should be created that will make it impossible to destroy sexual education's achievements through politically-inspired budget cuts. He points out the need to introduce proper legislation, divide roles among levels of governance (decentralisation) and continuously evaluate the process. He highlights the role of the organisation of the scientific and technical community, specialists in the field of sexual and reproductive health in preparing teachers. He also stresses the need to cooperate with NGOs.

This publication is a mini-guide through contemporary sexual education in Europe. It helps the reader understand what are the greatest challenges it faces, where they come from and what they can result in. It also points out crucial, burning issues – existing and possible – in the essential and geographical meaning. It identifies key actors influencing the system. And it presents the best and the worst practices based on experiences from many European countries... The reader, once they finish, will understand that there is no singular sexual education – there are many, varied sexual educations. They should also have no doubt what GOOD SEX ED is, and why it is worth promoting and fighting for.

Enjoy your read!

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# 1

## A Supplement to a Good Life. Sexuality education in Sweden

by Jack Lukkerz

Sweden introduced, being the first country in the world to do so, compulsory sexuality education in 1955<sup>1</sup>. This event was never controversial domestically, even though at that time it had attracted some international attention. How can the fact that Swedish sexuality education keeps an unquestioned position in the country's public opinion be explained from a historical perspective? The simple answer would be that it is about creating health, and it is a matter of building a society that takes into account both — the needs of an individual and the society itself.

When Swedish sexuality education was introduced, the discussion at that time was mainly characterised by the idea that sex ed should distance itself from an overly scientific view on sexuality and society's moralisation, principally focusing on abstinence and risks<sup>2</sup>. It was suggested that sexuality itself has an intrinsic value for the human being, that it constitutes a supplement to a good life and well-being of an individual. The matter could be summed up, frankly speaking, by saying that when an individual is doing well, the society will also do well.

The need to promote a positive outlook on sexuality, the “good” type of sexuality, with desire and pleasure in the forefront, has sprung from the perspective of promotion and has

1 Myndigheten för skolutveckling (2005). *Hela livet. 50 år med sex- och samlevnadsundervisning*

2 Bäckman, M. (2003). *Kön och känsla. Samlevnadsundervisning och ungdomars tankar om sexualitet*. Stockholm: Makadam förlag



been a recurring theme over the decades. Nevertheless, it has not been an easy journey. The notion of good sexuality, based on pleasure, has struggled and still struggles for its *raison d'être*. Recent research suggests that the risk perspective and perhaps the “simpler”, factual, aspects of the content of sex ed such as contraception and sexually transmitted infections still dominate<sup>3</sup>. Yet, the idea of the good sexuality, made visible as a concept by the researcher Michelle Fine in the 1980s, has never really made an impact on the Swedish perspective<sup>4</sup>.

Additionally, there still exist an uneven allocation of sexual responsibilities in teaching sex ed in Swedish public schools, where girls and young women, young LGBTQ people and young people with norm-breaking functionality are given greater responsibility to avoid risks. Their sexuality is examined to a greater degree than, for example, the one of boys and young men. This aspect has never been examined to any noticeable degree in Swedish research, although it is a fact that I have identified in my research on sexuality education aimed at young people with intellectual disabilities<sup>5</sup>. The findings show that sexuality among youth with intellectual disabilities (ID) is largely seen as problematic and risky, while pleasurable aspects are made invisible. Young people with ID are expected to take responsibility for possible risks in their surroundings. Stereotypes about gender and sexual expression are significant, while non-heterosexual youth with ID are acknowledged by professionals but mostly seen as a challenge to the daily work. The professionals also express a lack of education and practical experience regarding sex ed<sup>6</sup>.

### The so-called “Sexual Issue”

Swedish society’s perception of the need for sex ed has its roots back in the 18th century’s widespread prevalence of sexually transmitted infections, at that time described as venereal

3 Löfgren-Mårtenson, L. (2011). “I Want to Do it Right!” A Pilot Study of Swedish Sex Education and Young People with Intellectual Disabilities. *Sexuality and Disability* 30(2), 209–225

4 Fine, M., McClelland, S. I. (2006). Sexuality Education and Desire: Still Missing after All These Years. *Harvard Educational Review*; Fall 2006; 76, 3

5 Lukkerz, J. (2014). *En tom arena. Gymnasiesärskole- och habiliteringspersonals perspektiv på sex- och samlevnadsundervisning*. Malmö Högskola: licentiatavhandling

6 *Ibid*

diseases, a big issue prevalent mainly among women within the field of transactional sex in urban areas such as Stockholm. The question of preventing sexually transmitted diseases, in parallel with avoiding unwanted pregnancies, plays even in our days an important role in the interpretation of the challenges for sex ed to confront. In other words, the medical science has dominated and to a certain degree still plays a crucial role related to the so-called “sexual issue”, a concept used as a paraphrase in Sweden in the old days. Nevertheless, at least during the second half of the 19th century, sexuality education also became a matter of a broader scope – the general public’s health work<sup>7</sup>. Sex ed became a part of the very idea of public education, with emphasis on the need for education, upbringing and enlightenment of a wider population, with the assumption that health can be planned and taught. As Bäckman points out, early on, two main traces of Swedish public health work emerged, which included the future subject of sex ed<sup>8</sup>. Firstly, a risk focus that aimed to draw attention to the risks with an overly permissive sexual desire, secondly the desire to highlight and acknowledge this very desire as a part of human sexuality<sup>9</sup>. These two tracks run like a common thread all the way into our days. It has to be kept in mind that medical science was, as mentioned before, the predominant force in interpreting and analysing human sexuality. In the latter part of the 19th century, concepts of moderation and self-control were advocated as ideals and followed – almost literally – a married couple, at the time when marriage was a prerequisite for sanctioned sexuality, all the way into bed<sup>10</sup>.

However, the pleasure aspect in human sexuality was already included in the discussion, in Sweden, during at least the latter part of the 19th century, at that time packaged as a rights issue. Workers, an emerging class in Swedish society, were considered to be deprived of possibilities to enjoy the

7 *Kön och känsla 2003*

8 *Ibid*

9 *Ibid*

10 *Ibid*. Sandström, B. (1995). *Ungdomssexualitet som undervisningsämne och forskningsområde*. Stockholm: Hälsohögskolan

good aspects of sexuality without suffering from further poverty resulting from having too many children. Sexuality has, at that time, also become a political issue, mainly within the socialist and liberal political sphere in Sweden. During the first decades of the 20th century, the sexual issue was pursued mainly by female doctors. The teaching on sexuality was generally referred to as “sexual hygiene” and aimed to discourage premature sexual life, as well as to inform about reproduction and sexually transmitted infections. Young women became the subject of teaching. The explanation was that young women are the ones who have to deal with the consequences of boys’ and men’s relentless sex drive. The women would learn to relate to the man’s desires and sexuality without having acknowledged sexuality of their own. Boys, on the other hand, should not be enlightened. Educating in sex was considered to entail the risk of a premature awakening of desire. Simply, you should never wake the sleeping bear, it was said<sup>11</sup>.

This is a tendency that remains in Sweden even in our days; for example, in the form of gender-segregated groups – the so-called girl and boy groups, in sexuality education. An evaluation published around the turn of the last millennium highlighted the risk of such procedures<sup>12</sup>. It was argued that it may appear that girls were in greater need of knowledge and that boys’ sexuality will be made invisible. It remains an important reminder to scrutinise the structures of sex ed, to avoid normative and gender-biased procedures.

## A Worldwide Leader

Swedish sexuality education cannot be described without mentioning RFSU<sup>13</sup>, the Swedish Association for Sexual Education. The organisation took shape in 1933, during a time when the contraceptive law, which was first abolished in 1938, prohibited information about contraceptives. During that time,

17  
Jack Lukkerz  
A Supplement  
to a Good Life.  
Sexuality education  
in Sweden

11 *Ibid*

12 Nilsson, A., Sandström, B. (2001). *Till rektor: "Min uppgift är att knyta iop det". Om kvalitetsgranskningen av tre områden: mobbing och annan kränkande behandling, undervisningen om sexualitet och samlevnad samt tobak, alkohol och narkotika.* Stockholm: Skolverket

13 [www.RFSU.se](http://www.RFSU.se)

the idea that knowledge and enlightenment would counteract the widespread ignorance regarding the sexual issue grew. It was said that a double effect could be reached. On one hand, sex ed would contribute to a general increase in knowledge among the public, and on the other hand, sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies would be reduced.

Elise Ottesen-Jensen, known as Ottar to the Swedish public at that time, became a bit of a celebrity, travelling around the country, giving lectures on the sexual issue<sup>14</sup>. After her lectures, she often offered to women in the audience to try out diaphragms, in some hidden nook nearby. She also became good at parrying the risks of getting arrested by police due to her educational work for as long as the prohibition laws were in force. RFSU has conducted sexuality education and often challenged a prevailing sexual morality for almost 90 years now and today is one of the leading actors in Swedish sex education. The organisation produces teaching materials and also conducts political advocacy work, an important part of a broader political work that clearly has contributed to the current state of legislation on sexuality in Sweden.

### Folkhem, Folkbildning, Folkhälsa

Back in the 1930s, the issue of sexuality became for the first time in history a discussion in the Swedish parliament, the Riksdag<sup>15</sup>. The new state of Sweden oriented towards "folkhem, folkbildning, folkhälsa", translated from Swedish as people's home, people's education and people's health (public health), would at the same time facilitate and control sexuality, reproduction, health and well-being. Sexuality became a part of the engineering art that characterised Sweden at the time, with the notion of eliminating poverty and ill health.

Public school was identified as an institution of weight and an actor of importance in implementing the idea of the

14 Lennerhed, L. (2002). *Sex i folkhemmet. RFSUs tidiga historia. Hedemora/Uppsala: Gidlunds förlag.* Thorgren, G. (2011). *Ottar och kärleken.* Stockholm: Norstedts

15 *Kön och känsla 2003 Ibid*

“folkhem”, which originally related to facilitation of population growth but later became known as the promotion of individual health and well-being. Sexuality became an increasingly political issue in Sweden, with ideas such as the good life and the new human being, a way of putting what Foucault describes as biopolitics into practice<sup>16</sup>. According to Foucault, however, there is no clear or cohesive political mobilisation. Rather, it is an interconnection of science and politics with issues such as reproduction and sexuality, issues that in previous generations were not considered as political. Specifically, it was about the advent of various kinds of regulations regarding human reproduction and sexual health. However, as Swedish research shows, the political development leading up to the introduction of compulsory sexuality education in 1955 is not only about the state’s efforts to exercise power and control. Actual health problems have also contributed to sexuality becoming a political issue.

### More Critical Eyes

Today, the consequence of this process is that sexuality education is seen as a way to change attitudes and individuals’ behaviours. Thus, it is not only a matter of knowledge but also a question of the effects of knowledge on human life and actions. The fact that the public school was given the task of dealing with the sexual issue within the framework of sexuality education should be seen as a way for the state to built-in a balance and counterbalance to the market forces. At the time when the mass media has gained an increasingly important role in Swedish society, the need for nuances and alternative narratives was considered important<sup>17</sup>.

The first teacher’s guide on sex ed, which was published ten years before the compulsory sexuality education was implemented, emphasised abstinence while at the same time

making young people's sexuality visible as an individual phenomenon. During the first decades of the compulsory sex ed in Sweden, the male desire was highlighted as especially strong and love was painted as a necessary component of human sexuality. The critique of an outdated and overly moralising view led to the normalisation of both – premarital relationships and values issues, coming into focus during the 1970s. During that decade, gender roles were looked on with more critical eyes and for the first time – a tolerant attitude. In parallel, classical issues of reproduction and sexually transmitted diseases, psychological and social aspects emerged as a part of sex ed, with ethics becoming a permanent element of sex ed<sup>18</sup>.

Sweden introduced legislation on free abortion in 1975<sup>19</sup> and in the light of this reform, in parallel with the introduction of the contraceptive pill the decade before, sexuality education then reflected a view of sexuality as a matter of awareness and planning. Sexuality became decoupled from childbirth, while the view on sexuality became more open and permissive; it was looked upon as a common project for a relationship based on love. Nothing should be left to chance nor would old ideals and norms prevail and limit the individual and the relationship. Instead, dialogue and understanding were emphasised.

After the 1970s, a more restrictive view emphasising restraint has gained ground, probably due to reasons such as HIV and AIDS. During the 1990s, public school has been given a clearer task in the updated curriculum on sex ed, while at the same time the content, unfortunately, has become vaguer. It seems that the restrictive view on sexuality has come to stay, or perhaps joined a more multifaceted view on sexuality that started to gain ground. The subject of sex ed, from then on, became nothing more than an important issue, among others, to be compared to the knowledge of traffic rules or drug prevention.

18 *Ibid*

19 Bergman, Y. (2003). *Polenaffären*. In S. Andersson & S. Sjö Dahl (Eds). *Sex. En politisk historia*. Göteborg: Alfabet

## 100 Years

Swedish sexuality education of today can be considered as focusing on acceptance and visibility of different aspects of sexual expressions and identities and the complexity and risks of sex in a new, digital, age in a multicultural society. Nowadays, Swedish laws include gender-neutral marriage, opportunities for adoption for same-sex couples and also updated legislation regarding transgender care. Today, sex ed is largely characterised by a variety of issues, and most recently also includes questions of honour-related violence and oppression, the aspect of sexual consent, which is a legal requirement for sex in Sweden<sup>20</sup>, as well as pornography, which is considered by some as conveying skewed norms and ideals regarding body, gender and sexuality<sup>21</sup>. Sex ed must also be included in all teaching subjects, not just be a part of biology or natural science subjects. Sexuality education has its shortcomings and there is plenty of work left to do, not least regarding aspects of pleasure, desire and the good sexuality. But it is, so far, there to stay.

Swedish sex ed stands in the middle of a process that cannot be fully overviewed yet. Research studies are underway, examining both the content of Swedish sexuality education and how its current shape and content has been affected from a historical perspective. Beginning with the autumn term, in 2021, Sweden will introduce compulsory courses for all pedagogy students in teaching the subject of sexuality education. This has been an issue on the political agenda for many years, and now the Swedish government has made its final decision<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore, a new curriculum is on the way, with a clearer emphasis on relations and relationships in the subject of sex ed. There is also a proposal to rename the subject of sex ed to the “area of knowledge on sexuality and relationships”, giving it breadth and space for including more aspects and, hopefully, keeping it up to date with future societal development.

20 Till rektor. "Min uppgift är att knyta iop det" (2001)

21 *Ibid*

22 Regeringskansliet (2020). *Ökad kompetens om neuropsykiatriska svårigheter och sex och samlevnad i lärarutbildningarna*

As a concluding reflection, today the subject of sex ed is well established in Sweden and is not an issue that public opinion would question. Sexuality education has been characterised by ambiguity regarding its content — many teachers have felt lost and unfortunately are also left to their own devices when it comes to teaching the subject. Therefore, it should be welcomed that the decision is made, and all pedagogy students will get assistance in teaching the subject of sexuality education.

Sex ed has always been seen as a valuable element in building a stable and healthy society, and as this short review shows, sexuality education in a broader perspective has been a part of Swedish society for at least the last 100 years. Religion has never had such strong position in society that would enable it to challenge, perhaps even stronger, position of the sexuality education, as it has been seen as a crucial part of Sweden's public health work. Even the largest Swedish religious community, the Church of Sweden, the former state church, plays today a significant role in strengthening the public discussion on sexuality and relationships, if looked at from a broad perspective.

### Work Must Continue

At the same time, Sweden is witnessing a rise of political forces that question women's rights or same-sex relationships, just like many other western countries do, as described by Applebaum<sup>23</sup>. Reproduction issues are linked to the nation's survival in times of migration and social challenges, while the other current pointed out by Bäckman<sup>24</sup>, enjoyment and lust, is seen, at least by some, as a demoralising force in need of restraint. The work must continue, both scientifically and practically, and we must observe further development of society regarding sexual politics and view on human sexuality.

23 Applebaum, A. (2020). *Twilight of Democracy. The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group

24 *Kön och känsla* 2003



We also need to strengthen cooperation with other countries, such as neighbouring countries in the former East Bloc. We have a lot to learn from each other's experiences, and our common base of knowledge is an invaluable asset for the future. For example, Poland and Sweden are the two neighbouring countries that have many differences but also a lot of similarities and similar experiences. As an example, during the 1960s, when abortion was banned in Sweden, Swedish women travelled to Poland to perform abortions as the country had much more liberal legislation on abortion. Now, the situation is the other way around. The issue of abortion goes hand in hand with issues such as LGBTQ rights and sexuality education in public schools, and they should be studied as a whole. Together, these matters tell us something about the ambitions of current political aspirations and goals in a future society. Sexuality and politics are the two sides of the same coin. The question that remains is: what kind of society (sexually) do we want to live in?

# 2

## Full Control of Our Bodies Sexual Education in an Ideologised State

by Miłosz Hodun

As I write these words, Poland is being rocked by the biggest demonstrations in years. Polish women and men have taken it to the streets in nearly 500 towns and cities. In the midst of the pandemic, downtown Warsaw was brought to a standstill by a crowd of nearly 150.000 people. Demonstrators have been chanting slogans targeted against the right-wing populist PiS (Law and Justice) party and its branches, including the government, the politicised Constitutional Tribunal, ultraconservative pressure groups, and against the Catholic church. The vernacular of the street has radicalised and become more vulgar than ever before, exposing the feeling of powerlessness in the face of authorities who think that they have the right to make decisions on every aspect of citizens' lives, including decisions regarding their own bodies. Never before have we seen such unequivocal social display of discontent with the church, which until recently was considered untouchable in Poland, a status upheld by the church's merits in the times of communism and by the authority of John Paul II. This time, however, neither the rhetoric of moral superiority nor the majesty of hundreds of Pope's monuments have prevented the outraged demonstrators from verbally attacking the hierarchy or even entering churches during a celebration of masses.

The ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal on abortion was the last straw that broke the camel's back. Julia Przyłębska, who chairs the Tribunal as the ruling party assignee and is an acquaintance of Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of the Polish right-wing party, along with other members of the Tribunal, in which 11 out of 12 have been nominated by PiS, has decided to effectively ban abortions in Poland altogether. Even before the ruling, Poland had had one of the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe. There were approximately 1.100 legal abortions annually, however, the number of abortions performed in the so-called abortion underground or abroad is estimated at well over 100.000 annually. Following the Tribunal's ruling, the number of legal abortions will be cut by 98%, which means that almost none will be performed. Polish women will be deprived of their right to make their own decisions even in the most dramatic situations. They will be left with an injunction.

The mass protests which rippled through Poland in October and November 2020 were provoked directly by the ruling on abortion, but ended up uniting all people fighting for human rights and liberty in the broad sense of the term, including the right to education and freedom from ideology. One of the demonstrators' recurring demands was the introduction of sex education. Under Polish law, abortion and sex education are closely intertwined: it was the anti-abortion law of 1993 that ordered the introduction of sex education to schools<sup>1</sup>. Young people, high school and college students, who were the majority of demonstrators, carried hand-made banners that read: "Education Protects", "Bible won't substitute for sex education", "We have the right to know #sexed", "Sex education, not parish education"... How is it possible that in 2020 young people in Central Europe have to take it to the streets in desperation to ask authorities to give them access to the basic

1 Art. 4.1 of Law on Family Planning, Human Embryo Protection and Conditions of Permissibility of Abortion Act of January 7, 1993. Unofficial English translation available at [https://www.reproductiverights.org/sites/default/files/documents/Polish%20abortion%20act--English%20translation.pdf?\\_ga=2.23023867.1556819338.1609332472-1426495471.1609332472](https://www.reproductiverights.org/sites/default/files/documents/Polish%20abortion%20act--English%20translation.pdf?_ga=2.23023867.1556819338.1609332472-1426495471.1609332472)

knowledge, a thing that seems to be a civilisation's standard with proven positive social impact?

### Sex Education in Poland. Facts

Polish schools never really had proper sex education. Even though the subject was on the curriculum in communist times, in 1973<sup>2</sup>, it was never up to standards and did not leave positive impressions in the collective memory of the public. After the peaceful revolution of 1989, it disappeared from Polish schools. In the current legal status, in Poland, knowledge on sex life is taught during “family life education classes” (*wychowanie do życia w rodzinie*, or WŻR), which minors can be excused from by their parents (there are no attendance statistics). The WŻR classes are held as first or last lessons on a given day, which adversely affects attendance. School principals talk about the low status of the subject<sup>3</sup>. The programme encompasses 14 lessons per year (for comparison, there are 76 religion classes per year), 5 of which are held in girl only and boy only groups, starting from the 4th grade of primary school. Should non-governmental organisations want to run additional classes on the topic, they need to obtain the school principal's consent and a positive opinion of the parent council.

Even though the original curriculum seemed comprehensive and detailed<sup>4</sup>, its implementation and conservative ideologisation have been its weakness from the start. The assumption is that students must know arguments “for sexual initiation in marriage” and be able to assess the “moral aspect”

2 As early as in 1969, sex education was taught at biology lessons, Polish lessons and form periods in primary schools, and at biology and hygiene lessons in secondary schools. In 1973, a non-compulsory subject was added to the curriculum: preparation for family life in socialism. The lessons touched on such topics as sexual maturation, contraception, conscious motherhood and fatherhood. See Wejbert-Wąsiewicz, E., Pęczkowska, E. (2009). Problemy edukacji seksualnej w Polsce. *Przegląd Socjologiczny* 58(3), 173–192

3 Bieńko, M., Izdebski, Z., Wąż, K. (2016). *Kontrola realizacji prawa młodzieży do edukacji seksualnej*. Warszawa: Federation for Women and Family Planning. Ponton Group of Sex Educators

4 Ministry of National Education of Poland (2017). *Podstawa programowa kształcenia ogólnego z komentarzem. Szkoła podstawowa. Wychowanie do życia w rodzinie*. Retrieved from <https://www.ore.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/wychowanie-do-zycia-w-rodzynie.-pp-z-komentarzem.-szkola-podstawowa-1.pdf>

of contraceptives. Moreover, they are expected to “present a respectful and caring attitude towards the life and health of human being from conception till natural death”. Tradition had precedence over knowledge. The aspect of sexuality and psychology were still marginalised. In the literature on the subject recommended by the authors, one can read about homosexuality prevention and therapies for homosexuals<sup>5</sup>. According to a renowned Polish sexologist Prof. Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz,

The education model dominating Polish schools has very many shortcomings. It is too embedded in the Catholic views on relationships, marriage and sex, the latter being presented as a threat. Education in this spirit means that young people are faced with unrealistic sexual expectations which most of them will not be able to meet. Another shortcoming of this model lies in the insufficient knowledge offered to young people who end up looking for answers on the web or in pornography. In Polish schools, there is still a lingering myth that sex education would kindle young people's interest in sex, which would result in premature sex initiation<sup>6</sup>.

The Polish Ministry of Education seems to be satisfied with the present regulations and their alleged implications. “Polish teenagers start their sex life later than young people in Western Europe, which is a testament to our success”, the Polish government seems to be thinking naively. This is a dangerous simplification, which overlooks the fact that lack of sensible education leads to many negative consequences, e.g. pornography addiction or lack of acceptance of one's body<sup>7</sup>.

Additionally, experts and students express reservations about teachers' competence. The classes are taught by

5 | Diamond, E.M.D., et al. *Homoseksualizm i nadzieja*. Retrieved from [www.mateusz.pl](http://www.mateusz.pl)

6 | Grzela, E. (2020, October 9). Prof. Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz: Model edukacji seksualnej dominujący w polskich szkołach ma bardzo wiele braków. *Puls Medycyny* [interview]. Retrieved from <https://pulsmedycyny.pl/prof-zbigniew-lew-starowicz-model-edukacji-seksualnej-dominujacy-w-polskich-szkolach-ma-bardzo-wiele-brakow-1004709>

7 | Bieńko, M., Izdebski, Z., Wąż, K. (2016). *Edukacja seksualna w polskiej szkole*. Warszawa: Difin

instructors with a pedagogical background of completing studies in family science or by teachers who have graduated from postgraduate studies in family life education. The WŻR classes are also often taught by mathematicians, catechists, or librarians who treat these additional lessons either as a sideline or an evangelical mission. Consequently, students feel uneasy, fearing that their questions regarding intimacy can be used in the context of other lessons.

“Ponton” Group of Sex Educators ran a campaign titled “What does sex education really look like in Poland?”<sup>8</sup>, which was spurred by a letter written by a 17-year-old from the Podkarpacie region who described his unpleasant experience of being taught unreliable and stereotypical information at his school. According to the study, 39% of young people had no sex education at school. And if they did, the classes were most commonly taught by catechists (24%). Only one-fifth of those surveyed stated that they were allowed to discuss values with their teacher. According to 80%, values were imposed on them. “Ponton’s” report is full of examples of harmful opinions, manipulations, lies and fake news presented to students by their teachers (e.g. harmfulness of condom use, wives’ sexual obligations toward their husbands, single-parent families stigmatised as pathological).

### Sex Education in Poland. Myths

Just as we thought that things could not get any worse, the problems with sex education and sex educators turned out to be just the tip of the iceberg. A full-frontal attack came during the last European Parliamentary elections. On February 18, 2019, the Mayor of Warsaw, Rafał Trzaskowski solemnly signed Warsaw’s LGBT+ Declaration. It followed Trzaskowski’s electoral promises which had landed him the post of the head of the Polish capital a few months earlier.

<sup>8</sup> Ponton (2009). *Jak naprawdę wygląda edukacja seksualna w Polsce?* Retrieved from <https://ponton.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Raport2009.pdf>

The document named areas which, according to the LGBT+ community, required action. The most important of these included: safety, anti-discrimination and anti-violence education at schools, artistic freedom, the establishment of an interventional hostel for people in crisis. “Warsaw is for everyone. This is not merely an election slogan but my vision of my beloved city where everyone can find their place. Political leaders, including politicians within local governments, must take a firm stand against homophobia and discrimination, thus contributing to positive changes in social behaviour. This equality is guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Poland”, stressed Rafał Trzaskowski.

Right-wing commentators focused their attention on one of the points of the Declaration, namely the one on the introduction of “anti-discrimination and sex education in every school which will factor in the notions of psychosexual and gender identity in line with the standards and guidelines of the World Health Organisation (WHO)”. PiS and its allies used the Declaration as fuel for the ongoing fight for people’s votes. The fact that education was mentioned in a document on the LGBT+ community enabled the populist right-wing to combine the two topics in a new fear and hate campaign. It was made easier by the fact that anti-LGBT+ rhetoric had long been the pillar of PiS identity. Sex education was now meant to be another public enemy.

Jarosław Kaczyński’s loyal soldiers, both in the Parliament and in the media, brought out the big guns to convince Poles that the WHO sex education standards amount to nothing more than a promotion of sexual deviations and criminal acts against children. It was emphasised that the standards in question would lead to “sexualisation of children”. Even the most prudish politicians kept talking about “masturbation”, and claimed that Warsaw’s nursery school pupils would be

taught to masturbate by homosexuals. More lies came from leading politicians and top state officials, including Deputy Minister of Justice and a candidate in European elections Patryk Jaki, or Children's Ombudsman hailing from ultra-conservative circles who accused the authorities of Warsaw of "destroying the norms, traditions and cultural patterns which are commonly accepted in Poland and the Polish Constitution"<sup>9</sup>.

Adam Bodnar, representing the last constitutional body independent of PiS – the Commissioner for Human Rights, got involved in the substantive defence of the Declaration and sex education based on the WHO standards. A few days after its adoption, he sent a congratulatory letter to Mayor Trzaskowski, saying that it was with "great joy" that he received the signing of the Declaration. The Commissioner "manifested his support" and "expressed the hope that the premises and goals of the Declaration, as well as its proposed solutions, would be effectively implemented". In his letter, Adam Bodnar also touched on the problem of discrimination against LGBT+ people.

The Commissioner's website posted a list of sex education myths, including a matrix from the publication "Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe" published in 2010 by the WHO Regional Office for Europe and the German BZgA (Federal Centre for Health Education) which included education in 0–4 and 4–6 age groups. It was this matrix that the right miscited, threatening that children in kindergartens would learn to masturbate. "The matrix points to (scientifically proven) changes in the behaviour of children at different stages of their development, including the emerging and growing interest in one's body. Next, it takes the specific stages of development into account and offers suggestions as to how knowledge should be imparted to children depending on their age. It is knowledge on sexuality not only in its biological and



physical aspect but also, or maybe above all, seen in its emotional and psychological context”, the Commissioner’s Office stressed. Moreover, the website pinpointed the most obvious and scientifically proven arguments for promoting modern education:

- 1 reducing the number of unwanted teenage pregnancies;
- 2 decreasing the number of sexually transmitted infections in the 15–24 age groups;
- 3 decreasing the number of HIV infections in the 15–24 age groups;
- 4 decreasing the scale of homophobia and violence motivated by it;
- 5 reducing the number of sex crimes.

Additionally, the Commissioner took an unequivocal stance on the situation in Polish schools.

In the opinion of the Commissioner’s Office, the current solutions are unsatisfactory, both in terms of the textbook used during the “family life education” classes, and the non-compulsory nature of the classes. The latest information gathered by the WHO also proves that the best and the most efficient sex education comes in the form of compulsory classes. This solution guarantees reaching a wide audience of children and youth, the professional implementation of an earlier developed curriculum adapted to specific age groups and teaching in an environment which, by definition, should be safe and conducive to all students’ development<sup>10</sup>.

The Commissioner did not lack the courage or determination to defend sex education as one of the key instruments in the protection of human rights. The same could not be said, however, about many opposition politicians. The politicians of the

Civic Platform, Rafał Trzaskowski's party, lacked the stamina to defend European values, were too fearful of discussions about marriage equality or of articles in which they would be called defenders of paedophiles by commentators at authorities' service. The centrist opposition turned out to be defenceless in the face of the cynicism and calculation of Jarosław Kaczyński, who thundered at rallies: "We say "no" to assaulting children. We will not be intimidated. We will defend Polish families!"<sup>11</sup>. Very few liberal and progressive politicians clearly stated that reliable education was the best weapon we can equip our children with to help them see when they are in danger; that education could prevent many tragedies from happening in situations with which teenagers who are deprived of knowledge of their own body and psyche cannot cope.

Once again, Jarosław Kaczyński employed a strategy he is known for, i.e. he created an enemy to unite his supporters and followers. He did so with disregard for the social costs of such a manoeuvre. In 2015, the enemy was epitomised by refugees who, according to Kaczyński, were carriers of "very dangerous diseases long gone in Europe"<sup>12</sup>, whereas in 2019, it was sex education and the LGBT+ community. What do these PiS "targets" have in common? Every time, a group too small to effectively defend themselves in the media is chosen. Every time, a group which can be labelled as "strange" or "alien" is chosen. It can be confronted with the "normal" majority, which provokes emotions, especially fear. Fear of what is alien, fear for children. Fear motivating for action, opposition, aggression. Every time, such attacks have devastating social consequences. They devastate the community, pit one against another. However, the end justifies the means: the right-wing populism will not hesitate to destroy anyone or anything on its way to gaining or keeping power, no matter the costs. Populism does not care for the costs, this is its defining trait.

11 „Kaczyński na konwencji PiS: Musimy bronić dzieci przed ich seksualizacją” (2019, May 11). *TOK FM*. Retrieved from <https://www.tokfm.pl/Tokfm/7,117303,24773642,kaczynski-na-konwencji-pis-musimy-bronic-dzieci-przed-ich-seksualizacja.html>

12 „Cholera na wyspach greckich, dezenteria w Wiedniu”. Kaczyński pyta o uchodźców” (2015, October 13). *TVN24.pl*. Retrieved from <https://tvn24.pl/polska/kaczynski-zastanawia-sie-czy-imigranci-sprawdza-do-europy-zarazy-ra585502-3315116>

## Stop Paedophilia. Stop Nonsense

Thanks to the polarisation around the topic of sex education, PiS won the elections to the European Parliament (45% of votes<sup>13</sup>). Elections to the Polish Sejm and Senate, which followed, were symbolised by the so-called “LGBT-free zones” and a fight against minorities; the topic of sex education, however, was still present.

Right before the elections, the right-wing circles gained momentum and demanded that PiS introduce radical legislative changes. They included the Stop Paedophilia initiative which used the slogan of “fight against child abuse” to collect 260.000 signatures of support across Poland for its civic initiative project<sup>14</sup>. The authors of the project want to ban “demoralisation and sexualisation of children”<sup>15</sup>. To this end, they propose to amend Art. 200b of the penal code. Currently, the article states:

**Art. 200b.** Anyone who publicly promotes or approves of paedophile behaviour will be punished with a fine, restriction of freedom or imprisonment for up to 2 years.

The Stop Paedophilia initiative wishes to see the law extended to read as follows:

**Art. 200b. §1.** Whoever publicly promotes or approves of paedophile behaviour will be punished with a fine, restriction of freedom or imprisonment for up to 2 years.

§2. The same punishment applies to anyone who publicly encourages or approves of sexual relations of a minor.

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13 Official results: <https://pe2019.pkw.gov.pl/pe2019/pl/wyniki/pl>

14 <https://stronazycia.pl/stop-pedofilii/>

15 Interestingly enough, “Stop Paedophilia” makes vast references to the brochure “Body, Love, Playing Doctor” (*Körper, Liebe, Doktorspiele*). The document authored by Ina-Maria Phillipps, a psychologist from the Institute for Sexual Pedagogy in Dortmund, was published and distributed in German educational institutions in mid-2000s. In Germany, excerpts of the publication aroused controversy. In 2007, the German prosecutor’s office dismissed charges of promoting paedophilia, finding no hallmarks of a crime; the brochure, however, was removed from circulation on the grounds of its ambiguous content. The decision was made by Ursula von der Leyen, the then Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. See <https://oko.press/wiezienie-za-edukacje-seksualna-i-przepisanie-antykoncepcji-projekt-stop-pedofilii-w-sejmie/>

§3. If the perpetrator commits the act specified in §2 by mass communication, they shall be punished with imprisonment for up to 3 years.

§4. Whoever promotes or approves of sexual relations or other sexual activity of a minor, acting in relation to the performance of a position, the performance of a profession or activities related to the upbringing, education, treatment or care of minors, or who acts on the premises of a school or other establishment or educational or care institution, shall be punished with imprisonment for up to 3 years.

The bill introduces in paragraph 2 the notion of “approving of sexual relations of a minor”. A minor is a person under the age of 18. Under Polish law, people as young as 15 years old can have sex. According to the new law, anyone who *approves* of phenomena such as homosexuality, contraception or masturbation could be imprisoned. Under the proposed Art. 200b, the punishment of imprisonment would be imposed mainly on sex educators. But also on others: teachers, psychologists, sexologists, publishers or journalists...

The bill has been opposed by the Polish Sexologist Society (PTS). In its statement, the PTS pointed to the fact that “the bill aimed at preventing sex education activities in Poland, pathologises these very initiatives which are much needed. The authors of the bill aim to put sex education on a par with the promotion of paedophilia”. Also, the Supreme Court took an unequivocal stance towards the bill by publishing a legal analysis of the project at the request of the Chancellery of the Sejm in September 2019. The analysis read that the authors of the project “intend not only to criminalise a morally-sensitive positive attitude towards sexual relations or other sexual activities of a minor, but also to criminalise a general, neutral approach to this phenomenon”. In its analysis, the Supreme Court

stressed that imparting human sex life knowledge, which the bill clearly strives to ban, is an individual's constitutional right to education (Art. 70, section 1 of the Constitution) and an individual's right to the protection of health (Art. 68, section 1 of the Constitution)<sup>16</sup>.

The referral of the bill to the Sejm sparked off protests in Warsaw and a debate in the European Parliament. During the debate, PiS MEPs tried to prove that sex education and promotion of paedophilia should be treated as one. Beata Kempa rhetorically asked a homosexual left-wing MP: "Are you in favour of promoting paedophilia? Because that is what the bill is all about: a ban on promoting paedophilia in Poland. (...) We will defend and protect children, whether you like it or not"<sup>17</sup>. Speaking on behalf of the liberal group Renew Europe, Michal Šimečka from Slovakia warned that "even though the authors of the bill want to protect children from evil, the result will be counter-productive", because children without proper knowledge will be vulnerable to sex abuse. "Theoretically, one could hope that the bill will not be used to fight against sex education. Such an assumption cannot be made, though, if you look at the policy of the current authorities in Poland, at the smear campaign against LGBT people", said Šimečka<sup>18</sup>. In its resolution of November 14, 2019, the European Parliament expressed concern over "the extremely vague, broad and disproportionate provisions in the draft law which de facto seeks to criminalise the dissemination of sexuality education to minors and whose scope potentially threatens all persons and in particular sex educators, including teachers, health-care providers, authors, publishers, civil society organisations, journalists and parents or legal guardians, with up to three years in prison for teaching about human sexuality, health and intimate relations". After the vote, TVP, a state-controlled

16 Stanicka, D. (2020, April 25). PiS gorliwie popierał zakaz edukacji seksualnej. Ultrakatolicki projekt niemal na pewno przejdzie dalej. *OKO.press*. Retrieved from <https://oko.press/pis-gorliwie-popierał-zakaz-edukacji-seksualnej-ultrakatolicki-projekt-niemal-na-pewno-przejdzie-dalej/>

17 [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2019-10-21-ITM-017\\_PL.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2019-10-21-ITM-017_PL.html)

18 Bielecki, T. (2019, October 22). Parlament Europejski o edukacji seksualnej w Polsce. *DW.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/pl/parlament-europejski-o-edukacji-seksualnej-w-polsce/a-50925680>

television channel, called the European Parliament “a paedophile parliament”<sup>19</sup>.

A majority of the Sejm MPs gave their support to the bill and expressed their will to continue working on it. Although elections interrupted the work of the Parliament, the discussion was resumed in 2020. “We don’t want to allow a minority which has demands concerning only their environment and which tries to change the model of social functioning to impose this model on all citizens, and especially on children”, argued the Minister of Education, Dariusz Piontkowski. He was countered by the then head of the Nowoczesna (Modern) party, Katarzyna Lubnauer: “There is no better protection against paedophilia and better protection from child pornography than sex education. Sex education teaches what bad touch is”<sup>20</sup>. The Sejm redirected the bill for review in commissions. So far, no further steps have been taken.

### The Shameful Body

Since the very beginning of its rule, PiS has proved that it is a party with strong authoritarian tendencies. Jarosław Kaczyński seeks to regulate all aspects of Poles’ lives, organise the state and society anew. Jarosław Kaczyński is a revolutionary who dreams of Poland’s renewal in an ultraconservative spirit. In his policies, ideology intertwined with religion plays a prominent role. The new Poland is meant to be a Poland of values cherished or at least professed by Jarosław Kaczyński himself. The means to achieve this great goal included dismantling the constitutional state of law and tripartition of power, assuming full control of the public media and attempting to control some of the private media, and *deforming education* with the main aim of raising a new generation of loyal voters of the populist right<sup>21</sup>. The new Poland which Jarosław Kaczyński

19 PiS gorliwie popierał zakaz edukacji seksualnej (2020)

20 „Sejm wraca do prac nad kontrowersyjnym projektem. ‘Kolejny etap walki światopoglądowej’” (2020, August 25). Retrieved from <https://fakty.tvn24.pl/fakty-po-poludniu,96/edukacja-seksualna-sejm-wraca-do-prac-nad-obywatelskim-projektem-stop-pedofilii,1027719.html>

21 *Read more* Hodun, M. (2017). Education in Poland at the Service of the Ruling Party. *4Liberty Review* 6. Retrieved from <http://4liberty.eu/review-6-education-in-poland-at-the-service-of-the-ruling-party/>

dreams of is a state controlling not only the minds but also the bodies of all citizens. The values from PiS banners are to become universally binding. Since neither persuasion nor vulgar propaganda will make all Poles PiS followers in their hearts, the state apparatus is to enforce obedience on them. *You have to be heteronormative. You have to give birth, no matter what. You have to wait until the wedding.*

The interference of the state apparatus in a person's intimacy sphere is the most brutal form of assault on freedom one can imagine. Ideology forced as a substitute for knowledge in such a delicate matter is not so much a populist but a totalitarian phenomenon which must be met with citizens' opposition. Especially those who were born in a free, democratic country.

The PiS government has taken every opportunity to limit individual sovereignty of Poles over their own bodies, launching particularly persistent attacks on women. The assault on sex education was not the first of its kind. On the contrary, ever since a string of successes in 2015, PiS has not missed an opportunity to gain more control over the physical sphere of Polish women and men. President Andrzej Duda's first veto was imposed on a gender recognition act which was meant to facilitate legal (not medical) procedures required to obtain a new birth certificate by transsexual persons<sup>22</sup>. Shortly before the parliamentary elections in 2015, Jarosław Kaczyński called the act an "oddity and an assault on the family". Following the veto, the only way to obtain new documents is by suing one's own parents for incorrectly determining sex at birth. In 2017, PiS limited access to emergency contraception, which is now available on prescription only. Getting a prescription means the need to make an appointment with a gynaecologist which in state-funded healthcare is available after an average of 18 days; minor patients over the age of 15 have no free access to gynaecological examinations and consultations<sup>23</sup>.

22 The EP LGBTI Intergroup (2015, October 6). Polish President vetoes gender recognition bill. Retrieved from <https://lgbti-ep.eu/2015/10/06/polish-president-vetoes-gender-recognition-bill/>

23 Commissioner for Human Rights' Office (2016). *Informacja o pracy Rzecznika Praw Obywatelskich*. Lipiec—wrzesień 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.rpo.gov.pl/pliki/14793071940.pdf>

A full picture of the situation comes with the cancellation of the national *in vitro* support programme and replacing it with non-scientific, inefficient but “sin-free” naprotechnology<sup>24</sup>.

### Powerful Patron

All of the above initiatives of the parliamentary majority are taken in consultation, under the patronage and, sometimes, even at the request of the Catholic church. The alliance of throne and altar in Poland is obvious and not questioned by anybody. Some of the government activities are directly motivated by episcopal lobbying, which was particularly clear in the case of demands for a complete abortion ban. The Polish church hierarchy are the church representatives who are still obsessed with corporeality. They want to control people’s hearts and minds by strictly controlling their bodies. They perceive sexuality as a tool in social control. The body, as the domain of evil, is to be feared. The foundations of the church built in Medieval times still linger in the countless dos and don’ts. And the foundations in the Polish church are particularly strong despite pressure for change from the faithful and from movements within the church itself.

The latter now has a prominent leader. Pope Francis has unambiguously opposed the obsession with the body within the church:

“We cannot insist only on issues related to abortion, gay marriage and the use of contraceptive methods. This is not possible. I haven’t spoken much about these things and I was reprimanded for that. But when we speak about these issues, we have to talk about them in a context. The church’s teachings are clear, I am a son of the church but it is not necessary to talk about these issues all the time. The church’s pastoral ministry cannot be obsessed



with the transmission of a disjointed multitude of doctrines to be imposed insistently”<sup>25</sup>.

However, Francis’s words have been drowned out by the followers of the *true Polish church*, a fortress under siege protecting Europe from the “civilisation of death”<sup>26</sup>.

The church in Poland has spoken out directly about sex education. Before the school year 2019 started, bishop Marek Mendyk, chairman of the Commission on Catholic Education of the Polish Episcopal Conference, appealed for “vigilance and prudence in relation to the financing of extracurricular classes in educational institutions planned by some local governments”<sup>27</sup>. He thus referred to the fact that some local governments planned to introduce sex education, and called parents to take action. In an interview given to the Polish News Agency, bishop Mendyk warned that: “The implications of the introduction of sex education in the West are terrifying, even unimaginable. The example of parents who flee some European countries because of the sexualisation of children and youth should serve as a warning to us in Poland”<sup>28</sup>. In their communiqué after a meeting of the Permanent Council of the Polish Episcopate in Jasna Góra, bishops wrote: “In recent months, there has been a growing threat to the well-being of children resulting from the introduction of classes that interfere inappropriately with children’s sexuality and psychosexual development. (...) That is why we need to remind parents of their rights in terms of the educational process, especially concerning the aspects of education implemented at school”<sup>29</sup>.

39

Miłosz Hodun  
Full Control of Our Bodies  
Sexual Education  
in an Ideologised State

- 25 Spadaro, A. (2013, Septemeb 30). A Big Heart Open to God: An interview with Pope Francis. *America*. Retrieved from <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis>
- 26 A term used by conservative and catholic politicians and commentators to describe modern liberal culture. It was first used by John Paul II in opposition of the catholic “civilisation of love”.
- 27 Winogrodzki, K. (2019, August 25). Bp Marek Mendyk o edukacji seksualnej. „Przerażające skutki na Zachodzie. Przewaga dla Polski”. *WP.pl*. Retrieved from <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/bp-marek-mendyk-o-edukacji-seksualnej-przeraszajace-skutki-na-zachodzie-przewaga-dla-polski-6417471486224001a>
- 28 *Ibid*
- 29 „Biskupi ostrzegają przed 'permissywną edukacją seksualną” (2019, August 27). *Rzeczpospolita*. Retrieved from <https://www.rp.pl/>

Bishops have defended the WŻR classes which they greatly influence. They warn against liberals depreciating and ridiculing the subject. They clearly state that they are proponents of type A sex education, which stands for *abstinence-only sex education*. Type B, *biological education*, and the WHO-recommended type C, *comprehensive sexual education*, are rejected by the church<sup>30</sup>.

The church had an impact on designing the new core curriculum of the WŻR classes which was developed as a consequence of the PiS *educational deform*. The core curriculum states that “it has been assumed that the core curriculum should reflect the values which John Paul II called the spiritual foundation of Europe, convergent with universally recognised humanistic values”<sup>31</sup>. The ethical guidelines for the WŻR classes emphasised the need to teach about the sanctity of marriage and marital sex. On a more specific level, the goal of the subject is to teach about the superiority of natural family planning over contraception, the latter being paired with “abortifacients, abortion and sterilisation”<sup>32</sup>.

It is worth noting that the Ministry of Education only allows the use of three textbooks on the subject at schools; all of them published by Catholic publishers. Quotes from the textbooks on the ineffectiveness of contraception and remarks disregarding gynaecologists have become an object of jokes on the Polish Internet. According to experts, the textbooks “contradict facts, spread myths and stereotypes and downplay the issue of preventive healthcare”<sup>33</sup>. Apart from supporting publications of dubious quality, the Ministry of Education has been financing educational programmes based on the same

30 It presents sexuality as an area of satisfaction and growth, all the while shaping control and decision-making skills to help young people to stay true to their needs in responsible relationships with others. Knowledge and attitudes are to protect students from contracting sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV and HPV, unintended pregnancies and sexual violence.

31 Podstawa programowa kształcenia ogólnego (2017)

32 *Ibid*

33 Bańkowska, A. (2015, April 21). 15 wyjątkowo głupich cytatów z podręczników do wychowania do życia w rodzinie. *Gazeta.pl*. Retrieved from [https://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114871,17789278,15\\_wyjatkowo\\_glupich\\_cytatow\\_z\\_podrecznikow\\_do\\_wychowania.html](https://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114871,17789278,15_wyjatkowo_glupich_cytatow_z_podrecznikow_do_wychowania.html)

factual assumptions<sup>34</sup>. In cooperation with Catholic organisations, they aim to train tutors who will provide type A sexuality education during offline and online workshops.

The cooperation in the fight against modern sexuality education between PiS and the episcopate is exemplary. When Jarosław Kaczyński in the heat of electoral campaign talks about defending children, his message is immediately reinforced by bishops who speak of “natural shame”, which is supposed to be “inherent in human beings” and is a “part of their dignity”. In the Warsaw LGBT Declaration, the source of the bishops’ greatest concern lies in the proposal of introducing sex education classes factoring in the “issues of psychosexual and gender identity” in line with the WHO standards and guidelines<sup>35</sup>.

It should be noted that the church’s harshest criticism of sexuality education was expressed in peculiar circumstances. It was a time when the church had to face serious charges of concealing paedophilia among priests, which led to universal social outrage. NGO activists and leftist politicians drew up a report on paedophilia in the Polish church which was later handed over to the Pope<sup>36</sup>. According to the report, 24 bishops were protecting 20 priests abusing minors. Oil was added to the fire by the documentary “Tylko nie mów nikomu” (Just Don’t Tell Anyone) by the Sekielski brothers on covering up sex crimes within the church. Within a short period of time, the film received 22 mln views on YouTube and was later broadcast by two TV channels. The film became the main topic of journalistic programmes and Poles’ conversations at home. In its aftermath, the episcopate published its own albeit very sketchy report<sup>37</sup>. The problem is still present in the Polish

34 „W stronę dojrzałości” (Towards Maturity), a programme which Lechaa Consulting Sp. z o. o. received PLN 9 mln 655 thousand 706 for from the National Health Programme.

35 Chrzczonowicz, M., Ambroziak, A. (2018, April 9). *Antykoncepcja powoduje raka i depresję, a zarodek woła do kobiety „przyjmij mnie” – tego dzieci mają się uczyć za pieniądze resortu zdrowia*. OKO.press

36 Szostkiewicz, A. (2019, March 8). Biskupi przeciwko Deklaracji LGBT+ Trzaskowskiego. *Polityka.pl*. Retrieved from <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/1785178,1,biskupi-przeciwko-deklaracji-lgbt-trzaskowskiego.read>

37 “Fundacja Nie Lękajcie Się publikuje nazwiska biskupów, którzy mieli tuszować pedofilię” (2019, February 21). *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Retrieved from <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75398,2,4480149,fundacja-nie-lekajcie-sie-oto-raport-o-pedofili-w-polskim.html>

public debate, mainly due to questions about the role of John Paul II and cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz in the cover-up of paedophilia cases<sup>38</sup>.

The fierce attack of the clergy on modern sex education proved even more shameful in the context of paedophile scandals within the church, and the fact that bishops joined in the crusade against educators gained new meaning. Experts emphasised that sexuality education is the best tool to counter paedophilia because it teaches to recognise threats, set limits, and seek help. On the other hand, the lack of sex education leaves victims on their own and makes potential victims helpless in the face of predators who abuse children and youth from a position of power. Unfortunately, in this case, the hierarchy turned a deaf ear to arguments that young people need to be protected.

The attitude of the Polish church to bodily matters in general and sexuality education, in particular, contradicts liberal values. Liberalism is based on an individual's moral autonomy and responsibility for one's choices, which is in contrast to the doctrine of total submission. Total control is incompatible with an open democracy. Middle-class town-dweller movements have long opposed full dominance, and today's youth, millennials, perceive it at best as an anachronism bordering on ridicule which, however, has become dangerous due to its ties with politics. Moreover, the exclusionary language of the church is repulsive for those raised in the democratic and European Poland and leads to the rejection of the institution and religion.

## Recap

Modern sex education remains a dream in Poland. It is a dream of many experts and activists, some parents and a handful of politicians. Modern sex education is also a dream electoral topic for right-wing politicians and their Catholic church allies

as well as satellite social organisations. The populist right-wing had to reach for the sex education subject because it naturally fits in the scope of its interests. Sex education is a topic for populists, as the negative consequences of its destruction will not be seen until some time later. Sexuality education is a talking point for the right-wing because it feeds on fears kindled hundreds of years ago by religion and cherished to this day by guardians of morality, which is seen mostly as an interest in the “purity of the body”. Combining these two features and serving them with a rhetoric child protection gravy has made sex education a fantastic addition to the existing range of enemies.

The ideologisation of the public space in Poland, which has affected not only politics but also the media, culture and education, has given the ruling party the tools to impose their values on the whole society. In an ideologised state there is no room for discussion or arguments, and science becomes just one of the possible opinions. Sex education, too, has fallen victim to ideologisation, being stripped of content developed by authorities on medicine or psychology, and supplemented with unprovable claims, statements and ideas of the binding doctrine. Unfortunately, the hope for a gradual improvement of the lopsided sex education in Poland has been thwarted. Those who were hoping to repair the WŹR curriculum step by step with the help of experts are bitterly disappointed. Revolution and collapse have replaced evolution. And there is no consolation in the fact that other subjects have also fallen victim to it.

Poles have changed. Political elites are much more conservative than the society, and the church is losing their faithful. Bishops’ involvement in the fight for a peculiar understanding of morality has deterred a whole generation from the church and faith. According to a survey by market research company Ipsos, as many as 65% of respondents believe that public schools should run sexuality education classes where the

topics of sex, gender, sexual orientation, or contraception are openly discussed. 29% are against such classes<sup>39</sup>. The trend is confirmed in many other studies<sup>40</sup>. Unfortunately, modern sex education in Poland, seen as a source of the emotional dispute, has, like many other areas of life, been in fact privatised by the PiS government. Good quality knowledge on sex life has been pushed to non-state margins. Citizens who wish to have or give their children access to it will have to do so (and often pay) on their own. The state's duty will fall on non-governmental organisations and private entities. Top model Anja Rubik's initiative #sexedpl shows that Poland needs a modern approach to sex education<sup>41</sup>. The textbook and campaign developed by experts and promoted by Rubik have become bestsellers because they do not shun difficult questions<sup>42</sup>. But #sexedpl is merely a symbol. Poland has many great educators who have done a painstaking and often heroic job of teaching children and youth in unfavourable conditions. The future of sex education in this country depends on educators' perseverance.

Poland only serves as an example. A glaring one but not the only case of using sex education for current political purposes at the expense of citizens. One can easily point to other EU countries where good quality sexuality education is ignored or replaced by a doctrinaire stopgap targeted towards promoting ideology rather than science. As right-wing populists gain more popularity, we can expect to see more assaults on sexuality education. Surely, not all of them will be nuclear and will call for imprisoning sex educators. Sometimes, as we



39 Skowrońska, M. (2020, November 13). The closest confidant of Pope John Paul II faces numerous accusations of covering up pedophilia. *Wyborcza.pl*. Retrieved from <https://wyborcza.pl/7,173236,26507636,the-closest-confidant-of-pope-john-paul-ii-faces-numerous-accusations.html>

40 Danielewski, M. (2019, October 25). Różnorodny, bezpieczny, radosny: o takim seksie Polacy chcą uczyć nastolatków [IPSoS dla OKO.press]. *OKO.press*. Retrieved from <https://oko.press/roznorodny-bezpieczny-radosny-o-takim-seksie-polacy-chca-uczyc-nastolatkow-ipsos-dla-oko-press/>

41 E.g. Rudziński, L. (2019, October 23). Sondaż IBRIS: Polacy chcą edukacji seksualnej w szkole. *Polska The Times*. Retrieved from <https://polskatimes.pl/sondaz-ibris-polacy-chca-edukacji-seksualnej-w-szkole/ar/c1-14525033>

42 Sexed.pl

have already witnessed, successes, even modest ones, are effectively thwarted by limiting funds for updating educators' knowledge or by damaging the prestige of the subject by fragmenting it and diffusing responsibility for the implementation of the core curriculum. It is liberals' duty to constantly monitor the phenomenon in the public sphere and contain it, and where it is not possible, support the non-governmental sector to help it efficiently fulfil its educational obligations which are rejected by the state.

# 3

## Sloppy Way. Consequences of Lack of Quality Sex Education in a Modern Society

by Michał Sawicki, Michał Tęcza

It is hard to imagine a more universal and useful knowledge than that provided by sexuality education. While complex physical formulas will not be useful to everyone in adult life, absolutely everyone will benefit from the knowledge about building healthy relationships, managing emotions and about the basics of human physiology. A quick scan of memory will suffice to remember cases of unwanted pregnancies or sexually transmitted infections. Would the incidence of such cases be smaller, had people got to know the interpersonal boundaries and safe sex methods early enough? Probably yes. These, however, are not the only social consequences of insufficiently reliable science-based sexuality education or the lack thereof. The consequences are many, and a significant part of them only becomes clear in adulthood.

To outline the significance of sexuality education in the psycho-sexual development, one should take a closer look at the word “sexuality” since it is often confused with sexual intercourse, a comparison not entirely wrong but unfair. A sexual intercourse is based on sexual need and our preferences, which are just a few elements of sexuality. According to Seligman<sup>1</sup>, who proposed a model of sexuality, the phenomenon is much broader and accompanies us from the first moments



of our lives. Apart from the preferences and sexual need, other important elements include gender (both in its biological sense and in the mental sense of belonging to a given sex), sexual orientation and social roles attributed by culture to a given sex. Sexology experts indicate that the model should be extended to include sexually transmitted infections prevention, contraception, respect for physical and psychological boundaries of another person, building healthy relationships and communication on sexual needs and emotions. So, we are dealing here with a vast area of human functioning which cannot be ignored.

Sex education is targeted towards developing the skills needed to make satisfactory, healthy and respectful sexuality choices. Contrary to popular belief, this field of knowledge is not aimed at encouraging young people to engage in sexual activity<sup>2</sup>. The mission of educators is, above all, to protect children and adolescents, teach them to set boundaries, understand their own sexuality and safeguard them against sexual abuse. Similarly to other school subjects, sexuality education, too, should be a process and it should start as early as possible. Thus, we would meet the goal of satisfying children's developmental curiosity and protecting them from searching for information on their own in other sources, mainly on the internet.

It should be remembered that good quality sex education lays emphasis on conscious choices and presents their consequences; it does not, therefore, come into conflict with worldview or religion. It does not prohibit the use of contraceptive methods, such as calendar-based ones, but demonstrates their pros and cons, as it does with condoms. It is also a tool that gives a sense of control and provides knowledge of the changes taking place at puberty. It is extremely important, taking into account European statistics which show that as many as 17% of young people before the age of 15 are no longer virgins<sup>3</sup>.



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- 2 WHO (2016). *Sexuality Education. Policy Brief No. 1*. Cologne: BZgA. Retrieved from [https://www.rpo.gov.pl/sites/default/files/Sexuality\\_education\\_Policy\\_brief\\_No\\_1.pdf?fbclid=IwAR28CTGscAydq\\_AXDnc5jupPdp6PxpC5xvqV-g9aR8c6kEq5-hu33tLOX5tk](https://www.rpo.gov.pl/sites/default/files/Sexuality_education_Policy_brief_No_1.pdf?fbclid=IwAR28CTGscAydq_AXDnc5jupPdp6PxpC5xvqV-g9aR8c6kEq5-hu33tLOX5tk)
- 3 Gambadauro, P., et al (2018). Correlates of sexual initiation among European adolescent. *PLoS ONE* 13(2). Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5805230/>

From a very early age, children shape their values and sexuality beliefs based on the patterns they observe in their environment. Therefore, a huge influence is exerted not only by children's families but also by their kindergartens, schools, peers, religious groups, local communities and the media. The period of childhood spanning ages 4–6 takes a decisive role in the process. This is a perfect moment to start sex education. This is when differences between sexes get noticed. In cognitive structures, one's own body-image is starting to take shape — i.e. the perception of one's appearance, boundaries, functions of different parts of the body. At this stage, it is incredibly important to be able to express emotions as they regulate healthy development. This is a key period of psycho-sexual development, and irregularities in its course can disrupt the process of maturation and result in negative consequences in the future, such as complexes, lack of self-acceptance, negative attitude towards the opposite sex, or even sexual disorders<sup>4</sup>.

Since sex education should be a process, there is a foundation that the knowledge should be built upon. The basics include knowledge of one's body, physiology and anatomical differences between sexes<sup>5</sup>. It is important to introduce such concepts as gender identity and sexual orientation at the very first stage of education, which can protect children from the traps of the heteronormative perception of the world. A strategy to safeguard children against sexual abuse should be an indispensable element repeated at every new stage of education.

When discussing the negative consequences of the lack of sexuality education, it is worth taking a closer look at the EU Member States in which the level of sex education has been low in recent years. Let's start with Cyprus. In 2002–2006, it introduced a pilot project called “Sexuality Education and Interpersonal Relationship Education”. The subject was

4 Długolecka, A., Lew-Starowicz, Z. (2006). *Edukacja seksualna*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Świat Książki

5 Sokoluk, W. (2003). *Wychowanie do życia w rodzinie. Poradnik metodyczny dla nauczycieli*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne

6 European Parliament. Directorate General for Internal Policies (2013). *Policies for Sexuality Education in the European Union*. Retrieved from [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/462515/IPOL-FEMM\\_NT\(2013\)462515\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/462515/IPOL-FEMM_NT(2013)462515_EN.pdf)

intended to students aged 14–15 and taught by biology teachers. It was suddenly cancelled due to, among others, a negative response of the public who, according to the authors of the project, were not ready for a liberal approach to sex education<sup>6</sup>. Currently, the curriculum includes a subject called “Health Education”, which, according to the Ministry of Education and Culture, covers the topic of “Family Planning – Sexual and Reproductive Health”<sup>7</sup>. Sex education has been, therefore, vastly reduced and its curriculum does not include gender equality measures.

According to the authors of “The Current State of Sexuality Education” report, the situation is similar in Romania. The *Age of consent*, i.e. the age from which young people can legally have sex, is 15, however, elements of sexuality education are offered to students from the age of 16. This is an example of a paradox that, unfortunately, affects the youngest. The sexuality education classes in question are called “Health Education” and are non-compulsory. According to the data of the Ministry of Education, in 2014–2015 only 6% of students participated in the classes. Another worrying sign was the rise in teenage pregnancies. Therefore, Romania made the decision that one of the main goals of health measures in 2014–2020 should be to increase social awareness of contraception and sexual health<sup>8</sup>.

Sexuality education taught from an ideological perspective is a problem that must be addressed. In countries, such as Hungary, Poland or Slovakia, moral and religious beliefs have a huge impact on the sexuality education curricula, which often contradict science. The curricula emphasise pro-family values and heteronormativity. According to many specialists in developmental psychology, psychotherapy and clinical sexology, sexuality education in these countries is effectively non-existent. On the contrary, it is stigmatised. In Poland, *wychowanie do życia w rodzinie*, or WŻR classes (family life

7 YouAct (2018). *The Current State of Sexuality Education*. Retrieved from [http://youact.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/WEB-SPREAD\\_The-Current-State-of-Sexuality-Education-in-Cyprus-Georgia-Poland-Romania-and-the-Netherlands-Insights-from-a-Youth-Perspective.pdf](http://youact.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/WEB-SPREAD_The-Current-State-of-Sexuality-Education-in-Cyprus-Georgia-Poland-Romania-and-the-Netherlands-Insights-from-a-Youth-Perspective.pdf)

8 *Ibid*

education) are taught starting from primary schools with a goal of discussing patriotic values. What makes matters worse is the fact that the rightist circles, both politicians and community organisations, are involved in propaganda activities that are aimed at eliminating sex education from public life. They promote slogans full of hatred for minorities, including LGBT+. They insult specialists in psycho-sexual human development, accusing them of paedophilic tendencies. They fearmonger about the imaginary “gender ideology” that is a threat to the Polish family. The Pro-Prawo do Życia foundation (pro-right to life) demands 3 years of imprisonment for teaching sex education classes. Its proposal is similar to the Russian law on “gay propaganda”, which was challenged by the European Court of Human Rights<sup>9</sup>.

One more country worth attention is Ireland. An official document for teachers of children that was published in 1998 included such statements as the following: “Sex is a gift, a most sacred act, and full sexual intimacy belongs in an adult relationship where there is an equal trust, respect, acceptance and understanding for both partners — such as in a marriage”. Another obstacle to universalising sex education is the law that allows schools to adjust curricula to their preferences. Due to strong religious influences and the universality of Catholic schools, there is no use in looking for topics on sexual diversity, LGBT+, or the problem of pornography in lesson plans<sup>10</sup>.

At puberty, when identity takes shape, sound sexuality education offers support and an explanation for maturation processes, which is conducive to building one’s self-esteem. It protects against abuse, teaches how to protect your boundaries and respect the boundaries of others, assertively communicate your needs and not do harm to others. We can imagine serious consequences of the lack of such foundations or of foundations built in a sloppy way. The consequences are often

9 Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich (2020, April 15). „Ogranicza prawa i wolności”. RPO o obywatelskim projekcie zakazującym edukacji. Retrieved from seksualnejhttps://www.rpo.gov.pl/pl/content/rpo-o-obywatelskim-projekcie-zakazu-edukacji-seksualnej

10 O'Brien, C. (2019, April 29). ‘A most sacred act’: Ireland’s sex education is from another era. *The Irish Times*. Retrieved from https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/a-most-sacred-act-ireland-s-sex-education-is-from-another-era-1.3874305 (access date: 22.11.2020)

elusive, inestimable and, thus, understated; how can you gauge the strength of complexes or the fear of closeness? How do you determine your level of ability to take care of yourself or your partner? Psychologists agree that safe psycho-sexual development is an element forming a healthy personality. What gives us a sense of security? Above all, knowledge and open communication, which are two tools of sex education. Let us now take a closer look at possible implications of taking these tools away from children.

## Sex Taboo

This is the greatest apparent anomaly. Adults very often do not have open discussions with their children about sex, which does not make the topic go away. We cannot pretend that there is no psycho-sexual development, no sexual needs, nor threats linked with this area of life. Children learn from an early age that some discussions are taboo. They train in keeping their thoughts to themselves, not expressing them. Additionally, they realise that every time they want to talk about sex, they will be emotionally punished with fear or embarrassment. Sex taboos entail a wide range of other consequences, also in adulthood:

- lack of communication in a crisis, also in health issues — difficulties in reporting specific health problems to a doctor;
- inhibited communication in a relationship on topics linked with emotions, intimacy and needs;
- difficulties in expressing needs and sexual fantasies, which can adversely affect satisfaction with sex life.
- passing on the burden of sex taboo to next generations, i.e. sex education is not offered to one's children.

Sex taboo also has a social dimension. As demonstrated by “Reported and cleared rapes in Europe” of 2020, there is no

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reliable data indicating how the number of rapes is influenced by the level of sexuality education. It turns out, however, that the level of sex education can have an impact on the number of reported crimes<sup>11</sup>. One is directly proportional to the other. Low level of sex education can cause fear and shame about reporting a rape, and thus can lower statistics. Whereas, legal support, more extensive knowledge and social openness in talking about sex help to master the courage to admit to being a victim of a sex crime.

### Yielding under Pressure of Stereotypical Gender Roles in Sex

Social roles are the functions attributed to a given group in a given culture. They most commonly refer to biological gender dualism, the stereotypical assumption being that certain behaviours are masculine while others are feminine. This translates into sex life as well. The lack of good quality education perpetuates this sharp division. Girls can develop submissive behaviours. Sex eventually becomes a form of pleasing one's partner, whereas one's own needs are treated as insignificant and are pushed to the margins. On the other hand, boys are wrongfully pressured into being the dominant figure who must always make the grade. This can lead to crossing boundaries in relationships and to difficulties in building them on the pillars of respect and partnership. What ensues is the phenomenon of sexual instrumentalisation. Partners start to objectify each other, their goal being to fulfil their social roles rather than to give each other satisfaction and pleasure. Empathy development is disrupted and egocentric attitudes are perpetuated.

### Distorted Body Image

Problems in this area manifest themselves at the cognitive (unrealistic, critical view of one's attractiveness), emotional

<sup>11</sup> Holmberg, S., Lewenhagen, L. (2020). *Reported and cleared rapes in Europe. Difficulties of international comparisons*. Stockholm: Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå). Retrieved from [https://www.bra.se/download/18.7d27ebd916ea64de5306c65f/1601393665407/2020\\_13\\_Reported\\_and\\_cleared\\_rapes\\_in\\_Europe.pdf](https://www.bra.se/download/18.7d27ebd916ea64de5306c65f/1601393665407/2020_13_Reported_and_cleared_rapes_in_Europe.pdf)

(sense of shame, fear of judgement, depression), and behavioural level. Speaking of the behavioural level, we mean unhealthy behaviours which often affect young people. Eating disorders, compulsive exercise, social withdrawal, auto-aggressive behaviours and self-harm. When an adolescent satisfies their natural curiosity and gains their knowledge about sexuality from unreliable sources, we cannot expect their development to be normal. We must remember that children's psycho-sexual development is a process, which proceeds despite everything else. It is a very delicate and highly impressionable sphere. Social media and the perfect body image that is promoted by them as the paramount value, as well as pornography with its unrealistic depiction of the sex act, are strong stimuli that perfectly fit the void created by the lack of sex education<sup>12</sup>. From the point of view of social consequences, the problem of child psychiatry comes to the fore. A distorted body image lowers self-esteem and entails a whole range of behavioural disorders and other mental problems, which require not only specialist psychiatric support but also psychological and social ones. This puts a significant burden on the health-care system, by increasing clinic, hospital and community centre occupancy.

### Premature Sexual Initiation and Unwanted Pregnancies

A popular myth spread by opponents of sexuality education is that it accelerates sexual début or even encourages to engage in sexual activity at an early age. The view stems from complete arrogance and ignorance about human sexuality. Or, perhaps, from the lack of sexuality education in the lives of its opponents. The introduction of moral prohibitions and avoidance of the topic does not delay sexual initiation. According to the global research "Sexuality Education"<sup>13</sup> conducted for the WHO, in 2005–2010 the number of 15-year-olds who had

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12 Kimber, M.S. (2015). *Body image: A consideration of immigrant status, ethnic minority status and immigrant concentration*. Hamilton: McMaster University

13 WHO (2016). *Sexuality Education. Policy Brief No. 2*. Cologne: BZgA. Retrieved from [https://www.euro.who.int/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/379045/Sexuality\\_education\\_Policy\\_brief\\_No\\_2.pdf](https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/379045/Sexuality_education_Policy_brief_No_2.pdf)

had their first sexual contacts was higher in Eastern than in Western Europe (Germany, Holland), where sex education was more extensive at schools. It can be easily deduced that when teenagers with skimpy knowledge of contraceptives engage in sexual activity, unwanted pregnancies soon become a problem. According to the report, in East European countries (where sex education is less progressive), the teenage pregnancy rate is the highest at 41,7/1000. In Nordic countries it reaches 30,7/1000, in Western Europe – 18,2/1000 and in South European countries – 17,6/1000<sup>14</sup>. Similar results are cited by the authors of the report “Policies for Sexuality Education in the European Union”<sup>15</sup>. They note an increase in the number of teenage pregnancies in countries with a low level of sexuality education, such as Hungary. This is also evidenced by data from Finland. Towards the end of the 1990s, sexuality education in Finland was reduced for financial reasons, which significantly increased the number of births and abortions among girls aged 15–19. When the sector was reinforced, the abortion rate fell from over 16,4 at its peak in 2002 to 12,1 in 2010 – four years after the reintroduction of sexuality education<sup>16</sup>.

### Increased Risk of Sexual Abuse

One of the main goals of working with children and youth is to equip them with knowledge and protect them from getting hurt. Children need help in building their self-esteem and developing their survival instinct. Otherwise, children are more vulnerable to manipulation and more prone to engaging in risky relationships, which can lead to sexual abuse. They may have difficulty in distinguishing between dangerous and safe behaviours appropriate for their stage of development. Sex education teaches children to make decisions about their bodies, shows ways to cope with difficult situations and

14 Part, K. (2013). Teenage pregnancies in the European Union in the context of legislation and youth sexual and reproductive health services. *Acta Obstetrica Et Gynecologica Scandinavica* 92(12). Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/262044449\\_Teenage\\_pregnancies\\_in\\_the\\_European\\_Union\\_in\\_the\\_context\\_of\\_legislation\\_and\\_youth\\_sexual\\_and\\_reproductive\\_health\\_services](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/262044449_Teenage_pregnancies_in_the_European_Union_in_the_context_of_legislation_and_youth_sexual_and_reproductive_health_services)

15 *Policies for Sexuality Education in the European Union* (2013)

16 *Sexuality Education. Policy Brief No. 2* (2016)



reinforces trust to the right adults. The latter being extremely important in the fight against paedophilia because it makes it possible to prevent a secret pact between the predator and their victim<sup>17</sup>.

### Increase in Sexually Transmitted Infections

One of the most dangerous implications of the lack of sexual education is a proven increase in sexually transmitted infections (or STIs). The growth trend has been observed for years, especially in young people. Whether we like it or not, they engage in risky sexual behaviours, and one factor which could limit the number of infections is knowledge of the threats associated with dangerous contacts. One of the best proofs for a decrease in the number of STIs through good quality sex education is provided by Estonia, where, according to research conducted by the WHO within 8-year period (2001 vs. 2009), the number of sexually transmitted infections fell from nearly 1.200 to just over 400 in the 15–19 age group. In the 20–24 age group, the number fell by half<sup>18</sup>. Research by Prof. Izdebski shows that in 2005 only 63% of Poles surveyed used protection during sexual encounters. The percentage decreases with age and reaches 57,3% in the group of 25–29 year-olds, 55% in the group of 30–39 year-olds and only 42,2% among 40–49 year-olds. In the group using protection, 47,1% of men and 42,7% of women chose barrier methods, which, among available contraceptives, are also the only effective protection against sexually transmitted infections<sup>19</sup>.

In recent years, the greatest risk of unprotected sex is that of an HIV infection. Great emphasis was laid on HIV prevention and education which, however, are now worryingly decreasing. According to the WHO report “HIV/AIDS Surveillance in Europe 2019–2018 data”<sup>20</sup>, there are approx. 140 thousand new HIV infections in Europe annually. The



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17 *Wychowanie do życia w rodzinie* (2003)

18 *Sexuality Education. Policy Brief No. 2* (2016)

19 Izdebski, Z. (2012). *Seksualność Polaków na początku XXI wieku*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego

20 European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (2019). *HIV/AIDS surveillance in Europe*. Retrieved from <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/HIV-annual-surveillance-report-2019.pdf>

data from 2019 shows that there are currently 37,9 million infected people around the world<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that specialists and epidemiologists are concerned about the limitations in the field of sex education and the changes in school curricula. Limited access to knowledge, and diagnostic, and treatment options will translate into an uncontrollable growth in new infections, including ones which will go undiagnosed. It is also worth taking note of the economic effects. Antiretroviral treatment, which is financed by state budgets, is much more expensive than preventive healthcare. For comparison, the average monthly cost of treatment of an HIV patient amounts to approximately EUR 800, whereas the wholesale price of one approved and certified condom is around EUR 0,10.

### Discrimination and Suicides

Discrimination against sexual minorities is an inevitable consequence of the lack of sex education. In many European school curricula, there are no topics related to acceptance and knowledge of sexual diversity. It is no secret that fear of the unknown is intrinsic to the human species, and homophobia, transphobia and all other phobias about sexual otherness arise from ignorance. Statistics show that 9 out of 10 LGBT+ teenagers experience bullying over their sexual orientation<sup>22</sup>. In Lithuania, as many as 85% of the polled teenagers (regardless of sexual orientation) declared that they were bullied or witnessed such bullying. All of the non-heterosexual respondents spoke of having experienced or witnessed homophobic bullying<sup>23</sup>. Equally alarming is the data concerning suicides; most teenagers who commit suicide have experienced bullying. The probability of suicide attempts among sexual minority adolescents was 3,5 times higher than among their heterosexual

21 Krajowe Centrum ds. AIDS: [https://aids.gov.pl/hiv\\_aids/450-2-2/?fbclid=IwAR2I18UUDWA5KPt2j-Vnr-qQRpfJVHnt-1sDhDaAnUwD5XmfJaAmBTAhg](https://aids.gov.pl/hiv_aids/450-2-2/?fbclid=IwAR2I18UUDWA5KPt2j-Vnr-qQRpfJVHnt-1sDhDaAnUwD5XmfJaAmBTAhg)

22 Bullying Statistics. Retrieved from <http://www.bullyingstatistics.org/content/gay-bullying-statistics.html>

23 Amankavičiūtė, S. (2015). *Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Based Bullying in Lithuanian Schools*. Vilnius: įvairovės ir edukacijos namai. Retrieved from [https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/Attachments/It\\_-\\_report\\_en\\_-\\_house\\_of\\_diversity.pdf](https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/Attachments/It_-_report_en_-_house_of_diversity.pdf)

peers<sup>24</sup>. According to research, 24% of adolescents aged 12–14 (i.e. nearly one in four) who have committed suicide were teenagers who identified themselves as LGBT+<sup>25</sup>. The percentage is, therefore, much higher than in the general population, which is estimated at approximately 6% in Europe<sup>26</sup>.

### Increased Risk of Compulsive Disorders

Sexuality education also means sound knowledge of the possible sexual problems: their roots, diagnosis and coping strategies. Neglect and lack of awareness can aggravate the problems. Sexual needs combined with a lack of thorough knowledge lead to a whole range of disorders affecting the way one perceives their body, the sexual act or clinical norms. Young people are left to their own devices in such situations. They look for ways to cope with their raging hormones. They lack a sense of security and knowledge about the matter. They must handle not only their needs but also their negative convictions about themselves and their sexuality. The most common negative convictions include the belief that masturbation is a sin, that sex should not be spoken of, or that high libido is a symptom of underlying issues. Adolescents can also succumb to peer pressure and start to believe that sex is the paramount value in social life. Releasing sexual tension can become compulsive in adolescents and young adults. It often happens without them being aware of the dangers associated with it. Lack of adequate help leads to growing sexual needs or even to the disconcerting feeling of compulsion to indulge in sexual activity. High frequency and intensity of sexual encounters adversely affect other aspects of life, such as work or study, and, thus, have tangible consequences for the economy<sup>27</sup>.



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- 24 Carroll, L. (2018, October 8). LGBT youth at higher risk for suicide attempts. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-lgbt-teen-suicide-idUSKCN1M11SL>
- 25 Ream, G.L. (2019). What's Unique About Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Youth and Young Adult Suicides? Findings From the National Violent Death Reporting System. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 64(5). Retrieved from [https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X\(18\)30791-2/abstract](https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(18)30791-2/abstract)
- 26 Deveaux, F. (2016). Counting the LGBT population: 6% of Europeans identify as LGBT. *Dalia Research*. Retrieved from <https://daliaresearch.com/blog/counting-the-lgbt-population-6-of-europeans-identify-as-lgbt/>
- 27 Rawińska, M. (Ed) (2019). *Zaburzenia seksualne a psychoterapia poznawczo-behawioralna*. Warszawa: PZWL

## Pornography Addiction

One of the greatest threats for adolescents is the internet, which is perceived by teenagers as a reliable source of information. What is even worse, as specialists indicate, is that many adults have a similar view, allowing children to look for information online on their own, without any supervision<sup>28</sup>. Adults often let the internet do their job when it comes to education. The same concerns knowledge about sexuality. Teenagers' unsatisfied curiosity pushes them towards pornography, which takes over the educational role of parents and teachers. This phenomenon can foster unrealistic views of the sexual encounter, social roles and body image. Ever kinkier fantasies are aroused because the need for new stimuli escalates. Watching pornography, often accompanied by masturbation, can worryingly develop from initial interest to an escalation of stimuli through to a compelling need to act out sick fantasies. The fantasies often remain in the online realm and take the form of sexting or cyberstalking<sup>29</sup>. Sex educators agree that pornography, even in sporadic doses, is unsuitable for minors, and it is up to adults to take precautionary educational measures and protect children against the negative effects of watching pornography.

## Sexual Dysfunctions

The unrealistic image of sexual intercourse, which results from the lack of sex education, can entail a host of difficulties in fulfilling sexual needs. Pressure for perfect sex leaves no room for any problems. The assumption that sex must be perfect is wrong because everyone can occasionally experience problems with desire, arousal or orgasm. This is not a concerning phenomenon and the very subject is covered in sex education, which prepares adolescents for what a real sexual act is like. Lack of sex education in this area leads to

28 [https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families\\_and\\_Youth/Facts\\_for\\_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-Online-059.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-Online-059.aspx)

29 *Zaburzenia seksualne a psychoterapia poznawczo-behawioralna* (2019)

the reinforcement of negative patterns and aggravation of dysfunctions. Dissatisfaction with oneself increases, which has a negative impact on daily professional and social life. Additionally, there is an increasing need for urological, gynaecological and sexological treatment, often funded by the state. We could easily reduce the costs, by laying greater emphasis on preventive sexual healthcare.

## Summary

All of the aforementioned consequences are accompanied by unpleasant emotions. Feelings of anger, helplessness, shame, guilt and fear are correlated with sex in the minds of young people. What should be enjoyable becomes stressful. Worse still, young people cannot be blamed for it. Responsibility for it lies with the system: family, education, culture and politics. These are the sources of negative beliefs about sex, sexuality, one's own body. Having such unreliable sources of knowledge, young people enter the period of sexual activity completely unprepared. Low level of sex education stirs unnecessary emotions in adolescents.

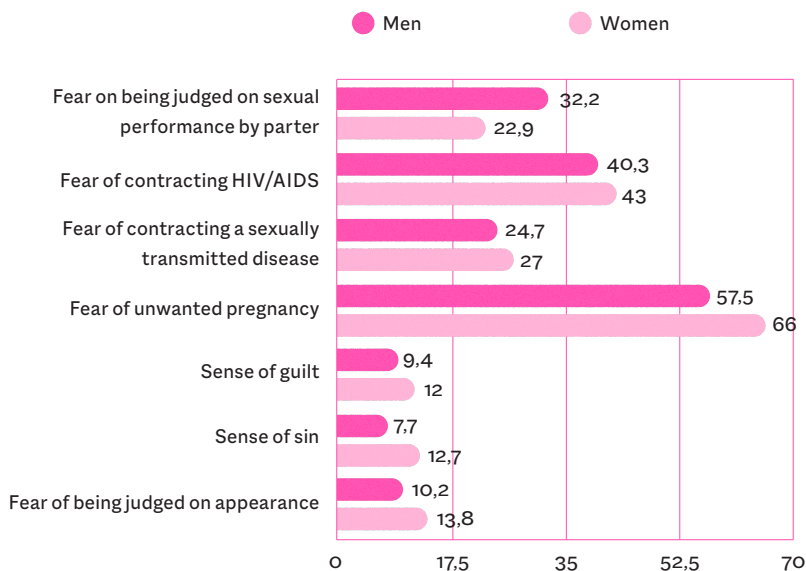
Excessive fear associated with the sexual domain is often triggered by misconceptions and unrealistic convictions. It can be manifested in dysfunctions linked with sexual performance, psycho-sexual development and building relations based on partnership<sup>30</sup>. The lack of sex education vastly contributes to many negative social phenomena, such as unwanted pregnancies or sexually transmitted infections. These are followed by economic consequences because the cost of treatment is much higher than that of prevention.

Summing up the scale of the problem, let us take a closer look at the point of view of those concerned, namely parents. Not often do they want to influence the curricula of such subjects as geography, mathematics or history. They are

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30 | Binik, Y.M., Hall, K.S.K. (2020). *Principles and Practice of Sex Therapy*. New York: The Guilford Press



Graph: Percentage of the greatest anxieties in relation to a sexual encounter in youth<sup>31</sup>

convinced that the curricula are drawn up by experts in their respective fields and taught properly. The same should hold true for sex education. Why is there no trust in this matter then? The knowledge and convictions of parents in this area differ and should not influence the shape of a solid knowledge base. Moreover, a healthy relationship with caregivers based on open communication is a perfect foundation for sexuality education taught by educators. According to research, many parents do not discuss sexuality with their children altogether<sup>32</sup>. So, where are young people supposed to learn about sexuality from? According to the worldwide research that covered a group of people aged 18–24, their main sources of information are the internet (58%), school (47%), friends

<sup>31</sup> *Seksualność Polaków na początku XXI wieku (2012)*

<sup>32</sup> Bieńko, M., Izdebski, Z., Wąż, K. (2016). *Edukacja seksualna w polskiej szkole*. Warszawa: Difin

(38%) and pornography (26%)<sup>33</sup>. Most Europeans want good quality sexuality education at schools so that the voice of experts does not get drowned out by media hype and the torrent of opinions of its ideological opponents. The ultimate costs of the ideological conflict are borne by the addressees of sex education, i.e. children and youth. Lack of proper care in this regard results in numerous negative mental and sexual health consequences. How sad that is!

33 Harris Interactive (2017). *Durex Global Sex Survey results*. Retrieved from <https://www.durex.co.uk/pages/global-sex-survey>

# 4

## Fast Forward. Modern Trends and Challenges in Sexual Education

by Michał Sawicki, Michał Tęcza

The world is changing and with it the needs, trends and challenges regarding sexual education. The times of limited access to information, VHS cassettes with pornography and porn magazines in shops have passed. Everything is readily available, literally underneath our fingertips. Universal and constant access to the Internet has revolutionised sexuality. But has it also revolutionised sexual education? Although authorities such as WHO have created their standards, the programmes in each country vary. They are heavily influenced by such factors as government, religion, culture and tolerance level. What makes this area so subjective?

Among the member states of the European Union, the situation varies dramatically. To compare – in Sweden, sex education has been introduced as an obligatory subject in schools back in 1955. As a result, the awareness about sexually transmitted infections, contraception and building relationships is high. In Lithuania, the first attempts of introducing sex education in schools began in 1996. The included topics were family planning and contraception. In 2002, the subject disappeared from lesson plans and its elements were supposed to be a part of other subjects, such as biology, ethics and PE to promote a healthy lifestyle. Of course, the



content of those lessons was based on the teachers' ideas and beliefs<sup>1</sup>.

The differences in the sexual education of each country result not only in various levels of knowledge about sexuality, gender and sexual orientation but also greatly influence the tolerance level towards non-heteronormative people. The situation of non-heteronormative people is one of the most pressing challenges of sexual education, both due to societal and political reasons. In countries with well developed sexual education, acceptance towards same-sex relationships is greater. For example, Belgium, where obligatory sexual education was introduced in 1995 and included gender, sexual orientation and building healthy relationships, is now placed second in the ranking of the most LGBT-friendly EU countries<sup>2</sup>. The lack of education and fear of the unknown result in ideas such as LGBT-free zones, equalising homosexuality and paedophilia, threatening with “LGBT ideology”, publicly insulting non-heteronormative people and calling them “rainbow plague”<sup>3</sup>.

The alleged threat to traditional values the populist governments warn about would not take root in people's minds if they were not lacking in education. In many European countries the situation of LGBT adolescents is terrifying. No acceptance from peers, harassment by the church, lack of legal protection for minorities — these are just some of the factors negatively influencing the psychological health of young people. According to the research conducted by Polish NGOs Lambda Warsaw Association, Trans-Fuzja Foundation, Campaign Against Homophobia, almost 70% of LGBT+ teenagers have suicidal thoughts and half of them battle with depression symptoms, often masked<sup>4</sup>. According to ILGA-Europe report,

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- 1 European Parliament. Directorate General for Internal Policies (2013). *Policies for Sexuality Education in the European Union*. Retrieved from [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/462515/IPOL-FEMM\\_NT\(2013\)462515\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/462515/IPOL-FEMM_NT(2013)462515_EN.pdf)
- 2 Rainbow Europe Country Ranking. Available at <https://rainbow-europe.org/country-ranking>
- 3 E.g. Applebaum, A. (2020, July 14). Poland's Rulers Made Up a 'Rainbow Plague'. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/07/polands-rulers-manufactured-a-rainbow-plague/614113/>
- 4 Świder, M., Winiewski, M. (Eds) (2017). *Situation of LGBT+ Persons in Poland. 2015–2016 report*. Warsaw: Campaign Against Homophobia

almost half of the surveyed LGBT adolescents had suicidal thoughts and 37,4% of them attempted to commit suicide<sup>5</sup>. The study conducted on a group of Spanish and Italian homo- and bisexuals aged 18–35 shows that 20% attempted suicide in comparison to 12% among heterosexuals<sup>6</sup>.

### Sexual Education and the Internet

The fast development of technology makes information more accessible. Children learn how to use smartphones earlier than how to build correct sentences. This makes finding pornography a child's play. Every eight-year-old with a phone can get unlimited access to many kinds of pornography in seconds – from “the classics” to deviant sex or sexual violence. The data is alarming, according to studies the majority of adolescents find that the access to pornography is too easy<sup>7</sup>.

Therefore, preparing children for contact with pornography is a great challenge. Can we shield children from pornography? Can we forbid them to watch it? If someone thinks it is possible, they are quite naive. Children are usually better than their parents when it comes to modern technology. Even if we block mature content, they will be able to watch it on their classmate's phone. Even if we forbid the child to watch pornography on the Internet and they listen, someone can still send it to them or they can find it by chance. We are unable to protect them from this. We should also remember that curiosity is a developmental characteristic of every child. According to surveys, 92,4% of Poles came in contact with pornography for the first time before they were 16 years

5 ILGA-Europe (2007). *Suicidality among lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth. Report by ILGA Europe to the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe*. Retrieved from [https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/Attachments/ilga-europe\\_lgbt\\_youth\\_suicide\\_final.pdf](https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/Attachments/ilga-europe_lgbt_youth_suicide_final.pdf)

6 Baiocco, R., et al (2014). Suicidal ideation in Spanish and Italian lesbian and gay young adults: The role of internalized sexual stigma. *Psicothema* 26(4), 490–496. Retrieved from <http://www.psicothema.com/pdf/4219.pdf>

7 According to research conducted by Polish Institute for Integrated Prevention this is what 89% of responders believe. Instytut Profilaktyki Zintegrowanej (2018). *Jak zwiększyć skuteczność profilaktyki problemów młodzieży*. Retrieved from [https://www.ipzin.org/images/dokumenty/broszura\\_ipzin\\_2018\\_jak\\_zwiekszyc\\_skutecnosc\\_profilaktyki\\_problemow\\_mlodziwy.pdf](https://www.ipzin.org/images/dokumenty/broszura_ipzin_2018_jak_zwiekszyc_skutecnosc_profilaktyki_problemow_mlodziwy.pdf)

old<sup>8</sup>, and 71% before they were 14 years old<sup>9</sup>. According to the American research, the average age of the first contact with pornography is 13,37.<sup>10</sup> In France, in 2017 the average was 14,35, and according to a British study from 2020, 51% of thirteen-year-olds already have experience with pornography<sup>11</sup>. There are many negative consequences of watching pornography – modern and accurate sexual education should treat this problem seriously. It should also reach adults.

The anonymity provided by the Internet lowers inhibitions and gives opportunities for earning quick and easy money. Apart from giving access to pornography, it makes it possible to earn money from creating it. A number of websites allow live streaming, during which visitors can pay the streamer to take various actions. They can decide if the person should show their face, genitals or engage in sexual activity, such as masturbation, for example. According to the surveys, among sixteen-year-olds in Poland, 2,5% of the responders stripped during video chats and 90% of them did it for money<sup>12</sup>. Sexting (sending erotic or pornographic photos and messages) has been widespread for years and in recent years has grown in popularity. Undoubtedly, it is influenced by technological developments and the fact that we rarely put our phones away. In 2016, 88% of the respondents of an online survey created by the American Psychological Association admitted to sexting in the last year<sup>13</sup>. Among adolescents, this problem

- 8 | Rawińska, M. (Ed) (2019). *Zaburzenia seksualne a psychoterapia poznawczo-behawioralna*. Warsaw: PZWL
- 9 | *Jak zwiększyć skuteczność profilaktyki* (2018)
- 10 | American Psychological Association (2017, August 3). *Age of First Exposure to Pornography Shapes Men's Attitudes Toward Women*. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2017/08/pornography-exposure>
- 11 | BBFC (2020). *Young People, Pornography and Age-verification*. Retrieved from <https://www.revealingreality.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/BBFC-Young-people-and-pornography-Final-report-2401.pdf>
- 12 | Grabek, A. (2013, Septemebr 18). W sieci kwitnie prostytutcja nieletnich. *Rzeczpospolita*. Retrieved from <https://www.rp.pl/artykul/1049179-W-sieci-kwitnie-prostytucja-nieletnich.html>
- 13 | American Psychological Association (2015, August 8). *How Common Is Sexting?* Retrieved from [https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2015/08/common-sexting?fbclid=IwAR3m1qDIMxUgZG65CIUzi\\_1M-HGZgSyex5zERuVxx2THh3NXNkXoNumffl](https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2015/08/common-sexting?fbclid=IwAR3m1qDIMxUgZG65CIUzi_1M-HGZgSyex5zERuVxx2THh3NXNkXoNumffl)

affects  $\frac{1}{4}$  of respondents (12–17-year-olds)<sup>14</sup>. Child grooming is another phenomenon, against which young people seem to be insufficiently protected. With the development of technology, paedophilia has also appeared on the Internet. Child grooming means seducing children by adults through chats, messaging services and social media to abuse them sexually. It is establishing a relationship and emotional connection with a child and then asking them to send photos, meet and engage in sexual activities.

With the rise in child grooming and sexting, “sextortion” (extorting sexual favours) also gains popularity. Usually, extortion relates to the publication of erotic photographs sent by the victim initially, if they do not agree to send more.

The answer to these phenomena should be a sexual education that discusses issues such as respecting one’s own body or dangers of publishing nude photographs on the Internet. Cyber violence, which is mostly overlooked, should be a fixture in the curriculum to protect children against the negative consequences of dangerous situations on the Internet. When a child’s correspondence, messaging applications and phones are not controlled by guardians, they can be used by paedophiles. Therefore, in the case of Internet threats, educating adults seems to be crucial. We should ask ourselves: Where does the child’s privacy end and where does their protection begin? Most parents, probably out of respect for their children’s subjectivity, or perhaps due to lack of technological skills and knowledge, do not control or limit their children’s activity on the Internet. However, establishing limits shows that they care. Respecting the child’s privacy is one thing, and responsibility for the content the child can encounter on the Internet is another. Parental monitoring is a must to protect children from harm.

## Challenges Beyond Internet

The Internet is not the only area we should be mindful of. Another sexual education challenge lies in a completely different area — in real human contact. The phenomenon called "chemsex" is worrying on many levels and nowadays observed more frequently by the experts. Chemsex means combining sexual behaviour with psychoactive substances. In most cases, such sexual sessions last for a few hours, or even days, and two to over a dozen people take part in them. Most of them are under the influence of the substances referred to as stimulants (methedrone, methamphetamine, cocaine, MDMA) that increase the activity of the central nervous system and/or depressants (GHB, GBL) that lower its activity<sup>15</sup>. Among the audiences of sexual educators and patients of psychotherapy practices, there are increasingly more people who struggle with this problem. Therefore, we should take a closer look at the dangers associated with chemsex. Especially these:

- Dangerous drug use. Frequent or intensive use of stimulants has a negative impact on sexual and cognitive functions, as well as systemic health. Depressants — called "G" — GHB and GBL in small doses have relaxing properties. In large doses, however, they are used as the so-called "date rape drugs". Even when taken intentionally, it can lead to a loss of consciousness during a sexual session.
- Greater inclination towards dangerous situations such as unprotected sex or bodily harm (including wounds and strains, due to higher pain threshold). Under the influence, people can lose alertness or cross their boundaries. This can also lead to the spread and mutation of sexually transmitted infections.
- Loss of pleasure derived from sexual intercourse without drugs. Some of the patients addicted to chemsex say that they cannot imagine intercourse when sober. It has become

less attractive. Psychoactive substances enhance sexual experiences.

- **Dangerous escapism.** Drugs influence more than sexual gratification. The first noticeable change after use is relaxation. Everyday worries disappear. The need to deal with problems vanishes. The feeling of one's attractiveness grows. Patients also describe feelings of agency, calmness and relief. Unfortunately, it is extremely deceptive, as once they are sober, everything comes back. Additionally, they are weighted by consequences stemming from chemsex itself – guilt, tiredness, hangover.
- **Issues in everyday life.** Just as it is with alcohol – one pays for initial pleasure with various ailments of the body. In many cases, the after-effects of taking drugs are stronger than alcohol. Bad mood and changed behaviour are prominent among them. Patients state that even a few days after chemsex they feel unwell, ignore everyday responsibilities, anger easily and experience disproportionate feelings of anxiety. They also mention difficulties in interpersonal relations.
- **Aforementioned relationship troubles.** Chemsex does not concern only singles. Among patients, there are often pairs who have sex under influence. At times, they invite other people. They often change partners and the feeling of closeness between them disappears over time. Drugs lower our inhibitions – this can lead to feelings of jealousy or irritation, conflicts and, as a result, a break-up.
- **Cross addiction.** This is a situation in which, apart from the drug problem, there is also a behavioural problem – the need to have sex with new people or constantly pushing the limits of one's body. Chemsex becomes a means to deal with tensions other than sexual, such as anxiety, hopelessness or stress.

In this case, the issues faced in the course of treatment are multifaceted. Firstly, those engaging in chemsex often take antibiotics or use pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), which means taking antiretroviral drugs to prevent infections. This is an effective method from the epidemiologic point of view, but it is not without side effects. Secondly, this phenomenon is still not well known by doctors and therapists. Only a limited number of specialists are able to notice the risk of cross-addiction, that drugs appear only in the context of sexual contact and taking them is not the aim in itself. Thirdly, even with this awareness, the therapeutic process is difficult, because it concerns sexuality. While it is possible to work towards abstinence from psychoactive substances, it is almost impossible in the case of sex. One cannot turn off their sexual needs. The final issue concerns the awareness of the patients themselves, who for a long time do not see any problems in this type of play. In a way, they are correct when they do not call themselves as typical “drug users”<sup>16</sup>.

### Reaching Your Audience

When talking about trends, we do not concentrate on the challenges and issues, but on the ways of overcoming them. We consider how to introduce preventive measures in order to be well received by more and more demanding audiences and to talk with them about issues they truly care about. It is a good moment to take a look at the best practices. One of the trends that has gained enormous popularity is “holistic sex education”. This approach is the answer to the dualism that reigned in this topic. Until now, two approaches were most prominent. One was promoted by conservatives “abstinence-only sex education”, according to which sexual abstinence before marriage is the only possible choice. The other was a liberal option — “comprehensive sex education”, which concentrates on topics

16 | Read more about chemsex: Duwe, J. D. (2018). *The Truth About Chemsex: Understanding and Overcoming Chemsex Addiction*. New Jersey: BookBaby; Tatarsky, A. (Ed) (2012). *Redukcja szkód w psychoterapii. Nowe podejście w leczeniu uzależnień od narkotyków i alkoholu*. Warszawa: Krajowe Biuro do Spraw Przeciwdziałania Narkomanii

such as contraception, safe sex and preventing sexual abuse. In comparison, the holistic approach is much more individualised. It is focused on the psychological and sexual aspects of an individual. It recognises their emotions and needs. Here, the main goal is to provide the audience with knowledge and help them develop the skills needed to make healthy and independent decisions when it comes to their sexuality.

A number of specialists, however, find that the role of sexual education is much more complex. It is not enough to give people knowledge about healthy behaviours and techniques for addressing troubles. It must be taken into consideration that many people will not be interested in such recommendations. There are multiple reasons for it: personality traits, influence coming from social groups, the financial situation. Gaining awareness about this state of affairs is the next step in understanding the failures of existing preventive measures. We already know that we cannot make anyone abstain from sex. What if someone does not wish to use condoms and decides to have frequent sexual contact with random partners? We could say that in such a situation we come up against a wall. A new preventive approach, based on the “harm reduction” philosophy, comes to our rescue here. Of course, educators working with this approach employ reliable information and pass it on to their audience, but first and foremost they focus on reducing the harm resulting from a given sexual behaviour. The main rule is not to judge<sup>17</sup>. This approach works perfectly when working with adults, who are difficult to convince. In such cases, the solution is to provide them with knowledge and to consider how it can increase the safety of their sexual activities. Therefore, if someone decides to have sex with multiple partners and without protection, the solution would be to use pre-exposure prophylaxis, take frequent STI tests and communicate openly with sexual partners. The goal is



to compromise the client's expectations, understanding their current situation and promoting optimal health<sup>18</sup>.

Another issue that the current preventive system must face is reaching those who deliberately do not become the beneficiaries of the efforts to educate. If specialists want to extend their reach, they cannot wait in their offices for the clients to come. There is a significant need to change the direction of the activity. This trend, called "outreach", can be observed in programmes organised by NGOs, which promote healthy sexual behaviours. Workers and volunteers take part in campaigns outside of their organisation. They take knowledge to people. They carry out projects in clubs, bars, meeting places, dorms. They meet with clients in their "natural habitat". The greatest challenge for prevention such as *outreach* is abiding by the rules of the meeting spot. For instance, one type of *outreach* is called "party-work" and refers to sexual education in places where adolescents meet — such as clubs, discos, bars. Then, educators work during the time chosen by the party's organiser, usually late in the evening. In accordance with the rules of *harm reduction*, they do not judge but provide factual knowledge and educational materials in a way that does not disturb the party. This way of working proves useful in the education of sex workers, who are especially sensitive to criticism of their behaviour.

To reach the younger target group, experts open up to the Internet and social media. This is a sensitive topic, as the Internet is at the same time one of the greatest threats to children and adolescents and one of the greatest chances for current sexual education. The need to introduce factual information through the Internet is evident, as it is needed to break through the layers of lies threatening sexual education, as well as mature content and pornography, which

18 | Harm reduction philosophy is also used in the prophylaxis and therapy of an addiction — behavioural and chemical. Drug substitution, for example, using methadone in addiction treatment in the 1960s, and campaign of exchanging needles and syringes for clean ones in the 1980s are some of the first efforts in this approach. As a result, in Europe, the number of HIV infections from psychoactive substance injections has fallen significantly. See Jabłoński, P., Bukowska, B., Czabała, J.C. (Eds) (2012). *Uzależnienie od narkotyków podręcznik dla terapeutów*. Warsaw: National Bureau for Drug Prevention

are at times penalised. For this purpose, social campaigns promoting sexual health and access to factual knowledge are created. Their success is warranted by engaging celebrities: actors, musicians and influencers. We have all heard about #MeToo hashtag, which was part of the movement for protecting women against sexual abuse. The campaign was popularised in 2017 by American actress Alyssa Milano, and she was followed by Lady Gaga and Viola Davis, among others<sup>19</sup>. The campaign's slogan has been used by European activists, who also brought to light the problem of crossing physical and psychological boundaries in sexual abuse. In Sweden, in 2018, the FATTA! (Got it!) movement was formed to protest against laws harming sexual abuse victims. The movement strove to change the letter of the law to state that any sexual behaviour without the explicit consent of all sides equals rape. Many artists took part in it to encourage men to take interest in this topic<sup>20</sup>. In Poland, due to the measures taken by the government to negate sexual education, campaign #sexed.pl was organised. The face of the campaign and its initiator was a well-known model Anja Rubik. Additionally, it was supported on the Internet by many Polish artists and influencers. The campaign's goal was to raise the awareness of the youth in the topic of sexuality<sup>21</sup>. An important event for prevention was Prince Harry's involvement in National HIV Testing Week organised by Terrence Higgins Trust in Great Britain<sup>22</sup>. The topic of sexual health was also undertaken by amfAR, the organisation that researches cure for AIDS as a part of its Epic Voice action. The American drag queen Ongina was one of the faces for this campaign<sup>23</sup>. The above examples show that there is still much to be done in preventative sexual health-care and how social media, as well as the image of celebrities interested in it, can be used.

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19 Pflum, M. (2018, October 15). A year ago, Alyssa Milano started a conversation about #MeToo. These women replied. *NBC-News.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/year-ago-alyssa-milano-started-conversation-about-metoo-these-women-n920246>

20 <http://fattaman.nu/in-english/>

21 <https://www.sexed.pl>

22 <https://www.startswithme.org.uk>

23 <http://www.curecountdown.org/epicvoices>

The development of sexual education brings about additional trends to the methodology. In line with the idea that “prevention is better than treatment”, more precautionary measures are taken. Although it is difficult to measure their effects, after a few years their influence on awareness and behaviour of a given society becomes apparent. It should be noted that indicators of educational measures are often inversely proportional to the theoretical assumptions. The perfect example is the HIV epidemiology. The initial assumption is to decrease the number of infections. To that end, people are educated to increase their knowledge and change their view on responsibility when engaging in sexual behaviour. Testing is inherent in the prophylaxis of any infection. Thanks to the educational effort, more people test themselves for HIV to take care of their health. As a result, the statistics show that the HIV-positive populace is larger than before the educational efforts have started. We can observe the paradox of preventive healthcare. From a medical point of view, we are successful. Because a greater percentage of people are aware that they are infected, they can start their treatment and stop further spread of the virus. This paradox is used by those opposing sexual education, who show their ignorance and lack of understanding by claiming that preventative measures increase the number of infections. Therefore, prevention is extremely important but often insufficiently promoted, as its value is difficult to measure.

Modern prevention is based on a positive message. Psychologists have frequently emphasised that threats do not bring projected results. Threatening with negative consequences only discourages from gaining new information. Barely any smokers look at the terrifying pictures and text on the cigarette packages. They do not want to feel any uncomfortable emotions. In the end, the preventative measures

fail to influence them. More frequently neutral, informative and non-judgmental message is used. The next step is motivational interviewing, which means – support in the process of change and encouragement to carry on with new resolutions. Specialists using this method emphasise the effort made by the client in working on himself and help them concentrate on positives coming from the decisions they have made, such as giving up smoking, decreasing the number of dangerous sexual contacts or getting tested for gonorrhoea<sup>24</sup>. Motivational interviewing proves effective when working with adults and children. Sexual education for the youth should also start as early as possible. We need to remember that this is a process, and we need to add to the knowledge. Just like in mathematics – at first, we learn about numbers, then addition, and only later how to perform complicated operations. When educating parents we highlight that it is better (also for their comfort) to explain to a small child concepts such as penis, vagina and sex to minimise the stress when an adolescent asks about the pull-out method. What's more, sexual education should be introduced in advance. We should tell girls about menstruation before they reach puberty or about contraception before they start having sex, and so on. Educating after the fact is similar to driving and using turn signals after the turn was made – a very risky activity! If we want to protect our children, not only against abuse but also false information, needless feelings of shame and ridicule, as well as lack of self-acceptance, we should provide them with the best we can – knowledge and feeling of safety.

## Conclusions

Sexual education is a broad subject that includes knowledge about the entire sphere of human sexuality. Starting with human biology, through sexual functions, to expressing

one's gender role<sup>25</sup>. Just like any other science that is based on research and experience from working with clients, it is continuously broadened and updated with new findings. It remains under the influence of changing politics, cultural and ideological trends, as well as technological development. Sexual education is mostly based on prevention and promoting a healthy lifestyle. Therefore, it is often difficult to find quantifiable indicators for this branch of science. Continuous data updating and adapting methods to the changeable conditions and needs of the society are a must. We include here both children, which from a very young age are exposed to pornography, abuse or false information on the Internet, and adults who frequently have false ideas about norms and sexual health due to lack of sexual education in previous generations. More and more often we are faced with new phenomena and challenges in sexology. Chemsex, providing sexual services on the Internet, sexting and child grooming are only some of the phenomena we should be aware of. We should also remember that sexuality cannot be turned off. Our goal is not to frighten, evoke feelings of disgust or deny sexual needs. In the case of adults, we need to educate without judgement, present possibilities and discuss the benefits and costs of given solutions. What we can do for children is to secure their development, protect them against dangers, as well as give them means of remediation.

Sexual education is still not at the level it should be, as young people aged 15–24 constitute 41% of the new HIV infections worldwide<sup>26</sup>. LGBT+ rights in many EU countries (e.g. Lithuania, Hungary, Poland) are not respected and even limited through legislation, which results in a higher percentage of depressive states among non-heteronormative adolescents in comparison to the general population. It is troubling that at times neither school nor home is safe. It is at school that

25 Lew-Starowicz, Z., Skrzypulec, V. (2010). *Podstawy Seksuologii*. Warsaw: PZWL

26 UNESCO (2012). *Comprehensive Sexuality Education: The Challenges and Opportunities of Scaling-up*. Retrieved from <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5519047ce4b0d9aaa8c82e69/t/5550b754e4b043d4fe6b7d20/1431353172708/UNESCO-Challenges-opportunities-scaling-up.pdf>

¼ of violent acts against children are committed from the lack of tolerance towards sexual minorities<sup>27</sup>. As a society, we can take the example from the positive experience of the countries where sexual education is on a higher level. We should base our methods on the best practices in prevention and systemic treatments. We should fight myths and prejudice. We should remember that it is not our religious or political beliefs but the good of the children that truly counts.

28 | Świder, M., Winiewski, M. (Ed.) (2017). Situation of LGBT+ Persons in Poland. 2015–2016 report. Warsaw: Campaign Against Homophobia

# 5

## Why Inclusive Language Matters

by Sergio Marín Zapata,  
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### Introduction

Language has incredible power in constructing the perspective through which human beings understand the inextricable difficulties of our society. Semiotic studies discuss the beginning of the process through which human beings understand meaning from a sign<sup>1</sup>.

Language is, so to say, the magic of communication: it can be culturally apprehended or mixed with the subconscious. The symbols we talk about can diverge from words to sketches to body language. The twofold division that argues in which proportion our subconscious interferes in the production of significances or the reception of understandings has had a lot of discussion on it in the field<sup>2</sup>.

Something to remark is that the person himself is the one who creates the meaning for a sign, mainly, in accordance with the culture, or habits or collective experience. This 'mainly' signifies that it is a non-static attribute: it depends on the place, language, belonging to a community, the field of labour, beliefs, gender, identity and so many other factors. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that we are based on culturally shared codes that allow us to understand each other or not to.



- 1 De Saussure, F. (2011). *Course in General Linguistics*. New York: Columbia University Press. Peirce, Sanders, et al. (1960). *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce: Edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss: Principles of Philosophy and Elements of Logic*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press
- 2 De Lauretis, T. (1984). *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press

Feminist studies had placed an important doubt within this construct of reality: is language a tricky tool that will always reflect the hegemonic patriarchal imaginary towards oppressed subjects, or can it be dismantled? In other words: “I will rather describe language as a tool that is drawn on strategically by both sexist and feminist campaigners, and as a site of struggle over word-meaning, which is also often a struggle over who has the right to be in certain environments, speak in certain ways and hold certain jobs”<sup>3</sup>.

Indeed, language is important to gender equality and gender rights. There is evidence that countries with gendered languages face more gender inequality than those with gender-neutral ones<sup>4</sup> and, similarly, hyper-gendered languages may struggle more with inclusive speech than the rest.

Sexual minorities and the LGBTQ+ community had reappropriated words originally meant as insults towards them, like the term “queer”, by emptying the term of offensiveness and giving visibility of the rejection on the public sphere and across different languages. The importance of the term falls on the interpreter, and the ability to play with the perspective of the essence is given to the word itself.

The purpose of this chapter is to establish how malleable a language is, through examples that display diversity and sexual education in actual cases. Cases at hand include the social need of sexual education (Poniewozik 2019), the necessity of more detailed and upgraded policies at the European level, and the sensibilisation of diversity giving voice transversally, in all fields, to the communities that are oppressed because of their gender or sexual orientation.

These needs are necessary for gentle and peaceful coexistence everywhere in Europe. This chapter reviews a plethora of examples, good and bad, of how inclusive language and sex education shape gender-inclusiveness and LGBTQ+ rights across

3 Mills, S. (2008). *Language and Sexism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

4 Prewitt-Freilino, J.L., Caswell, T.A., Laakso, E.K. (2012). The Gendering of Language: A Comparison of Gender Equality in Countries with Gendered, Natural Gender, and Genderless Languages. *Sex Roles* 66(3), 268–81



the European Union (EU) in different aspects of societal and individual life.

### Language, Inclusivity, and Education in Practice

Inclusive language is a language that “acknowledges diversity, conveys respect to all people, is sensitive to differences, and promotes equal opportunities”<sup>5</sup>. Throughout Europe, inclusive language is done differently: other than grammatical factors, a country’s culture also plays into it. While this should be observed and proved empirically, there seems to be an overall positive correlation in countries with a larger use of gender-neutral speech and inclusive language, which also tend to enjoy more LGBTQ+ rights, and wider social acceptance for queer communities. This chapter looks at inclusive language in the everyday language, the law, and how it is applied and being helpful towards good sex education. We will assess how fragmented the European context really is in this matter.

#### 1. Language inclusivity in everyday speech

The precursor of inclusive language in Europe is the Swedish language. Swedish is a gendered language, even though masculine and feminine nouns now act equally, and only neutral nouns are grammatically different. However, pronouns are a different thing, and the third person singular does have a masculine and a feminine form: both ‘he’ (*han*) and ‘she’ (*hon*) exist. That shows no space into being identified as a non-binary gender, tearing apart the possibility of interpellation. What it means is not being intelligible or acknowledged, and therefore excluded from recognition<sup>6</sup>. That is, non-existent in everyday speech.

To correct this, just over ten years ago, activists started to use a new pronoun, *hen*, as a gender-neutral option<sup>7</sup>. It has two main uses: the first one is designating a third person when



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- 5 ILGA (2013). *Responding to Hate Speech against LGBTI people*. London: Article19. Retrieved from [https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/responding\\_to\\_hate\\_speech\\_against\\_lgbti\\_people.pdf](https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/responding_to_hate_speech_against_lgbti_people.pdf)
- 6 Beck-Gernsheim, E., et al (2003). *Women & Social Transformation*. Frankfurt: P. Lang
- 7 Gustafsson Sendén, M., Bäck, E.A., Lindqvist, A. (2015). Introducing a Gender-Neutral Pronoun in a Natural Gender Language: The Influence of Time on Attitudes and Behavior. *Frontiers in Psychology* 6

the gender of said person was unknown or irrelevant to the discussion, and the second one is to provide a pronoun with which non-binary and gender-fluid individuals out there would feel comfortable.

Its first major appearance was in a children's book in 2012, where its use was consistent. Whereas at first it was attacked by many press commentators, its use nowadays has become widespread and it even has been included as a word in the dictionary, appeared in government documents, has been used by a Minister at the *Riksdag*, and the Swedish Language Council has even issued recommendations on how to use it<sup>8</sup>.

Similarly, France has had a push in the so-called inclusive writing and inclusive language in recent years<sup>9</sup>. Unlike in Sweden, the French Academy has not favoured this development, although it gave in to the pressure to at least allow the feminine forms of some professions<sup>10</sup>. In German, written inclusive plurals have become common, but its three-gender grammar does not allow for spoken inclusiveness — after all, even “a girl” is neutral, not feminine.

In Spain, inclusive writing started with the use of the ‘@’ sign whenever the gendered vocal was used, as it looks like an ‘o’ (masculine) and an ‘a’ (feminine) juxtaposed. Orally, the ‘@’ has been read in the form of dual plurals, which has stuck in common and official speech even after the ‘@’ lost popularity as it was considered binary since it pictured two concrete genders.

Since that did not destroy the imaginative of gendered vocabulary addressed to human beings, and the purpose of inclusive language is to create and give a truly neutral perspective to words, the ‘@’ eventually started being replaced by an ‘x’. The word “Latinx” in the US activism is a perfect example of this use<sup>11</sup>.

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8 | Vergoossen, H. P., et al (2020). Are New Gender-Neutral Pronouns Difficult to Process in Reading? The Case of Hen in SWEDISH. *Frontiers in Psychology* 11.

9 | Charaudeau, P. (2018). 'L'écriture inclusive au défi de la neutralisation en français'. *Le Debat* n° 199(2), 13–31

10 | Rérolle, R. (2019). L'Académie Française Se Résout à La Féminisation Des Noms de Métiers. *Le Monde*. Retrieved from [https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2019/02/28/l-academie-francaise-se-resout-a-la-feminisation-des-noms-de-metiers\\_5429632\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2019/02/28/l-academie-francaise-se-resout-a-la-feminisation-des-noms-de-metiers_5429632_3224.html)

11 | Salinas Jr, C., Lozano, A. (2019). Mapping and Recontextualizing the Evolution of the Term Latinx: An Environmental Scanning in Higher Education. *Journal of Latinos and Education* 18(4): 302–15

Technically, its main advantage is removing the focus on gender. Eventually, though, it was discredited as being binary too, as people are educated to know two genders, and so the ‘e’ vowel was introduced into pronouns. The ‘e’ created an empty space in the imagination regarding what gender could belong to the word. Pronouns with e (elle, nosotres, vosotres, elles) now have the same two uses as Swedish ‘hen’.

Unlike in Sweden, though, this has not seen a widespread acceptance. The Royal Academy of the Spanish Language has been even more inflexible than the French Academy and has consistently refused to officialise any attempts at making language more inclusive, even the now commonly used dual plurals in oral speech<sup>12</sup>. While the use of ‘@’ and dual plurals is normalised but not necessarily common, ‘x’ and ‘e’ pronouns are politically charged and almost exclusively used by militant activists.

Elsewhere, the picture is bleaker. Indeed, Italian yet has to officialise the femininisation of certain professions<sup>13</sup>, but the inclusive language debate is far from prevalent. While both Portuguese and Romanian had tried to adopt inclusive pronouns and endings following the Spanish model, they have not gained much traction<sup>14</sup>.

Finally, languages of Slavic roots are hyper-gendered and pose very difficult grammatical challenges for the adoption of inclusive language<sup>15</sup>. Together with a political environment that would be generally hostile to the said initiatives, few initiatives deemed worthy of being mentioned have been adopted so far.

The importance of embracing inclusive language in everyday speech means equal treatment and recognition of a society’s diversity. It is a matter of fairness towards sexual minorities after centuries of discrimination. Diversity is what

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12 Moretti, J. (2018). La Real Academia Española y el rechazo al lenguaje inclusivo. *Letras* (7): e138–e138

13 Gheno, V. (2020). La questione dei nomi delle professioni al femminile una volta per tutte. *Valigia Blu*. Retrieved from <https://www.valigiablui.it/professioni-nomi-femminili/>

14 Navarro, R. (2020). Are Romance Languages Becoming More Gender Neutral? *Global Voices*. Retrieved from <https://globalvoices.org/2020/09/11/are-romance-languages-becoming-more-gender-neutral/>

15 Wilson, C.L. (2018, October 28). Can You Be Nonbinary in Russian? *SEJ*. Retrieved from <https://u.osu.edu/seej/2018/10/25/can-you-be-nonbinary-in-russian/>

constructs modern democracies; respect for everyone is what constitutes modern societies.

The challenge is how to teach people to avoid language habits that may unintentionally lead to marginalisation and stereotype perpetuation. Changing basic grammatical concepts of any language is usually controversial and always a difficult process. Language-awareness is a powerful tool in reaching basic goals of modern sexual education and shaping positive attitudes towards minorities among youth. It can be facilitated by sexual education curriculum, which by definition focuses on diversity and inclusion.

## *2. Legal effects of language inclusivity*

Beyond the use of language in everyday life, the use of language in the law matters as well. For instance, this is the case in same-sex unions. In the European Union, all member states besides Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, and Romania offer some form of recognition to same-sex couples. However, only thirteen member states offer gender-neutral civil marriages. The rest either recognise a civil partnership or an extremely limited form of cohabitation, as in the case of Slovakia and Poland<sup>16</sup>.

This creates a hierarchy of marriage rights, both within and among EU member states. Consequently, legal categories of relationships are created, and some of them are not available to all citizens, which can be seen as legal or societal discrimination. Since it is beyond the scope of the Treaties, the Union can simply not regulate this policy area. However, what does fall under EU regulatory competences is the granting of residence and work permits to family members of EU citizens, including not only kin but also third-country nationals who are legal partners of a EU citizen.

After many countries legalised civil unions and/or marriage for LGBTQ+ couples in a 'wave' between 2012 and 2015,

<sup>16</sup> In Poland it is in the form of the so-called "common cohabitation" introduced by the Supreme Court. See Zielińska, E. (2016). *European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination* [EC report]. Retrieved from <https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/3773-poland-landmark-decision-of-the-supreme-court-regarding-rights-of-same-sex-partners-in-criminal-law-pdf-101-kb>

most EU member states extended family rights to LGBTQ+ partners who were third-country nationals and married, or entered, a civil partnership with a EU citizen. Some, like Romania, did not.

In 2010, Mr Coman, a dual Romanian-American citizen, married Mr Hamilton, an American citizen, in Brussels. Under the Belgian law, Mr Hamilton was given a residence permit as the spouse of a EU citizen. In 2012, Mr Coman inquired the Romanian government about obtaining a Romanian residence permit for Mr Hamilton.

The Romanian government, whose constitution explicitly bans same-sex marriage, said that it could not offer any family benefits to Mr Hamilton. After a long judicial process, the European Court of Justice ruled in Mr Coman's favour in 2018<sup>17</sup>. And so, since then, same-sex marriages performed in a EU member state that permits them must also be recognised in all 27 member states for the purposes of residence.

This case is obviously a major breakthrough for LGBTQ+ rights across the EU, and as such it must be celebrated. It is an example of how legal tools, including rulings of the Court of Justice of the European Union, can be used to positively expand the scope of linguistic categories on minorities, limiting systemic discrimination and its consequences. However, this particular victory relies not on human rights provisions but on free movement rights contained in the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Citizens' Rights Directive of 2004, which state "spouse" without reference to gender<sup>18</sup>. This is an exception, as around the world citizenship and residence laws are to this day gender-discriminatory<sup>19</sup>.

Even after *Coman*, however, Romania has upheld a constitutional ban on same-sex unions. The European ruling did not



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17 CJEU. 2018. Case C-673/16 *Coman and Others v. Inspectorate*. Retrieved from <http://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=202542&doclang=EN>

18 Rijpma, J. J. (2019). You Gotta Let Love Move: ECJ 5 June 2018, Case C-673/16, *Coman, Hamilton, Accept v Inspectoratul General Pentru Imigrări*. *European Constitutional Law Review* 15(2), 324–39

19 van Waas, L., Albarazi, Z., Brennan, D. (2019). Gender Discrimination in Nationality Laws: Human Rights Pathways to Gender Neutrality. In Reilly, N. (Ed). *International Human Rights of Women*. Singapore: Springer, 193–207. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-8905-3-13>

prevent national discriminatory tendencies. In neighbouring Hungary, the government is going even further by trying to restrict rights that have already been granted. Same-sex civil partnerships are allowed and tolerated, but Orbán's administration has been adamant in removing rights from LGBTQ+ individuals and couples since its takeover of the country's government and civil service in 2010.

Firstly, a new constitution was passed in 2011, ignoring all political and civil society actors external to the Fidesz's sphere. This constitution defined marriage as "the union of a man and a woman" and withdrew all legal provisions that would allow for the protection of minorities, including sexual minorities.

For a while, other than indirect attacks on sexual minorities using anonymous militias, right-wing activists, etc. The government did not concern itself with attacking minorities more. In 2018, however, the local accreditation for gender studies programmes at all Hungarian universities was removed, with a minister deeming the discipline as an 'ideology' rather than a science<sup>20</sup>. That was a small but clear example of the dehumanisation of minorities that the right-wing populists in Europe are using by deeming LGBTQ+ as an ideology.

In 2020, as a way of finding a new scapegoat during the COVID-19 crisis, and after migrants stopped arriving in Hungary, things took a turn for worse<sup>21</sup>. In May, while the world was struggling to contain the virus, Orbán used pandemic-related rule-by-decree to promulgate a law that changes the "Gender" category in official documents to "Gender at birth". Through this mechanism, transsexuality remains tolerated and accepted, the government can claim it is protecting their rights, but they add the stigma of having to interact with authorities using sex at birth<sup>22</sup>.

20 | Prager, B. (2019). The Hungarian Ban on Gender Studies and Its Implications for Democratic Freedom. *Harvard Journal of Law & Gender*. Retrieved from <https://harvardjlg.com/2019/01/the-hungarian-ban-on-gender-studies-and-its-implications-for-democratic-freedom/>

21 | Előd, F. (2020). Are Sexual Minorities the "new Mi-grants" of Hungary? *Telex*. Retrieved from [https://telex.hu/english/2020/12/17/lgbtq-hungary-fidesz-political-communication?fbclid=IwAR3nzld\\_K4BUZvN8D5jP-\\_GdpAFy24GqtFE-VODEmnT3QziH4afouhila94](https://telex.hu/english/2020/12/17/lgbtq-hungary-fidesz-political-communication?fbclid=IwAR3nzld_K4BUZvN8D5jP-_GdpAFy24GqtFE-VODEmnT3QziH4afouhila94)

22 | Wareham, J. (2020). Transgender People In Hungary Lose Right To Gender Recognition. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://>

Parenthood came next. While it was already limited in practice<sup>23</sup>, an amendment rushed through legislation at the end of 2020, right before these lines were written, has officially outlawed an adoption of children by LGBTQ+ parents by inserting the sentence ‘the father is a man, the mother is a woman’ into the constitution<sup>24</sup>, effectively excluding most rainbow families from being deemed as parents. The government’s line is thus clear: rainbow families are not normal families, their members should not be treated as normal members of society, and their rights should be limited.

In such cases, the language in the law has been progressively modified to exclude LGBTQ+ people from rights they previously had, making it seem accidental when it is not. In this sense, Mills’s ‘thoughtlessness’ does not apply here, despite Hungarian’s gender neutrality; the increasing sexism, homophobia, and transphobia of the Hungarian government are very much designed and years in the making<sup>25</sup>.

### 3. Sex education and hate speech

Language determines the way humans think. Words are powerful. Classifying people by stereotypes or mere characteristics makes an easy path to point out the target of hate. That is how a speech promoting hate to a certain collective excludes and erases diversity making it defectively existing. Similarly, non-inclusive language removes visibility of these groups, rendering them non-existent in public discourse.

Hate speech is an increasingly prevalent problem in 21st-century societies, undoubtedly helped by the Internet’s growing role in our daily lives. The online sphere, with the

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[www.forbes.com/sites/jamiewareham/2020/05/19/hungary-makes-it-impossible-for-transgender-people-to-legally-change-gender/](https://www.forbes.com/sites/jamiewareham/2020/05/19/hungary-makes-it-impossible-for-transgender-people-to-legally-change-gender/)

- 23 Takács, J. (2018). Limiting Queer Reproduction in Hungary. *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 20(1), 14
- 24 Novak, B. (2020). ‘Hungary Passes Laws Curtailing Gay Rights and Expanding Executive Power’. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/15/world/hungary-laws-orban-gay-rights.html>
- 25 Vida, B. (2019). New Waves of Anti-Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Strategies in the European Union: The Anti-Gender Discourse in Hungary. *Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters* 27(2), 13–16

anonymity it provides, has created greenhouse conditions for hate speech to spread.

Nevertheless, online hate speech is a part of the wider pattern of harassment and abuse that is happening in all other areas of our life. Research has proved that LGBTQ+ collectives are consistently among the main victims of hate speech. Some surveys suggest that, in certain EU member states, up to 50% of LGBTQ+ persons have been victims of hate speech or hate crime<sup>26</sup>.

Sexual education is one of the most effective tools to combat hate speech, as it contributes to gender equality and the fight against gender stereotypes<sup>27</sup>. Stereotypes are mental constructs inextricably linked to emotions, often fear, reluctance, or anger. The right to sex education is considered as a human right<sup>28</sup>. With sexual education being taught from childhood, diversity will be better acknowledged and welcomed. Even if it is not agreed with, knowledge on the topic would create conscience of the existence, guidance on the practice and an opened view of cohabitating in diversity, providing health and a sense of safety to students<sup>29</sup>.

As consequential as legal language is for the adoption and removal of rights, and no matter how much more welcoming a language may become for queer and non-binary folks, when it is made inclusive, in few places does language matter more than in education, as the language in schools will shape children's perceptions on a variety of issues, including, of course, sexuality and gender. These perceptions can change through the education policies, inserting diversity and inclusion into

26 | EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (2009). *Hate Speech and Hate Crimes against LGBT Persons*

27 | FRA (2017). *Education to promote inclusion...* [press release]. Retrieved from *Education to promote inclusion and mutual respect is essential to counter hate speech*, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/news/2017/education-promote-inclusion-and-mutual-respect-essential-counter-hate-speech>; [https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/responding\\_to\\_hate\\_speech\\_against\\_lgbti\\_people.pdf](https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/responding_to_hate_speech_against_lgbti_people.pdf)

28 | Mijatovic, D. (2020). *Comprehensive Sexuality Education Protects Children and Helps Build a Safer, Inclusive Society*. *Commissioner for Human Rights*

29 | Davis, A. (2008). *Interpersonal and Physical Dating Violence Among Teens (FOCUS)*, National Council on Crime and Delinquency. UNESCO (2018). *Why Comprehensive Sexuality Education Is Important*. Retrieved from <https://en.unesco.org/news/why-comprehensive-sexuality-education-important>



the understanding of our bodies, sexual orientation, and ways of conceiving our personality. For instance, Norway is a sex education beacon. Norway passed an Action Plan for Improving the Quality of Life among LGBT<sup>30</sup>, adding that sexual orientation and gender identity must be addressed at the National Curricula, together with equal opportunities and gender issues as a part of University curriculum<sup>31</sup>.

### Case Study: Sex Education in Spain

An example of hate speech against good practices of sexual education can be found in Spain with the ‘SKOLAE’ education programme in Navarre, containing new techniques of co-education that apply sexual education to students aged 3 to 18, stigmatised for “encouraging gender ideology, sexuality and masturbation in class”<sup>32</sup>. That is a typically populist technique: creating a sensationalist headline blasting all efforts and hard work attained.

The education programme inserted sexual-affective coeducation as a pillar to the school curriculum. Its content emphasises understanding of sexuality as a fundamental dimension of life, inserting topics such as what is affection, reproduction, care, sexual identity, desire orientation, gender identity, the body, family diversity, relationships, and violence, among others. It focused on empowerment, respect, and responsibility<sup>33</sup>.

Just a simple explanation of these topics and how the educational programmes are projected into practices establishes equality in the classroom. The UNESCO gave SKOLAE the 2019 prize for Girls’ and Women’s Education — for building autonomy, critical thinking, and leadership skills. Inserting comprehensiveness of sexuality are some of the key features of sex education.



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30 Norway, Ministry of Children and Equality (2009). *Improving Quality of Life among Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Trans Persons, 2009–2012*. Retrieved from <https://tandis.odihr.pl/handle/20.500.12389/21844>

31 IGLYO (2018). *LGBTQI Inclusive Education Report 2018*. Retrieved from <https://www.iglyo.com/resources/lgbtqi-inclusive-education-report-2018/>

32 Castejón, M. (2019). ‘Skolae, coeducar para ser más libres y felices’. *ElDiario.es*. Retrieved from [https://www.eldiario.es/pikarra/skolae-coeducar-libres-felices\\_132\\_1491895.html](https://www.eldiario.es/pikarra/skolae-coeducar-libres-felices_132_1491895.html)

33 Gobierno de Navarra (2019). *El programa skolae, un itinerario para aprender a vivir en igualdad*

SKOLAE teaches students how to acknowledge, understand and confront inequality in all domains including gender, culture, religion, social class and sexual orientation or identity. The programme broadens the scope of comprehensive sexuality education and embeds it in the curriculum at all levels. [...] This contributes to the development of equal and respectful emotional, social and sexual relationships, while building students' autonomy, critical thinking and leadership skills<sup>34</sup>.

On the other hand, and even if sex education in Spain is not regulated at the national level, it is usually available in most schools<sup>35</sup>. While all state schools are mixed, gender-segregated religious schools still exist<sup>36</sup>: all segregated schools are Catholic, and most of them are associated to *Opus Dei*, a reactionary sect within the Roman Catholic Church.

Even in mixed Catholic schools, receiving adequate sexual education has been a challenge<sup>37</sup>. Indeed, since there is no national law regulating sex education in the Iberian kingdom, while in Navarra the SKOLAE project is in full swing, parents with children studying at Murcia's state schools can have them opt out of LGBTQ+ awareness seminars<sup>38</sup>.



- 34 UNESCO (2019). *UNESCO Laureate Brings Freedom and Equality to Boys and Girls in the Classroom*. Retrieved from <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-laureate-brings-freedom-and-equality-boys-and-girls-classroom>
- 35 Ketting, E., Ivanova, O. (2018). *Sexuality Education in Europe and Central Asia: State of the Art and Recent Developments. An Overview of 25 Countries* (2018). Cologne: BZgA. Retrieved from <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/Life-stages/sexual-and-reproductive-health/areas-of-work/young-people/sexuality-education/sexuality-education-in-europe-and-central-asia-state-of-the-art-and-recent-developments.-an-overview-of-25-countries-2018>
- 36 Sanmartín, O. (2018). Las 10 preguntas de la educación diferenciada por sexos. *El Mundo*. Retrieved from <https://www.elmundo.es/espana/2018/04/11/5ab10462468aebcd7b8b45d6.html>
- 37 Barrio, F. (2020). Charlas de sexo en escuelas católicas: "Nos dijeron que no tuviéramos relaciones hasta que no quisiéramos ser madres". *ElDiario.es*. Retrieved from [https://www.eldiario.es/sociedad/entidades-comunidad-madrid-sexualidad-concertados\\_1\\_1274827.html](https://www.eldiario.es/sociedad/entidades-comunidad-madrid-sexualidad-concertados_1_1274827.html)
- 38 Perea, E. (2017). La asignatura prohibida: Educación Sexual en la España de 2016. *Fundación Sexpol*. Retrieved from <https://www.sexpol.net/a-asignatura-prohibida-educacion-sexual/>

There seems to be a limited correlation between the country's religiousness and the availability of sex education. Staunchly Catholic countries like Portugal and Austria regulate and offer sex education at the national level with little opposition from civil society<sup>39</sup>, whereas in less religious countries like Spain or Hungary there is more activism against sex education.

The issue of sex education in schools became prevalent in the Spanish media sphere in 2017, after a publicity stunt by ultra-conservative association *HazteOír* backfired. This organisation, with ties to the Catholic Church, organised a bus with transphobic messages painted on it and set it to drive around Spanish cities. Eventually, the bus was fined by Madrid's local police and later stopped by judicial order<sup>40</sup>.

As aimed for, the association gained a lot of media attention<sup>41</sup>. However, few public figures sided with them. Indeed, a year later, *HazteOír* even campaigned against the election of a moderate candidate to the leadership of Spain's Christian Democratic party, due to her views on abortion. They have also been involved in campaigns to limit sex education in schools, so far with very limited success<sup>42</sup>.

## Sex Education in the Law

Hate speech and the progress of LGBTQ+ rights — and other human rights — are, ultimately, two sides of the same coin<sup>43</sup>. The importance of sexual education is very relevant to the understanding of diversity in new generations (or older folks



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- 39 | Matos, M. et al (2014). Sexual Education in Schools in Portugal: Evaluation of a 3 Years Period. *Creative Education* 5, 1353—62.  
Ketting, E., Ivanova, O. (2018). Sexuality Education in Europe and Central Asia: State of the Art and Recent Developments. An Overview of 25 Countries (2018).
- 40 | Santos, A. (2017). El autobús contra la transexualidad de Hazte Oír vuelve a recorrer las calles de Madrid. *El País*. Retrieved from [https://elpais.com/ccaa/2017/06/06/madrid/1496747297\\_464939.html](https://elpais.com/ccaa/2017/06/06/madrid/1496747297_464939.html)
- 41 | Abad Gutiérrez, R. (2017). La transexualidad y la campaña del autobús de HazteOír: comparativa del tratamiento informativo de abc.es y eldiario.es. Retrieved from <http://uvadoc.uva.es/handle/10324/27877>
- 42 | Torres Menárguez, A. (2019). La censura sobre la diversidad sexual entra en la escuela española. *El País*. Retrieved from [https://elpais.com/sociedad/2019/09/30/actualidad/1569842298\\_343380.html](https://elpais.com/sociedad/2019/09/30/actualidad/1569842298_343380.html)
- 43 | This is also visible in the fight for re-definition of hate speech and hate crimes in some countries [editors' comment].



necessary to head to the European Court of Human Rights with this issue.

To sum up, we see that despite the EU and the Council of Europe’s legal frameworks protecting the right to sex education, applicability on the ground varies a lot – even in the countries with a relatively favourable political environment, conducive to a roll-out of sex education programmes. Legal restrictions on this are on the rise across Europe, as is the prevalence of hate speech.

### *Conclusions and Recommendations*

The extension to which a language can help us understand meanings, these meanings can be modified or reappropriated, and perspectives can be shuffled is a key point on the awareness of inclusivity and diversity within a population. As we have seen, the largely fragmented and diverse scenario we have in Europe today is not conducive for the adequate language inclusivity.

Policymakers must understand the need for generalising language and gender to achieve the influence of wider social structures. With the risk of polarisation and the rise of nativism around the world, as well as its institutionalisation in many national and local governments across the European Union, it is up to European institutions to preserve fundamental rights and pull off a balancing act between freedom of speech and human rights violations.

To that effect, the European Parliament’s Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs published a study on Hate Speech and Hate Crime in the EU in July 2020, setting the importance of empowering LGBTQ+ people as they are the main victims of hate speech, along with protected groups characterised by ethnic origin, religion, race or racial origin, disability and migrant status<sup>45</sup>.

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45 | Bárd, P., Bayer, J. (2020). Hate Speech and Hate Crime in the EU and the Evaluation of Online Content Regulation Approaches. *European Parliament*, 169

Following this report's findings and President von der Leyen's State of the Union address in September 2020, the European Commission unveiled in November 2020 the EU's first LGBTIQ equality strategy<sup>46</sup>, which aims to further shield LGBTIQ+ communities from hate speech and further protect their family rights, among others.

In that line, efforts like the recent one to remove the EU's funding from Polish local authorities that declared themselves to be "LGBT-free" are also a step in the right direction<sup>47</sup>. The EU may not have competence over the definition of marriage in the member states but, as *Coman* and the recently adopted Rule of Law mechanism show, the institutions do have valid tools in their toolbox to bring about compliance, whether from the power of the purse or the power of single market integration and the four freedoms.

In parallel, the right to sex education should be imported into EU law. The EU-wide guidelines should exist on aspects that include information and guidance on gender identity and sexual orientation. They should be accompanied by inclusive health care, problematisation of common stereotypes, myths and romantic behaviours, discussing consent and what it can look like for different identities, agreeing on practices during sexual intercourse and all types of relationships through inclusive language and understanding diversity, and emphasising the need for protection during sex. Inclusive sex education leads to changes in both – thinking and language used to construct and express the identities and experiences of diverse peoples.

Training sessions should be compulsory for educators across all member states. On top of the diverging legal frameworks – covered above – when it comes to sex education across Europe, cultural differences may make some educators less comfortable and others at ease, or even knowledgeable, to

46 | European Commission (2020). *LGBTIQ Equality Strategy – 2020–2025*. Retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/lgbtiq-equality-strategy-2020–2025\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/lgbtiq-equality-strategy-2020–2025_en)

47 | Pronczuk, M. (2020). Polish Towns That Declared Themselves "L.G.B.T. Free" Are Denied E.U. Funds. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/30/world/europe/LGBT-free-poland-EU-funds.html>

adequately teach the national sex education curriculum. Convergence should be sought on both ends — legal and education.

No matter what is done, national constitutional differences will remain in place, but at least blatant human rights violations aimed at sexual minorities would no longer be tolerated. Umberto Eco once said that “The language of Europe is translation”<sup>48</sup>. There is no reason for the inclusive language not to be translated.

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48 | Frank, T. (2016). “The Language of Europe Is Translation”. *Hungarian Review* VII(05), 32–37

# 6

## Here's the Framework, There's the Canvas. You Know How to Paint It. The Importance of Institutional Bases in Education

by Miguel Areosa Feio

### Introduction

At the time this article was written, November 2020, the world was experiencing the peak of an unprecedented pandemic crisis that had already triggered an economic and social crisis that will shake established consensus and consolidated ideas, and postpone projects and interventions. We live in a time where the accessory becomes expendable. And if this is true for the life of every individual, so it is for public policies. These will, unavoidably, focus on ensuring the economic and social survival of societies and, also, the survival of every citizen. We live in an era where the theme of this article — sex education (SE) — can fit into the above-referred expandable issues. However, what we'll try to show is that it doesn't have to be so. Sex education is a matter of central relevance, particularly if we perceive it as something in the spectrum of broader areas such as health, health education, education for citizenship, and human rights. These issues are not only fundamental, as they concern the development and full experience of each one of our lives, allowing conscious and adaptive choices, but also in their broader approach they contemplate a position that refers to tolerance, solidarity, and democracy, which are essential values in crisis response.



We face several threats against acquired rights. Although Portugal is a country that tended to be politically immune to such attacks, largely due to the present memory of the dictatorship period, the truth is that we still have a large spectrum of conservative views where populism movements tend to bloom and attack the established consensus, something that Barack Obama called “the attack on decency”. Here are a few examples: the movement that tried (and accomplished for a few months) to punish women that wished to do an abortion in 2015; the recent public judgment of education for citizenship curriculum (with a letter signed by some of the highest instances of the conservative wing of the Portuguese politics, including a former Prime Minister and a former President); the mechanisms of undermining social movements in the areas of feminist, LGBTI+ rights or anti-racist rights<sup>1</sup>. All of this should make us believe that no rights should be taken for granted and irrevocable, and that we must never let down our guard in the fight for its promotion.

This article is broken down into several parts. Initially, it starts with a generic presentation of the theme with a special emphasis on its articulation between inequalities and other essential areas of human and social development. The Portuguese panorama on sex education, in the context of the right to education and the right to health, will be the next focus of the article. Subsequently, a development of SE in

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1 News about the changes on abortion law in 2015: Lopes, M., Lopes, M.J. (2015, July 22). “Vergonha”, gritou-se no Parlamento no dia em que a lei do aborto foi alterada. *O Público*. Retrieved from <https://www.publico.pt/2015/07/22/politica/noticia/vergonha-gritouse-nas-galerias-no-dia-em-que-o-aborto-voltou-ao-parlamento-1702852>. News from 2020, where it is told that the former Prime Minister and President sign a letter asking for families right to conscious objection on education for citizenship: “Cavaco, Passos Coelho e bispos pedem objecção de consciência em aulas de Educação para a Cidadania” (2020, September 1). *O Público*. Retrieved from <https://www.publico.pt/2020/09/01/politica/noticia/cavaco-passos-coelho-bispos-pedem-objeccao-consciencia-aulas-educacao-cidadania-1929917>. News about demonstration organised by the far-right party with the motto “Portugal não é racista” answering social movements that raise awareness about structural racism after the assassination of a black man on the street: Barbosa, M. (2020, June 27). A manifestação “Portugal não é racista” que se transformou num comício do Chega. *O Observador*. Retrieved from <https://observador.pt/2020/06/27/manifestacao-do-chega-ppsp-em-alerta-para-elementos-da-esquerda-radical-e-da-extrema-direita/>.

Portugal will be discussed, with a special stress on the period from 2009 to the present, with emphasis on some key guiding and regulating documents. In the end, some ideas will be presented on how to reassess the public policies process as a whole. Thinking about interventions with coherency, and using available resources, not only contributes to leveraging the ongoing implementation in this field but at the same time becomes a protection shield against attacks to its value as rights' promotion policies.

### Why Sexual Education Matters? — Health, Gender and Inequalities

If you open any of the official United Nations documents on education, you will find a central idea about the importance of education for all: Education enables upward socioeconomic mobility, is a key to escaping poverty, helps to reduce inequalities and reach gender equality, and is crucial to fostering tolerance and more peaceful societies. Efforts to make education comprehensive and accessible are evident, as shown by the fact that in 2018, 84% of children around the world attended primary school. However, the access should not represent the end of the line. Despite the achievements, considerable differences still remain within those who attend and complete school, with girls remaining at a clear disadvantage. And these differences impact to a considerable extent, i.e., equal employment opportunities, and consequently the empowerment of people in poverty and their integration into society<sup>2</sup>.

In fact, people with low income or those in a situation of exclusion are most often the ones that have worse school results and statistically are more likely to suffer difficulties and deprivation regarding future employability and their capability to break exclusion cycles. Within the excluded groups themselves there are also differences and, invariably, girls

and women are the ones who suffer the most from such deprivations, in a clear phenomenon of inequalities' intersection (social and gender, in this case)<sup>3</sup>. This exclusion is a heavier burden for all women if, simultaneously, their access to health is somehow constricted. Particularly when it comes to Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), an area that especially affects them. It can be seen from the fact that 74% of the intervention produced by International Planned Parenthood Federation is aimed exclusively at girls and women<sup>4</sup>.

For the purpose of this article, first, we will be looking at the intersection between health and education, in the case between SRH and Sex Education. When we talk about health, in general, we talk about healthy habits and the understanding of how to maintain good health, beginning from early childhood and through adolescence, a time especially opportune to build healthy habits and lifestyles<sup>5</sup>. However, adolescence is also a time when multiple and complex aspects need to be organised as an individual grows, learns, experiences and develops. In particular, in terms of SRH, we talk about teenage pregnancy, access to contraception, violence and gender equality, family planning or HIV. We talk about sexuality and its both health and identity components, central to human development<sup>6</sup>, that include a bunch of aspects that are expressed, not only physically, but also through thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships<sup>7</sup>. It assumes the right of each person to be informed and to have access to family planning methods of their choice that are safe, effective, and acceptable, as well as adequate, diversified health services, techniques, and methods that contribute to



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3 | António Firmino da, C. (2012). *Desigualdades Sociais Contemporâneas*. Lisbon: Mundos Sociais.

4 | Feio, M. A. (2019). *O Silêncio das Inocentes Objeção de Consciência e Outras Barreiras na Implementação da Interrupção Voluntária de Gravidez*. Lisbon: ISCTE

5 | UNESCO (2018). International technical guidance on sexuality education. In the *United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization SDGs*. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0026/002607/260770e.pdf>

6 | World Health Organisation (2002). *Defining sexual health*. Retrieved from [https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/sexual\\_health/defining\\_sexual\\_health.pdf](https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/sexual_health/defining_sexual_health.pdf)

7 | Vilar, D., Feio, M. A. (2019). *Estratégia para a Educação para a Sexualidade e outras temáticas transversais – Cabo Verde* [Report for the Government of the Cape Verde]

the health and the reproductive well-being of women and men throughout their life cycle<sup>8</sup>.

In this matter, despite the fact that non-formal education is important, the studies tell us that when these learnings within family and social contexts are integrated with those from school – formal education – as well as in the relationship with health services, health organisations and other agents of socialisation of young people, they produce results that are much more goal-compliant<sup>10</sup>. Evidence shows that a comprehensive SE approach, expressed in an organised school curriculum built based on scientific knowledge, is essential to achieve the objectives described. If the political decisions and public policy process are science and human rights based, rather than ideological, they will most likely fulfil their purpose. Note that a public policy is a system of principles created by governing bodies or public officials to achieve specific outcomes and in terms of education policy especially, includes regulations and standards set by departments of education or public instruction<sup>11</sup>. In particular, an evidence-based approach that is adapted to its context and proves to be especially valuable in helping young people delay the initiation of sexual intercourse, decrease frequency of sexual intercourse, decrease the number of sexual partners, reduce risk-taking, increase the use of condoms and increase the use of contraception<sup>12</sup>.

This paradigm led into a sort of consensus that allowed public policies in different countries – mobilised by different

- 8 *O Silêncio das Inocentes Objeção de Consciência* 2019. Vilar, D. (2015). *Educação para a Saúde Reprodutiva e Sexualidade Humana – Relatório Técnico à DNE, Cabo Verde* [Report for the Government of the Cape Verde]
- 9 Matos, M. G. De, et al (2014). Educação sexual em Portugal: legislação e avaliação da implementação nas escolas. *Psic., Saúde & Doenças* 15(2), 335–355
- 10 St. John, E. P. (2007). Finding social justice in education policy: Rethinking theory and approaches in policy research. *New Directions for Institutional Research* 133, 67–80. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1002/ir.205>
- 11 Nuss, K. J., et al (2019). State Policy on School-based Sex Education: A Content Analysis Focused on Sexual Behaviors, Relationships, and Identities. *American Journal of Health Behavior* 43(3), 498–505. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.5993/AJHB.43.3.6>
- 12 UNESCO (2018). International technical guidance on sexuality education. In the *United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization SDGs*. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0026/002607/260770e.pdf>

factors, but greatly influenced by the importance of human rights guiding documents – to promote the scheduling and formulation of legislation that would accommodate SE as an essential component of the school curriculum in different education cycles, from the lower to the higher. In Portugal, we have a saying that states “*a path is made by walking it*”, but the route is sometimes long, has obstacles, progress, and turnbacks. An example of this is the fact that Sweden, the first country that focused its attention on SE policies, started it in 1955 but only in 2009 UNESCO published the International Technical Guidance on Sex Education, the first official document of a UN agency on this matter<sup>13</sup>. Portugal, as we will examine next, despite having an early legislation in terms of SE, followed this trend of some stagnation, particularly until the turn of the century, when we sought to produce knowledge and evaluate what had been done up to then.

### The Portuguese Example — Timeline and Current Situation

In Portugal, the accommodation of this international consensus took place in 1984 with Law 3/84<sup>14</sup>, which states that “the State guarantees the right to sex education as a component of the fundamental right to education”. This law also stated that children and young people should study subjects such as anatomy, physiology or sexuality, and suggested teacher training as a crucial part of the pursuit of these objectives. Later on, in 1986, the Basic Law of the Educational System described that all cycles must include in their curricula a component of Personal and Social Training, in which sex education will be included. It was the formalisation, in the Basic Law, of what we now commonly call Education for Citizenship.

Law 120/99 and its regulation through Decree-Law 259/2000<sup>15</sup> reinforces the implementation of school programs through horizontal interdisciplinary intervention, the need to

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13 | *Estratégia para a Educação para a Sexualidade 2019*

14 | *Lei 3/84 de 24 de Março – Educação Sexual e Planeamento Familiar, no. Diário da República No 71-I Série (1984)*

15 | *Decreto-Lei no 259/2000 de 17 de outubro, 5784 (2000) (Governo de Portugal)*

provide support to students' and teachers' training as essential public policy measures for the pursuit of the objectives proposed for SE. Despite the legislation ruling in the 1980s, a 2004 study showed that the percentage of teachers who consider themselves poorly prepared or with no intention of getting involved in actions related to sex education was still very high<sup>16</sup>.

In 2009, the Portuguese Parliament approved Law 60/2009<sup>17</sup>, which finally established sex education in schools as compulsory. Firstly, what stands out in this law is the autonomous character of this educational component, with its specificities and importance to human development in relation to other aspects of health education. In this law, we can find the inclusion of sex education in the non-disciplinary curricular areas – Health Education, Education for Citizenship, Project Area and Guided Study<sup>18</sup> – as well as in the interdisciplinary implementation in all regular and professional educational cycles. SE is then, through this law, mandatorily included in the educational projects of schools and classes, with an approach including horizontal and specific perspectives for a minimum of 6 and 12 hours per year.

At the same time, schools are encouraged to create multidisciplinary and teaching teams, as well as student support offices to work in the areas of sexuality. They are also asked to establish external partnerships and involve school community in a comprehensive and coherent process that intends to work this subject of greater importance to the development of each child and youth. The formulation and implementation model adopted in Portugal through this policy responds, basically, to the dual aspect that sex education must have: horizontal and specific work in the subject or a project, a methodology, later on, described by UNESCO as something that favoured the intervention on SE<sup>19</sup>.

16 Reis, M. H., Vilar, D. (2004). A implementação da educação sexual na escola: Atitudes dos professores. *Análise Psicológica* 22(4), 737–745. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.14417/ap.273>

17 Lei 60/2009, 5097 (2009) (Governo de Portugal).

18 These designations are freely translated from the original names used in the Portuguese educational system so that a clear idea of what kind of subjects they relate to is understood.

19 UNESCO (2015). *Emerging evidences, Lessons and Practice in Comprehensive Sexuality Education – A Global Review*

In 2012, the non-disciplinary curricular areas – Education for Citizenship, Project Area and Guided Study – come to an end through the decision from the Ministry of Education, in a spectrum of policies that intends to constrict public investment and give relevance to the curriculum areas that are linked to the conservative views on school's success. This decision showed that decision making, based on political and ideological assumptions and not on technical and scientific arguments, especially in the area of educational policies, can greatly impair the applicability of measures aimed to promote rights and social justice.

The governmental centralisation of these decisions takes away from experts (technical institutions, academia and investigators) and local decision and implementation institutions (schools, school groups, municipalities) the possibility of creating policies based on context. This is especially clear when the top-down policymaking process is compared to measures that aim to give autonomy or curriculum flexibility to schools and school groups. At the end of the day, evidence showed that the extinction of these areas proved to be a barrier to the implementation of SE and other components of the health education program<sup>20</sup>, especially if we consider that the evidence also showed that the formulation of the 2009 law was coherent and following the paradigm in this field, as well as being based on sound scientific proposal<sup>21</sup>. A study, which aimed to respond to the 13th article of the referred legislation – the evaluation of its implementation – looked at 428 Organic Units (OU – schools or groups of schools), thus covering a universe of close to 620 thousand students, showed that despite difficulties created by the 2012 changes and setbacks, some good things were happening at schools at the time. For example, the study showed that:

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20 Associação para o Planeamento da Família (n.d.). *Educação Sexual*. Retrieved from <http://www.apf.pt/educacao-sexual>

21 Educação sexual em Portugal 2014

- In the subject of Health Education, sexual education was addressed in 98,6% of the cases
- Implementation took place through the Student Support Offices in 79% of cases (at least through them), showing that the creation of these offices was really important
- The Student Support Offices, in addition to coordinating the implementation of the SE area, focused on:
  - Promoting specialised support in 85,5% of OUs
  - Organising training in 84,4% of OU
  - Promoting prevention campaigns in 77,1% of OU

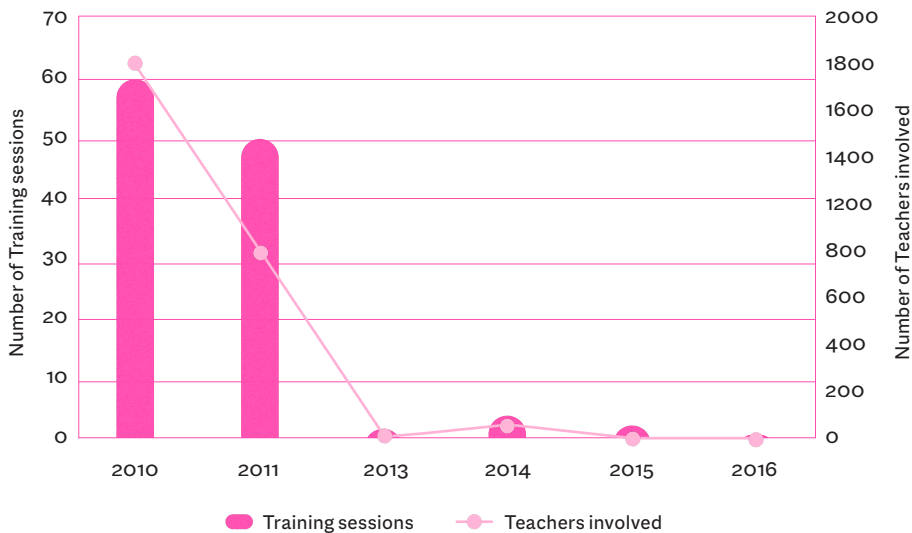
The quality of the implementation was considered good or very good by:

- 85% of professionals in 2010/2011
- 88,3% of professionals in 2011/2012
- 81,3% of professionals in 2012/2013

Indeed, this study did not yet manage to provide clear evidence about the impacts of the 2012 legislative change, namely the end of non-disciplinary curricular areas, but it shows that the path followed by schools was promoting very relevant impacts within the scope of SE. Another aspect addressed in the study was the technical and personal self-representation of teachers, about their capacity to address those topics; where the majority of respondents (87%) considered themselves comfortable working on the topic, 68,4% claimed to have pedagogical skills and 69,3% said they have scientific skills to do so. Although they also feel very overwhelmed in the process of developing several activities<sup>22</sup>. The organisation of the scientific and technical community contributed to this preparation, broadening its field of training intervention with teachers – in particular in their activities to work through project methodology or to implement and manage support offices for students.

The Portuguese Family Planning Association (APF) intervention was particularly relevant in this regard, as it has





**Image 1: Training sessions and teachers enrolment on Sexual Education from 2010–2016** Source: Family Planning Association training records, 2020

created and made available training materials and training sessions for teachers, which, in addition to other awareness-raising activities with schools, spread knowledge and intervention strategies.

The infographic above helps to understand the scope of APF’s intervention during the years following the 2009 law and also the impact of the 2012 structural change on that same intervention area.

As it can be seen, after a huge amount of work done in training, in 2010 and 2011, there was a decrease linked to the economic constraint from the years following the crisis. During those years, schools and their professionals felt less incentive, time, and motivation to attend training and also to implement measures provided by the law. The fact that there was no

available time for project development or to include education for citizenship or health components, which as we saw earlier is essential in this process, led to the decrease in attention to SE. SE remained exclusively as an area to be addressed horizontally, within the scope of several subjects, with the minimum hours expected by the law. Despite the recommendations of the aforementioned study<sup>23</sup> — i.a. the need to value this area or the reestablishment of non-disciplinary curricular areas or the training of teachers — the truth is that the period from 2012 to 2015/2016 has become the time of considerable decrease in activity, in terms of the educational response to this matter.

Such evidence is justified by the fact that in the midst of the financial and euro crisis, public policies reflect economic and social ideology, and the school, itself, has the role of reproducing the values of the current paradigm — i.e., references to the market, entrepreneurship, skills, competitiveness, with PISA (as an example) being a paradigmatic example of the school's function according to these guidelines<sup>24</sup>. In this framework, the constraint to which public investment in education has been subjected to had evident consequences. It was supplemented by austerity policies and led to a situation in which education for citizenship, health, and sexuality became absent or on a secondary role.

And the absence of SE enhances maladaptive behaviours and, on the contrary, a planned, comprehensive approach, based on scientific knowledge in human rights, and above all close and appropriate to the context, is relevant to the successful implementation of policies on education and health in this area.

This is why the central government must pay more attention to providing scientific and technical support, resources, and autonomy to the implementation agents, schools, or

23 Educação sexual em Portugal 2014

24 Benavente, A., Queiroz, S., Anibal, G. (2015). Crise, Austeridade e Educação em Portugal (2011–2014). *Investigar Em Educação* 2(3), 49–62

25 Also PRACE (Program for the Restructuring of the Central Administration of the State).

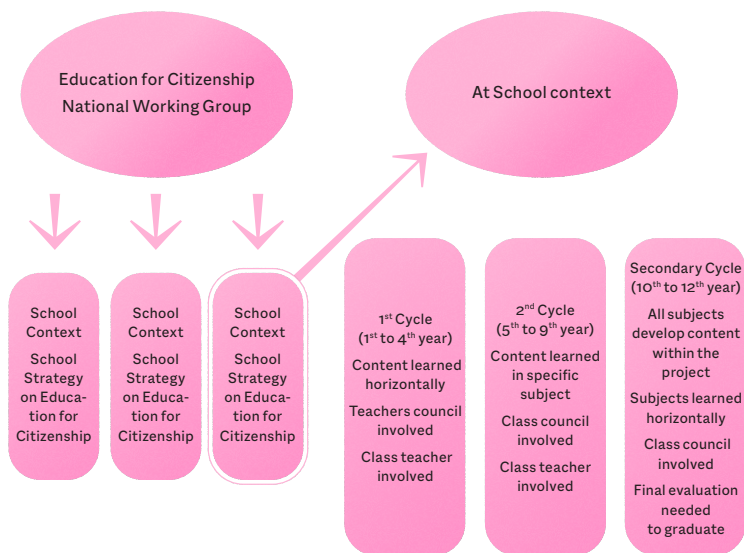


Image 2: National Strategy on Education for Citizenship

Source: Estratégia Nacional de Educação para a Cidadania, 2017

municipalities (for example) in the field rather than making reforms and decisions based on ideology.

In images above (images 1 and 2) are some examples of how it can be done in terms of education. The first one shows the articulation between the offices of the Secretary of State for Education and the Secretary of State for Citizenship and Equality that led to the creation of the National Strategy for Education for Citizenship, a document that aimed at restoring quality, coherency, and efficiency to schools and school group's work. The second one shows the Health General Directorate and Education General Directorate collaborative work, which also led to the creation of the new Health Education guidelines in 2017, to help teachers, schools, and school groups to

implement subjects with a highlight on, what is especially relevant to this text, SE. Without being directive, it provides a strategy that schools may follow and adapt to their work, to their context.

These two examples show precisely what we believe the role of a centralised public administration in education must be: identifying problems, creating legislation, providing guidelines, and distributing resources, allowing field organisations to implement them. Through this, the public institutions can be reinforced and helped to aim their goals better, while on the other hand, they can build capacity with their own resources, recover credibility and then become a strong wall against growing populism.

### How Strengthening Institutions May Respond to Populism

The truth is that, as far as we believe, the response to populism and the misinformation that accompanies it will be more effective if we can assure that the debate between “who’s right and who’s wrong”, the polarised opinion, is kept exclusively on the political/ideological field, and does not affect the institutions responsible for the implementation of policies. This is the picture to which we were trying somehow to return to in the last 5 to 10 years in Portugal, in SE and citizenship, where ground laws build the framework, guidelines are continuously giving the canvas and the paint, and field organisations – schools and communities – are painting the actual picture.

Value of educational policies built by specialists, based on independent research, cannot be overestimated as it lasts for years. Even during periods of austerity and cuts in public spending or during the right wing populist rule. One of the most efficient ways to create a shield against such political forces – or even of a pandemic, social and economic crisis, or both – is in the assurance of confidence in the institutions, its

**Table: Affections and Sexual Education**

	Objectives
1. Identity and Gender	Develop awareness of being a unique person with regard to sexuality, identity, expression gender and sexual orientation Develop a positive attitude towards gender equality
2. Affective relations	Recognise the importance of affections in individual development Recognise the importance of interpersonal relationships Valuing cooperation and mutual help relationships
3. Values	Develop values of respect, tolerance and sharing
4. Development of sexuality	Being able to accept and integrate the physical and emotional changes associated with sexuality, throughout life Be responsible to yourself and others
5. Parenthood	Reflect on the development of a life project Adopt healthy attitudes and behaviors
6. Sexual and reproductive rights	Recognise sexual and reproductive rights as a component of human rights

reinforcement, its independence; in transparency and rigour in the knowledge production, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation processes. However, this is a long and tortuous path, to which we take the risk of adding some additional, short, thoughts to help with its accomplishment.

*1. Strengthening the Public Administration’s capacity-building knowledge, monitoring and evaluate policies, supporting decisions*

Ideally, public policies should be scheduled and formulated based on strong, relevant evidence, and should, at its level of implementation, have monitoring and evaluation mechanisms as well. In Portugal, the tradition is not quite that. If we look at the period since 2006, with a particular incidence in the crisis years, the Portuguese Central Administration was losing its capability and interest in doing so. Looking at the governments in those years, we can find some interesting evidence. PREMAC (Plan for the Reduction and Improvement



26 Feio, P. A. (2020). Sistemas de Apoio à Reflexão Estratégica e à Decisão Política: que papel para a Administração Pública? Contributos para um debate necessário. *Revista de Administração e Emprego Público* 6, 83–107

27 Capucha, L., Sebastião, J. (2018). Políticas de educação, processos de gestão e avaliação das escolas em Portugal. *Revista de Administração e Emprego Público*, 4, 57–67. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10071/17235>

28 *Ibid*

of the Central Administration of the State<sup>25</sup>) produced a breakdown of resources in services responsible for decision support. As evidence, we can find that between 2011 and 2015, in a group of 75 entities of the Central Public Administration, whose mission includes functions of “supporting the formulation or design of policies”, “studies” or “planning, programming or evaluation of policies”, there was a cut in the number of staff members twice as big as in the Central Public Administration as a whole<sup>26</sup>.

This evidence on the organisation of the policy decision support system, among other consequences, brings a high degree of distrust between the governments and the State, between political decision-makers and institutions that implement them, as well as widespread distrust towards the policies themselves. This increases the field in which the populist speech can grow. Applying resources that promote knowledge to public policy, strengthening institutions and their decisions, all contribute to better fulfilment of the purposes assigned to those policies, generating confidence and ensuring the stability of policies, their efficiency, and consistency.

## *2. Strengthening the decentralisation of educational policy implementation process, giving to schools and municipalities the autonomy to decide, implement and support context-based policies*

The widespread access and quality in education — while they keep guaranteeing learning and school success — brought to schools permanent challenges, in terms of mitigation of inequalities<sup>27</sup>. All actors involved in the education system should be aware that they will succeed only if they are able to guarantee that the knowledge previously served merely to a few is now available to all. This requires identifying proper educational modalities and pedagogical strategies that are both flexible (adaptable) and in line with Essential Learnings.

29 Barroso, J. (2018). Descentralização, territorialização e regulação sociocomunitária da educação. *Revista de Administração e Emprego Público* 4, 7–29

30 PO CH -Texto Integral Reprogramação 2020, 2020

31 *Ibid*

To fulfil this difficult task, it will be necessary to guarantee adequate, territorially contextualised policy implementation and to guarantee that schools, and their partners, can adapt the execution of the guiding public policies, along with access to resources and pedagogical autonomy. It is essential that school's management becomes more flexible and autonomous, to allow optimal distribution of tasks and responsibilities among different professionals, which can contribute to construction of innovative educational projects<sup>28</sup>. This is not accomplished yet, but that the advances of the last years allow us to look into the future with optimism.

Decentralisation and territorialisation aim to respond to this goal, although the central state should not step out from its regulatory role. A model that emphasises territorial capacity for the implementation of educational policies, in a logic of transferring executive capacity from the centre to the outskirts in an adequate, coherent and contextualised way is much desired. It should guarantee an interconnection between the different participants and ensure that the multiplicity of agents are being taken into account in the process of implementing educational policies. This does not mean a total separation from central power and local decision-makers in the area of education. On the contrary, it is about a close coordination and resource availability that will allow schools to make decisions on their own projects, strategies, funds management. In this way schools will become the demolishers of a system of inequalities they are supposed to be. This participatory and democratic logic (socio community, as João Barroso calls it)<sup>29</sup> allows greater comprehensiveness and adequacy in educational projects and pedagogical strategies, something that is particularly important if those include subjects that tend to be the targets of ideological attacks — such as Sex Education.

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### *3. Reinforce school's human resources and provide training to them using the available resources*

The ultimate suggestion is to strengthen the human resources that implement activities. As we saw earlier, after the initial *boom* in teachers' training in the area of SE we find that there has been a decrease of interest in this area, largely due to the disinvestment in teacher training as a whole and in the area of sexuality and citizenship in particular during the "Troika intervention governments". However, it seems like we are now on a reversal trend, stimulated i.a. by new investments (far from sufficient yet), mobilised via European Social Fund. Nevertheless, further changes are necessary. Further investments in teacher training must go hand in hand with their bigger involvement in decision making.

It is a European strategy in education – which Portugal follows – to focus on the promotion of educational success and reduction of the number of school dropouts. These two aspects are related to each other but also are strongly linked to the components of social inequality, to which it is a public school's duty to respond to (as expressed in the opening of this article). In this strategy, teacher training plays a central role, as we may assess by the reinforcement of 10 million euros, specifically in this area, to respond to the effects of the pandemic crisis on education, within the scope of the last reprogramming process of European Structural and Investment Funds in the area of Human Capital<sup>30</sup>. We can also assess that by analysing the intervention of the referred Operational Program in teacher training between 2016 and 2020, in the least developed regions of the country (North, Center and Alentejo). Close to 93.000 teachers attended training, which corresponds to a total eligible investment for this area of around 19 million euros<sup>31</sup>. These examples, despite not being directly linked to the subject of SE or citizenship,



allow the strengthening of institutions, making them much more immune to populist attacks and produce quite exciting expectations.

In conclusion, populism may act as a serious attack on a human rights approach in education, especially in the fractured fields such as SRH and sex education. This is a trend that we can find in many places – even in Europe and the USA. This challenge must be addressed by politicians in the political debate. But there is more than that. We will be better protected if we focus on the institutional response.

In this particular field, the institutional approach has reached a consensus where sex education has been seen, for several years now (in Portugal since 1986), as an important field of learning that allows children and young people to develop into healthier and well-prepared citizens. Policy-makers and experts have developed quality programs, projects, and resources, based on extensive research. They must continue to work and deliver knowledge that will allow to adjust educational tools to modern challenges.

As we have seen, in Portugal, despite some turn backs, schools have managed to keep the work ongoing, even with all the struggles. Today, things seem to be getting back on track. This was, and is, possible because there are firm institutional bases that allow continuous work under any political circumstances. These bases empower teachers to maintain their projects and experts to keep on producing knowledge on SE, citizenship, and all other subjects that are important to the school's role as inequality breaker. Strengthening institutionally the capacity to investigate, produce, monitor, and evaluate policies, to delegate and customise roles allowing autonomy, and providing adequate resources will make institutions even more solid – those that will provide better answers and won't shake, even when facing furious attacks.



*The ideologisation of the public space in Poland has given the ruling party the tools to impose their values on the whole society.*

*In an ideologised state there is no room for discussion or arguments, and science becomes just one of the possible opinions.*

*Sex education, too, has fallen victim to ideologisation, being stripped of content developed by authorities on medicine or psychology, and supplemented with unprovable claims, statements and ideas of the binding doctrin.*

**from chapter 2**

This publication is a mini-guide through contemporary sexual education in Europe. It helps the reader understand what are the greatest challenges it faces, where they come from and what they can result in. It also points out crucial, burning issues — existing and possible — in the essential and geographical meaning. It identifies key actors influencing the system. And it presents the best and the worst practices based on experiences from many European countries... The reader, once they finish, will understand that there is no singular sexual education — there are many, varied sexual educations. They should also have no doubt what GOOD SEX ED is, and why it is worth promoting and fighting for.

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