



# The Science of Sexuality Education and Youth Work

*IO4 from Paper to Practice Report*



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## Contents

The Document.....	3
Consortium.....	4
Project Information .....	5
Document Information .....	5
Document Version Control.....	5
Introduction.....	6
Methodology.....	8
Questionnaire .....	11
Introduction of the Partners .....	12
Project’s overview and good examples from each partner country .....	15
Policy makers .....	15
What would they like to change in the current situation and if this could be combined with the project?.....	19
Difficulties they face/ suggestions.....	21
Youth/Youth Workers: .....	22
Lessons Learned.....	24
Conclusions / Recommendations.....	26
Cyprus.....	26
Ireland .....	26
Czech Republic.....	27
Greece .....	27
Belgium.....	28
References .....	29

## The Document

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## Consortium

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P2 KYPRIAKOS SYNDESMOS OIKOGENEIAKOU PROGRAMMATISMOU -CFPA- CYPRUS



P3 KENTRO MERIMNAS OIKOGENEIAS KAI PAIDIOU-KMOP- GREECE



P4 EUROPESE CONFEDERATIE VAN ORGANISATIES VOOR JEUGDCENTRA ECYC VERENIGING- BELGIUM



P5 The Rural Hub CLG- IRELAND



P6 Motion Digital s.r.o.- CZECH REPUBLIC



## Project Information

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<b>Project Partners</b>	<p>Kypriakos Syndesmos Oikogeneiakou Programmatismou- Cyprus</p> <p>Kentro Merimnas Oikogeneias Kai Paidiou- Greece</p> <p>Europese Confederatie Van Organisaties Voor Jeugdcentra Ecyc Vereniging- Belgium</p> <p>The Rural Hub Clg- Ireland</p> <p>Motion Digital S.R.O.- Czech Republic</p>

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## Introduction

Included in this report is a collection of lessons learned, good examples and practices, challenges and policy recommendations for The Science of Sexuality Education and Youth Work. SAFE YOUTH is a project funded by the ERASMUS+ which focuses on supporting and empowering youth workers combating the social obstacles young people face nowadays, because of their gender, sexual orientation and mental health status and help youth to build resilience and improve their well-being.

Youth workers can facilitate and respond to this developmental phase empowering young people on a personal and a social level. According to the National Occupational Standards for Youth Work 2008, youth work enables young people to develop holistically- their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential; something that the formal educational system cannot achieve solely.

It is not inadvertently that for the first time, Youth Work is being mentioned in the European Youth Strategy of 2019- 2027 and it has its own agenda which aims on supporting youth empowerment through quality, innovation and recognition of youth work. Quality development of youth workers is interconnected with the competence development of youth workers.

SAFE YOUTH focusing on the Youth priorities of the ERASMUS+ Programme addresses the importance of quality, innovation and recognition of youth work. There is a need for the sustainable empowerment of youth workers who in their turn will increase their efficiency on supporting the development of youth and combat the social obstacles young people face- especially marginalised ones- because of their gender, sexual orientation and mental health status. This practice report was prepared as a result of consultations with three target groups: policy makers, youth workers and young people.

A practice report with policy recommendations, the SAFE YOUTH partnership first heard from the project's policy makers about the real situation that exists in each partner country and what is also possible to change in the near future. In this way, the policy practice report includes both youth workers and young people people want to change and what is most possible to put into practice in the near future for the field of youth work and youth rights. Each partner produced a national report before KMOP combining all the reports together to create a European one. The European report is available in English. The repository of European Policy Recommendations is designed for download from the project's website and the project's Facebook page.

The practical European policy report consists of four sections as follows:

1. Project overview and good examples from each partner country
2. Successes and challenges in the field of youth work
3. Recommendations for professionals
4. Recommendations for policy makers

In the context of SAFE YOUTH, focus groups, interviews, etc. were implemented. with all the target groups involved - policy makers, youth workers and young people - in order to arrive at a realistic and implementable practical policy report.

## Methodology

**KMOP** prepared the standards and guidelines followed by all partners in the implementation phase to collect data and information for the practice report. KMOP also provided the reference standard and in the end, combined all the national reports and created the European one.

Focus groups and interviews were held, with participants such as policy makers, youth workers and young people working together to produce some results; one with key stakeholders/policy makers, one with youth workers and one with young people. In the case that the participants were unaware of the SAFE YOUTH Program, a brief briefing was given.

More than 60 people from the aforementioned target groups participated in all focus groups. Also, 24 interviews were conducted, 2 interviews for each target group/per partner. The estimated discussion time ranged from 1.30 to 2.00 hours. The questions discussed were duration 1.30 – 2.00

**Rural Hub** conducted a focus group with youth workers, young people, and policy makers to collect relevant information about the current status of sexuality education in Ireland. This focus group took place in the Rural Hub Office, Virginia, Cavan on July 22nd, 2022. In total 9 participants attended, comprising; 3 young people, 3 youth workers and 3 policy makers. Each participant came from varying backgrounds of work and location. The aim of this focus group was to gather ideas directly from participants, regarding sexual education, mental health, and wellbeing in Ireland. It also served to discuss best practice examples already in place, nationally. This will provide the project qualitative data from the project beneficiaries' perspective.

In addition to this, since focus groups encourage interaction among participants and are moderated by at least one person, conducting this focus group was an effective method to reach out to the different categories of participants, especially young people, and policy makers.

Participants were then given the opportunity to give feedback on the project aims and outputs and ask questions.

The focus group of **Motion Digital** took place on 15.7.2022 in Prague. Among the 9 participants were lecturers and teachers of leisure activities for youth, coordinators and directors of education, social service workers, psychotherapist, students and teachers and Czech key stakeholders in the topic of sex education and LGBTQ+ represented by two organization (Karolína Křížová from Konsent, Mgr. Karel Pavlica Ph.D. from PraguePride).



Duration of the combined focus group was 1 hour and 30 minutes. The focus group was facilitated by Jana Netíková from Motion Digital. The atmosphere was pleasant and relaxed, with all participants equally involved and contributing valuable insights from their practice and expertise to the discussion.

**KMOP** implemented a focus group with youth workers, young people, and policy makers to collect relevant information about the current status of sexuality education in Greece and discuss challenges and further recommendations. The focus group conducted in the Office of KMOP, in Thessaloniki on July 28th, 2022. The duration of the focus group was approximately 1.30 minutes. In total 9 participants attended, comprising; 3 young people, 2 youth workers and 4 policy makers. In particular, policy makers were 2 social workers, 1 supervisor of the social services and the chief of the association of parents and guardians, residing in the municipality of Delta in Thessaloniki. Youth workers were 1 school nurse and 1 school social worker residing in the municipality of Neapolis- Sikeon. Young people were two students of the Technological Educational Institute of Sindos and 1 social worker trainee. The focus group was well accomplished as it created an accepting environment and allowed participants to thoughtfully answer questions in their own words and add meaning to their answers. The facilitator encouraged the participation of all group members.

**CFPA's** focus group was conducted online on the 29th of July. Six participants engaged in the discussion concerning the present state of the provision of Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in Cyprus. The focus group consisted of a representative from the Advisory Committee for the Prevention & Combating of Violence in the Family, whose mission is to ensure the best implementation of the Law on Domestic Violence and propose policies for improvements, a representative from NGO Support Center, which has developed expertise and works in the field of active citizenship, peace and reconciliation, development education, human rights education, intercultural dialogue, and participation, two Sex Ed trainers/CFPA volunteers, that have experience in providing Sex Ed to students, teachers and professionals, a junior volunteer student and a member of the CFPA staff who is responsible for recruiting volunteers and project management.

**CARDET** implemented two different focus groups, one online with youth workers and youth representatives on the 28/06/2022 and one with policy makers on the 29/06/2022. During these focus groups, the project aim and objectives were presented to the participants and then the structured questions were discussed. Some main results were drawn and are summarized at a later stage on this report. Moreover CARDET with CFPA drafted the Cyprus national report which was shared to relevant stakeholders during the final steps of the project.

## ECYC

The European Confederation of Youth Clubs organized a focus group discussion with young workers on the topic of sexual education, in relation to youth policy and youth work practice. The Focus Group was organized in person in Brussels on the 20.07.2022 with 10 participants and 90 minutes duration. It was contended that in terms of best practices the program of EVRAS <https://www.evras.be>– is the main reference program for the French speaking part of Belgium. EVRAS - education in relational, affective, and sexual life - consists of supporting children, adolescents and young adults and offering them an awakening to the multiple dimensions of their development. Participants in the focus group have discussed a series of recommendations for the attention of youth workers as well as a series of core values that should be considered in practice.

## Questionnaire

The questions addressed were the following:

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### 1. Policy makers

- What is the current situation regarding sexuality education in your country?
- What would they like to change in the current situation and if this could be combined with the project?
- Difficulties they face and if there is anything to suggest, maybe good practices?

### 2. Youth workers - Young people

- How do they face the current situation regarding sexuality education and if they think there are gaps? If so what are they?
- What do they believe are the most important difficulties regarding sexuality education?
- What would they change about sexuality education and if they know any good practices?

Each partner produced a national report, and KMOP combined the findings from all partner countries to produce a European Policy Practice Report. This report shares the status of all partner countries concerning issues of sexuality education, mental health and well-being, as well as the value of youth work as a whole.

## Introduction of the Partners

**CARDET – Cyprus** brings together an international team of experts with decades of global expertise in designing, implementing and evaluating international projects. The CARDET team has successfully participated in more than 300 projects in more than 40 countries, several of which were supported by the European Commission, the United Nations Development Program, Microsoft, The Commonwealth of Learning, international agencies and governments around the world. One of their core-strengths is their ability to carefully plan, implement, execute and evaluate projects in various contexts. The management team is supported by 10 members of the board and advisory board, who are all international veterans in education, business, research, and evaluation. CARDET has a long-standing experience in innovative training practices as well as accreditation processes.

**KMOP, Greece** founded in 1977, is one of the oldest civil society organizations in Greece, with extensive experience in direct provision of social services and implementation of social initiatives. KMOP is dedicated to making a positive social impact through research and innovative initiatives that address critical social issues, inform public debate and help shape policy, nationally and internationally. KMOP actively supports individuals and communities through the direct provision of social services and educational opportunities, the implementation of innovative initiatives, research and impactful policy design. One of the areas KMOP is focusing is Health promotion and well-being and has core experience in designing and developing training programmes in the field of social integration and active participation of disadvantaged youth. Safe Youth: KMOP was the leader in IO4 and was responsible for preparing the standards and guidelines to be followed by all partners in the implementation phase to collect data and information for the practice report. KMOP was responsible for bringing together findings from all partner countries and producing a European Policy Practice Report.

**The Rural Hub**, Ireland was set up as an association by a group of education, training, and rural development professionals as a response to the impact of the economic crisis on small rural villages and towns in Ireland. Since it was first established in 2012, The Rural Hub has been providing a wide range of training and capacity development programmes to residents and community groups. This organization specializes in the area of community development and has developed a number of local initiatives to support the social inclusion of disadvantaged rural youth, migrant communities, and isolated senior residents. They work with these groups, using creative approaches and the testing of digital media resources to support greater social cohesion among local communities in County Cavan, Ireland. The Rural Hub has a developed network of

county-wide stakeholders who support their work on a thematic basis. Through their community-based office, they deliver informal adult and youth education programmes, such as the SAFE YOUTH project. The Rural Hub has considerable experience in supporting youth and adult learners with diverse needs through The Social Mornings Programme and Educational Afternoons Programme that they deliver through their community outreach office in Virginia, County Cavan. The Rural Hub is a flexible and versatile community development organization capable of responding to a wide range of needs due to the diverse skills of the volunteers who support its actions. The team have a vast range of skills and expertise in community development, adult education, youth work, project management, financial management, instructional design, and e-learning.

The SAFE YOUTH project was implemented in local schools and youth organizations throughout Cavan to address the needs of youth workers and young people concerning sexuality education, mental health, and wellbeing. Rural Hub was responsible for Quality Assurance, Impact and monitoring activities of the project

Since 2019 **Motion Digital**, Czech Republic supports children, youth and adults to care for their individual and community well-being in an inclusive, respectful and caring way and to inspire them to engage in meaningful ways to build well-being for the world. We aim to support organizations, civil society, youth workers, and youth clubs to engage in active advocacy in their local communities.

Motion Digital connects experts in the fields of youth work, well-being, resilience, mindfulness and social-emotional learning. We also cooperate closely with local external experts in the field of psychology, education, social work and digital learning.

The topic of sex education is currently very relevant and necessary in the Czech Republic. Under the auspices of non-profit organizations, new manuals for teachers are being created and there are efforts to push for changes in the teaching of sex education within the compulsory school curriculum. At Motion Digital are very excited to help this change through the outputs of the Safe Youth project by targeting another important group - youth workers.

**Safe Youth:** Dissemination and Sustainability Plan: developed by Motion Digital to serve as a common guideline and information tool for communication and exploitation activities consortium implemented it in order to achieve effective dissemination of the project and its results.

The **Cyprus Family Planning Association – Cyprus** was founded in 1971 and is one of the oldest and most firmly established non-Governmental, non-profit, voluntary organizations in Cyprus with rich contributions in the field of sexual rights, health, and education, especially for the youth.

One of its main priorities is the implementation of sexual education at all levels of education and the organization and implementation of seminars, lectures, and experiential workshops for children, young people, parents, and professionals in matters of sexual health and well-being.

Part of its mission is the awareness and enlightenment of the public, and the promotion of policies and legislation to the competent bodies for matters of Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights, with the aim of planning and implementing policies and actions.

The Association has a rich collection of informative and educational material and provides information and support through a helpline 1455. It conducts research projects and organizes informational campaigns aimed mainly at young people. Safe Youth: Leader of IO1 explained- Learning kit on Sexuality Education, Mental Health and Well-being. Safe Youths: CFPA was the leader of IO1 SAFE YOUTH explained- Learning kit on Sexuality Education, Mental Health and Well-being

The **European Confederation of Youth Clubs (ECYC)**, Belgium represents a European network of youth work and youth club organisations that practice and promote open youth work and nonformal education. With 22 nationally represented organisations in 18 Council member State Countries, reaching 1.2 million young people, the organisation has at its heart the supporting of youth clubs and other forms of neighbourhood youth work. The organisation is also running permanent working groups on youth work education, youth work policy and youth work dealing with marginalised and vulnerable young people, directly involving the strong member base through national youth work organisations and access to youth work national offices in (other than Belgium) 14 EU countries.

ECYC has been organising European trainings on the topics of youth and youth work's involvement in sexual and mental health since 2013, through research, policy and capacity.

Safe Youth: Responsible for the organisation of the study visit in BE

## Project's overview and good examples from each partner country

In all countries in the focus groups, which were organized during the month of July 2022, participants in attendance were given an outline of the project including the following:

- Description of project and project partners
- Aims and objectives
- Learning resources
- Target group's expected involvement
- Website and Facebook page

Participants were then given the opportunity to give feedback on the project aims and outputs and ask questions.

## Policy makers

### What is the current situation regarding sexuality education in your country?

According to the results of the focus group in **Cyprus** by the participants as policy makers, the mental health of young people is perhaps the biggest challenge at both the state and societal level that the relevant agencies are called to manage, especially after Covid-19. pandemic. About 1 billion people worldwide suffer from some form of mental illness that makes it difficult for them to go about their daily lives. We now know that 75% of all mental illnesses occur between the ages of 15 and 24, the age period when young people are called upon to become independent and active in society. An even more important finding, however, is the fact that 80% of mental illnesses worldwide could have been prevented with early and valid intervention as well as societal and state support through effective mental health services and policies.

The introduction of the Health Education Curriculum in public schools in 2012 is an important step in ensuring the right to sexual education. The content of the Program is scientifically documented, theoretically grounded and includes all dimensions of health. In elementary school, topics related to sex education are covered in the Health Education/Life Education course mainly in the thematic sub-section Family Planning, Sexual and Reproductive Health and is offered in the 2nd, 3rd, and 6th grades.

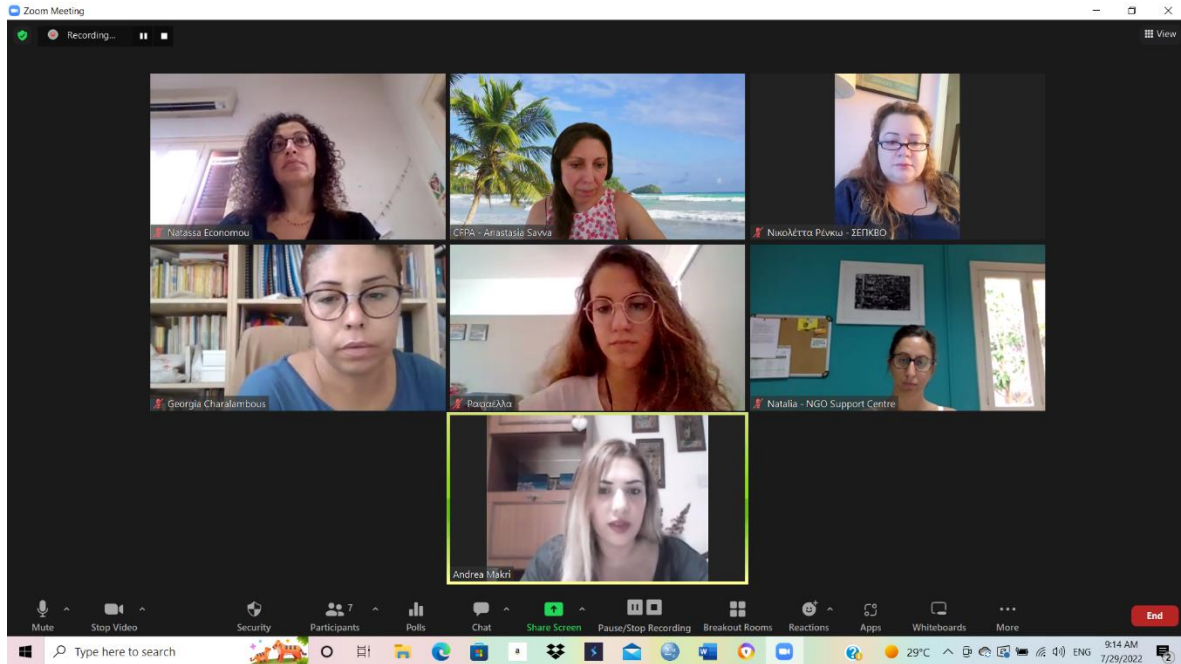
In secondary education, in high school, sex education is approached in the courses of Home Economics and Biology. In High School, relevant modules are covered only in the biology course (compulsory in 1st grade of High School and optional in 2nd and 3rd grade of High School) and in the optional Family Education course. Secondary Technical Education does not cover sexual education. It is important to note that since the

education of children with special needs is not based on an Analytical Program but a personalized individual program, many children with disabilities do not have access to sexual education.

According to the conclusions of the publication 'Analysis of the Current Situation: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Adolescents in Cyprus'<sup>1</sup> published by the Cyprus Family Planning Association in 2015, sex education is not implemented effectively. Indicatively, adolescents lack knowledge and skills in matters of conception, contraception, sexual health, sexual violence, sexual rights, and gender.







It was noted and agreed by all policy makers that in **Ireland**, the sexual education curriculum needs to be vastly improved. Currently there is a small section of topics taught through Relationships and Sexuality Education known as the RSE Programme in Ireland. RSE is taught in primary schools to children between the ages of 5-12. Although it is considered a mandatory programme, it is not taught in all schools. This is due to the influence of Catholicism in education, whereby sex education was not on the school curriculum. For 12–18-year-olds in Ireland, the SPHE- Social, Personal and Health Education course is delivered to young people at secondary level. This course delivers materials on relationships and sexuality. However, the course lacks information on important topics such as; consent, contraception, sexual expression, STI’s, etc. The Irish government has announced a full revision of this education material to include more information for young people, however this is still a work in progress.

All participants were aware of the low level of sex education in the **Czech Republic**. From their own experience, they still remember well the minimum information they received on this topic at school or at home. This minimum was mostly only on the topic of reproduction, menstruation, condom use and the existence of AIDS. These topics are usually discussed either in high school biology classes or as part of a prevention programme. The choice and quality of information depends on the individual choice of each school. Therefore, the students' experience and knowledge of sex ed varies from school to school. One school may be progressive and open-minded in sex education, while another may be very conservative.

Freya, an organisation that works on the systemic implementation of sexuality work, also deserves a lot of attention. Freya offers education, professional social counselling, methodological support and other activities in the field of sexuality of adults and youth with disabilities, seniors and senior women.



Other sex education providers in the Czech Republic include primary prevention organizations and individuals from the ranks of psychologists and therapists who work with the topics of intimacy and sexuality, emotions and trauma, femininity, women's health or manhood

**In Greece**, the majority of the participants, from all three target groups, argued that sexuality education in Greece is quite incomplete. They mentioned that there has been controversy surrounding sexuality education in Greece and the subject is politically contentious and also religion influences strongly this topic. Policy makers, youth workers and young people agreed that sexuality education is only partly taught in the course of “Biology” on high school. Even though sexuality education has been mandatory in Greece since 1995, and schoolteachers, school nurses and the Family Planning Association of Greece are responsible for its provision, it seems that this education is not implemented in the appropriate way in schools and focuses more on the biology of the individual than on human relationships and sexual health.

Policy makers stated that the school year 2021-2022 is considered landmark for sexuality education in Greece. The Greek Ministry of Education decided to introduce Sexuality Education in national compulsory curricula for primary and secondary education within so-called “Skills Workshops”.



## What would they like to change in the current situation and if this could be combined with the project?

In **Ireland** one of the participants stated that there is a severe lack of resources available in youth work that discusses the topics of sexuality education. It was noted that having these educational materials are important, as young people are reluctant to come forward to discuss important topics such as contraception and STI's. These topics are still often stigmatised in Ireland and therefore are seldom discussed with young people. All participants agreed that the current situation needs to change and that a project like SAFE YOUTH will encourage young people to engage in those conversations earlier and learn more information that could positively impact their own sexual and mental health. It was also noted that the mental health materials in the SAFE YOUTH project are extremely relevant, topical, and supportive to young people.

Few participants consider **Greek** sexuality education highly insufficient and they stated that 'there is a need both for intensification of information on sexual contraception, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS, and improvement of the quality and specialization of this information'. Participants on the whole stated that even in the sexuality education of students through the biology courses or few seminars conducted by school nurses, the material is incomplete and does not focus on enquiries and difficulties that young people face today. In fact, even though it is 2022, the discussion of sex education is considered taboo in Greece, young people find it difficult to express their opinion or related issues that concern them, during the 1 hour of biology course. Thus, participants highlighted the need of new and suitable material and suggested that the use of the material of Safe youth could be extremely helpful. Sex education material developed by Safe Youth will contribute to a healthy and normal psychosexual

development and will provide all the necessary skills and knowledge useful in youth lives in order to adopt a healthy and safe sexual behaviour.

Youth workers reported that it is difficult to reach students' expectations in sexuality education nowadays since they are not sufficiently trained and they don't have appropriate educational material. One participant also mentioned that the time at school is limited for the education of sexuality and they need time to build trust with students. Young people agreed with youth workers and mentioned that few times discussions about sexuality should be traumatic as few teachers they are old-fashioned and they can't follow discussions about sexual orientation or they argue that "abortion is a huge sin".

In **Cyprus** as the Commissioner for the Protection of Children's Rights notes in her report<sup>2</sup>: 'As regards the information that children receive today in the context of compulsory education, the children themselves report that the Life Education course included in the New Analytical Programs of the Ministry of Education and Culture, at the Secondary Education level, it is not taught sufficiently, not even regularly. On the contrary, according to all the children, it is delivered piecemeal, insufficiently and by inadequately trained staff.' Inadequate implementation of sexuality education means that young people lack accurate, accessible, and holistic information about sexual health and rights, as well as the knowledge and skills necessary to make responsible decisions about their health and well-being and to develop healthy and equal relationships.

Research shows that when sex education is offered early, it reduces the risk of unwanted pregnancies, and transmission of sexually transmitted infections promotes healthy sexual development and relationship satisfaction among young people<sup>3</sup>.

**Czech Republic** one school may be progressive and open-minded in sex education, while another may be very conservative. Fortunately, this is slowly changing, thanks to non-profit organizations such as Konsent, PraguePride and Nesehnutí, who are coming up with a modern and comprehensive approach to sex and health education. Their programmes are mostly funded by European programmes and are thus offered free of charge to schools (but in limited numbers). The positive thing is that demands and initiative from schools themselves are starting to increase. Perhaps this is also because there are louder pleas from the students themselves for better sex education in schools.

## Difficulties they face/ suggestions

The biggest difficulties faced in **Ireland** regarding sexuality education is the slow process of policy reform and government decision making. Although there are current talks to reform this education policy, it will more than likely take longer than planned. Another difficulty will be that some teachers in the older generation of teaching, are not open to engaging with or discussing topics proposed in the reformed curriculum. This is still the case in some schools in Ireland, whereby religious mentalities continue to stigmatise these topics. Overtime society is slowly accepting the importance of sexual education in Ireland, but at present, curriculum intervention is essential.

**The Greek Ministry** of Education decided to introduce Sexuality Education in national compulsory curricula for primary and secondary education within so-called “Skills Workshops”. However, one of the obstacles Greece is facing is the slow process of the implementation of policy reform and the intense reactions of the religion and few parents. Even though there is a plan for policy reform, it may not apply in schools soon. Participants suggested that policy makers should start the implementation of their plan by investigating students’ opinions for school-based sexuality education that will meet their needs in a more satisfactory way than it does at present. Furthermore, few participants highlighted that policy makers should organize conferences where they will invite parents and teachers with the aim of discussing the need for sexuality education with the guidance of specialist doctors, nurses and psychologists.

From the perspective of representatives in the **Czech Republic** from youth workers in the Children and Youth House (in czech DDM- Dům dětí a mládeže) or other youthclubs, they are trying to get sex education into their programmes. But it always depends on their own initiative and the support of the supervisor/director. In this environment, sex ed is especially important for children from Roma or socially weak families, where parents do not talk about sex with their children at all. Most often, however, youth workers respond to requests and needs that come organically and individually from their youth clients.

The majority of suggestions system on which the education process in **Cyprus** is based. Specifically suggested:

- Enrichment of NHS with services and programs related to the prevention of mental health and not only the treatment of mental illness
- Creation of Social Welfare and Prevention programs with the aim of reducing delinquent/criminal behavior, forms of violence, addictions and suicide among young people in society.
- Create and implement systematic and ongoing educational programs for parents on managing and empowering mental health at home

- Restructuring the way the school operates and promoting a healthier education and learning environment.
- Implementation of more creative ways of teaching by instructors (removing the teacher-centered model and promoting a circular learning model)
- Appointment of permanent psychologists per school and free services within the school
- Introduction of a mental health first aid course in middle and high schools
- Competition for finding/designing space by the community authorities of each community.
- Provision of logistical infrastructure.
- Accessible spaces and activities for all people (disabled, languages, etc.)
- 30 Youth Clubs staffed with 2 functionaries based on the population (in collaboration with the already existing youth centers).

### Youth/Youth Workers:

To the questions how they experience the current situation regarding sexuality education, whether there are gaps, what they would like to change and whether they would like to suggest something, the answers were formed in all partner countries as follows.

Youth workers who participated in the focus group agreed that there is a huge gap in sexuality education for young people in **Ireland**. One mentioned how although young people receive a level of sex education in school, it still does not cover enough in relation to contraception, safe sex, STIs and unplanned pregnancies. He stated that these are the issues that young people need to know more about and in Ireland, they are minimized and avoided. One young man agreed that when he was at school, his teacher skirted around the topic of sex education and refused to teach it according to curriculum guidelines. Youth workers have commented that there is an apparent lack of training for teachers in Ireland on how to approach young people on sensitive issues and support them to understand real situations that young people may experience. One young person mentioned how the issue of consent is not fully addressed in the current school curriculum and noted that this is extremely important for young people.

Youth workers and young people agreed that sex education in Greece is more than inadequate. More specifically, few participants commented that sexuality education in Greece is problematic and old-fashioned. Discussions about sex education in Greece focus on biology and anatomy. Young people argued that teachers and health promoters in schools do not receive adequate training on sexuality education and are not aware of the issues that concern young people today. Young people reported using

information online and talking to friends or family about their questions. In addition, youth workers highlighted the need for expert training and new educational materials.

Most of the young people's suggestions related to the operation of the school, the structure and volume of the curriculum, the behavior of the teachers, the timetable and the system on which the educational process **in Cyprus** is based. Specifically, the young people propose:

- Promotion of systematic and daily extracurricular groups and activities in the fields of sports, music and art
- Create and implement systematic and ongoing educational programs for parents on managing and empowering mental health at home
- Provision of systematic and continuous professional training programs for all levels of teachers for the promotion and management of mental health in schools.
- Introduction of more interactive activities for the delivery of the lesson that will include movement, dialogue and interaction in the school space.
- Adaptation of the course assessment method (use of assignments, presentations, voluntary work, creating a social project, practical training, etc.)
- Restructuring the syllabus since the amount of material seems to be the main source of stress for students.
- Smaller number of students per room
- Create a Mental Health Day where there will be updates and activities about empowerment, anti-stigma and awareness of mental illness in young people

From the perspective of representatives from youth workers in the Children and Youth House (in **Czech** DDM- Dům dětí a mládeže) or other youth clubs, they are trying to get sex education into their programs. But it always depends on their own initiative and the support of the supervisor/director. In this environment, sex education is especially important for children from Roma or socially weak families, where parents do not talk about sex with their children at all. Most often, however, youth workers respond to requests and needs that come organically and individually from their youth clients. The biggest advantage of youth workers is that youth have more trust in them than in teachers at school or sometimes in parents.

All participants agreed that sex education belongs both in and out of school and should take place in the family.

In Greece, KMOP's both groups commented that the sexuality education should be first based on the empowerment of self-awareness and self-love. Furthermore, they agreed that policy makers should start the implementation of a new educational plan with new educational curriculum by investigating students' opinions for school-based sexuality education that will meet their needs in a more satisfactory way than it does at present. One youth suggested that healthcare experts should first implement a study to investigate the needs of young people, teachers and parents and then the Ministry to apply a new program of sexuality education in schools.

## Lessons Learned

In Ireland it was mentioned by youth workers that young people are consistently facing exceptional pressures from peer groups and social media in today's digital world. Young people are faced with trends and the constant need to be liked online for beauty and image. They all agreed that the social media world has not helped with the sexualisation of young people and the increased pressure they feel. One youth worker mentioned that training young people from primary school age around topics such as social media consent and self-awareness/ self-love is imperative to support their mental well-being. They also mentioned that overcoming the generational influence of teachers that are ill-informed of the best practices method for sex education, will still be a difficulty for young people.

All participants agreed that the Irish educational curriculum needs a review on sexual education, to try move forward from past teachings. Currently some youth organisations are working hard to try to alleviate this deficit. A national organisation known as "Foróige" has developed a programme to support young people with their relationships and sexuality. This programme is called the "REAL U Programme" and covers a range of relevant topics including boundaries, puberty, body image, reproduction, gender, sexuality, consent, contraception, sexually transmitted infections, and mental health. This is a best practice example of youth work moving forward with the changing needs of Irish young people. It was noted by the participating youth workers that these topics need to be discussed further with young people and from a younger age if possible. This would help them to develop the confidence to be safe and know how to make an informed decisions when it comes to sexual activity and relationships.

Youth workers and young people agreed that the sexuality education in Greece is more than insufficient. More specifically few participants commented that sexuality education in Greece is problematic and old-fashioned. Discussions regarding sexuality education in Greece focus on biology and anatomy. Young people argued that teachers and health promoters in schools they don't receive the appropriate education about sexuality education, and they are not aware of the issues that concern young people



nowadays. Young people mentioned that they use information on internet and they discuss with friends or relatives about their enquiries. Moreover, youth workers highlighted the need for trainings from experts and new educational material.

As very useful, participants were recommending workshops and materials of different **Czech** organization that they consider useful in the field of youth work. Few examples follow. Konsent is right now contributing to the change of sexual education a big part. They hold very successful workshops and social media compaignes on consensus and prevention of sexual violence for high schools and colleges, teachers, clubs and bars, businesses and parents. They have published methodologies for teaching sex education for primary and secondary schools "No taboo in front of the blackboard" (Žádná tabu před tabulí). PraguePride has been offering variety of workshops and publications specializing in the topic of gender and the specifics of social work that respect gender, sexual and relational diversity.

Also, the organization Freya has already published two books. First one is called "Let's talk about sexuality" (Pojďme se bavit o sexualitě) . This year they published their second book, "How to sex educate children and adolescents with PAS."

As far as sex education in Czech families is concerned, the situation again varies from family to family. Fortunately, the Konsent organisation also runs workshops for parents and is now realising a book about sex education. The book is inclusive for different parents from different backgrounds and is called "Children want to know it as well" (Děti to chtějí vědět taky).

In **Cyprus**, after evaluating the answers given in the focus group, they concluded that the application of sex education should exist at all levels of education to cover the Lyceum (inclusion as a compulsory subject) as well as students attending special schools and special units. Particular importance was given to the systematic and mandatory training and support of all educational staff at all levels in matters of sexual education.

## Conclusions / Recommendations

At this point, the conclusions and policy recommendations are mentioned as they emerged from each partner country in the SAFE YOUTH project.

### Cyprus

- Sex education should be implemented at all levels of education to cover the Lyceum (inclusion as a compulsory course) as well as students attending special schools and special units.
- The systematic and mandatory training and support of all educational staff at all levels in matters of sexual education.
- The design and implementation of a control and evaluation system for the implementation of all the success indicators of the Health Education Program, as well as the introduction of a control and evaluation system for the implementation of educational programs.
- The organization of informative and educational programs for parents.
- Conduct research on the needs of children and young people in sexual and reproductive rights and services.

### Ireland

From this focus group, it is clear that Ireland's current system needs reform in relation to the current state of the sexuality education curriculum. In order to achieve this successfully, it is imperative that we provide training for youth workers and educators so that they feel able to support young people with information about sexuality education, mental health and wellbeing. In this way, Ireland's young people can feel empowered to discuss these issues openly and make informed decisions that positively affect their wellbeing.

From the conducted focus group, the following recommendations have been made:

- Revising the RSE, and SPHE curriculums to include topics such as; consent, contraception, STI's, etc. With this, young people can have access to reliable sources of information that can help them to make safe and informed decisions.
- Offering training to educators so that they feel fully equipped to navigate the sensitive topics of sexuality education, mental health, and wellbeing with young people.
- Offer relevant advice that applies to young people and can help them in real-life situations.

- Empower young people to discuss and question sensitive topics such as; contraception, pregnancy, STI's, consent, etc.

## Czech Republic

Through the results of the discussions and interviews it comes to the following conclusions and recommendations

- No more taboos, the ability to talk openly about sex from a young age
- From Kindergarten onwards, apply body, touch, assertiveness teaching
- Have more positive role models for parents and professionals to listen to
- Sex and medical material would use words like vulva, female orgasm, clitoris
- To learn greater respect for themselves and each other
- Speak out about body-shaming
- Communicate respectfully, listen, take the mistake as an opportunity to learn and not punish

## Greece

Sex education should first be based on strengthening self-awareness and self-love. In addition, they agreed that policy makers should start implementing a new educational plan with a new curriculum, exploring students' views on sex education in school that will meet their needs in a more satisfactory way than at present. A youth worker suggested that health professionals should first implement a study to investigate the needs of young people, teachers and parents, and then the Ministry implement a new sex education program in schools

The following recommendations were proposed to improve the state of sexuality education in Greece

- Young people should not only use online sources for their sex education. School should be the safe place for all young people to navigate the sensitive issues of sexuality education, mental health and wellbeing.
- Youth workers and educators should build trust with young people and should enable them to discuss issues of sexuality education, mental health and wellbeing.
- Youth workers and educators should be adequately trained by experts in sexuality education, mental health and wellbeing.
- Educational materials should focus on questions and difficulties faced by young people today and provide all the necessary skills and knowledge useful in young people's lives in order to adopt a healthy and safe sexual behavior.
- Changes are essential in sex education in Greece and any policy change must include the opinion of youth groups. Religion and the conservative workers and educators of your youth

## Belgium

This focus group represented a good opportunity to join a discussion about what youth workers felt that young people, youth workers and policy makers should know and should act upon in relation to sexuality education. Also, participants came to the idea that it is absolutely necessary to have a close collaboration between the structures that provide services for young people in the field and sexual and reproductive education.

- Recommend that each state foresee comprehensive SRE as a component in their youth dedicated strategies, or links the youth strategies on this matter, with health or education strategies, recognizing the importance of SRE, also through youth clubs.
- Recommend that non-governmental youth work sector is actively involved in the formulation of any local, national or international policies or strategies related to SRE at the appropriate level (local government involve local project, national government involve national organization, EU involve ECYC etc.).
- Recommend that states foresee data reporting mechanism for the implementation of SRE programs, including progress made on SRE provision and SRE programs delivered through youth clubs or other forms of neighborhood work.

Finally, it is clear that the current system in Ireland needs reform in relation to the current state of the sexuality education curriculum. In order to achieve this successfully, it is imperative that youth workers and educators are trained to feel empowered to support young people with information about sexuality education, mental health and wellbeing. In this way, Ireland's young people can feel empowered to discuss these issues openly and make informed decisions that positively affect their wellbeing.

## References

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