



RESOURCE HANDBOOK:

National Framework and Good Practices from
Cyprus, France, Italy, and N. Macedonia



Co-funded by
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SEX EDU Project Partners:

BANGHERANG (Italy): <https://www.bangherang.it/>

BRÛLANT·E·S (France): <https://brulant-e-s.com/>

KRIK(N, Macedonia): <https://www.krik.rs/en/>

YEU Cyprus (Cyprus): <https://www.yeucyprus.org>



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THE PROJECT

The SEX-EDU project aims to positively influence inclusive sexual and emotional education programs at national and European levels to foster well-being among young people with diverse backgrounds including those who are often marginalized such as second-generation migrants, people with disabilities, members of the queer community, and more.

Sex education provides information about puberty and reproduction, contraception, gender identity, and sexuality, while emotional education teaches how to identify, understand, and manage one's own emotions and feelings. Both offer tools to help young people communicate appropriately and make informed choices about sexual intercourse and their sexual health as well as provide youth workers and educators with the proper instruments and tools to approach the topic inclusively and comprehensively, ultimately improving their skills.

The objectives of the SEX-EDU project are:

- Strengthen the skills, competencies and capacities of youth workers and organizations for providing inclusive sexual and emotional educational activities and programs
- Develop an innovative practical training program to enable organizations and youth workers to plan, implement, and evaluate effective inclusive sexual and emotional education programs for young people.
- Create digital educational content- recommendations, practices and empower youth workers and young people.
- Encourage young people to become peer promoters and raise awareness about the importance of sexual and emotional education.

The partners in the SEX EDU project come from Italy, France, N. Macedonia, and Cyprus and each brings different views and experiences to the project which reflect the local context in their countries. Consequently, SEX-EDU adds value to the European level through the exchange of cultural diversity, good practices and the promotion of transnational collaboration for the creation of educational programmes that are inclusive, complete, and developmentally appropriate. These benefits cannot be attained by activities done in one country alone.

THIS HANDBOOK

What it is about:

The handbook aims to give visibility to successful sex education programmes from the partner countries of the project which can be a source of inspiration for the creation of new revamped and revisited programmes that address the ongoing needs and trends regarding sexual and emotional education. It also seeks to understand the local context in each of the countries to better understand the possibilities and potential obstacles that can enhance or impede the success of such educational programmes.

Contents:

- Brief description of the local context in each of the partner countries including regulations, programmes already in place and the social context around the topic etc.
- 2 Examples of successful sex education programmes.

Who can benefit from reading this:

- Those interested in understanding the local context of sex education in the partner countries.
- Those looking for inspiration in creating new sex education tools and projects or those who look to repeat some successful methods.

Something to keep in mind:

We don't have to reinvent the wheel! It's not a bad idea to replicate some successful projects. However, the local context, the timing and other external factors and circumstances need to be taken into account to be equally successful. Always be mindful: Make the necessary adjustments and give credit to the original project.

ITALY



ITALY - LOCAL CONTEXT

There is currently no law in Italy requiring mandatory sexual education in school, and this means that there are no guidelines or principles to be followed for those educational contexts and entities that want to implement it.

As pointed out by Will Media Italia, a news website, “this is an issue that has been discussed for almost fifty years, since the first bill on the subject dating back to 1975 and signed by Giorgio Bini of the Italian Communist Party. Since that time, more than ten bills have been introduced, all of which ended in a deadlock”.

According to research implemented by the Regional Health Agency of Tuscany, the absence of a structured program causes an “educational gap and negative effects on sexual health knowledge, the proper use of condoms and forms of contraception, access to youth sexual health services, and awareness related to gender-based violence and homotransfobia”.

Within the research implemented by Will Media Italia, the consequences of this lack are disclosed: “the first is a lower awareness among young people on issues such as contraception, affectivity, sexually transmitted diseases, sexual orientation and gender roles. Precisely because of this educational gap, according to the ISS, 80 percent of Italian adolescents turn directly to the Internet to seek information about their sexuality, partly because 1 in 2 young people do not address these issues in the family. All this in a context in which Italy ranks 26th out of 45 European countries for access to contraception. A potentially very dangerous vicious circle”.

The debate began to move very recently following a tragic news event in which a 22-year-old girl was a victim of femicide. Public opinion has been particularly moved by this event, as have doctors, psychologists and the school-educational world.

The wave of protests sweeping the country led the Italian government, which had no plans to change (or create) guidelines for sexuality and affectivity education, to propose a plan called "Educating for Relationships." Once again, however, the plan provides for activities, such as "discussion groups" outside school hours, that are optional for institutions and that cannot even be implemented without the consent of the students' parents and that of the students themselves.

PORCOSPINI - SPECCHIO MAGICO COOPERATIVA SOCIALE ONLUS



The PORCOSPINI project is an initiative by SPECCHIO MAGICO Cooperativa Sociale Onlus, focusing on sensitizing and preventing child abuse and sexual violence against minors. It provides a comprehensive toolkit for children in primary school to recognize and avoid potential dangers while promoting emotional and relational skills. The project involves a series of engaging sessions for students, parents, and teachers, aiming to create a shared growth experience.

<https://porcospini.org/>
https://youtu.be/ANLj_yD_acQ

Context in which it was created:

The project PORCOSPINI originated from an idea by Dr. Alberto Pellai and is based on the "Pellai method," developed by Dr. Pellai and Yvette Lehman. It was implemented locally and in Europe, promoted by Lions Club and the inter-institutional group Mal.Ab, including entities like the Municipality of Trieste, Municipality of Duino-Aurisina, Municipality of Muggia, and various health and educational institutions.

The project was initiated as a response to the strategic need for preventive investment in child protection. It received support from various entities, including the Lions Club and the inter-institutional group Mal.Ab, with recognition from the Department of Equal Opportunities and the Ministry of Education in Italy. Additionally, it obtained European recognition from the Directorate of Justice of the European Community under DAPHNE III.

What makes this stand out?

Strongest Elements: The project stands out for its comprehensive approach to primary prevention of child abuse, incorporating emotional intelligence and relational skills.

Originality and Innovation: The use of the "Pellai method" and its application through engaging sessions for children, parents, and teachers makes PORCOSPINI original. Its focus on cultural and emotional aspects distinguishes it.

Replicability: The project's success lies in its methodology, which can be replicated in various educational settings. The toolkit and strategies can be adapted for use in different communities.

Inspiration: PORCOSPINI can inspire other initiatives by emphasizing primary prevention, collaboration between institutions, and community involvement.

Impact

Evidence of Success: The project has received regional, national, and European recognition. It is a local reference for primary prevention within the Protocol for the prevention of child abuse and violence.

Reports and Data: The project has involved a significant number of classes and students, with numbers increasing each year. For the 2021/22 school year, it reached 341 classes and over 7,640 students.

Testimonials from participants:

- "This game puts a smile on my face."
- "During the lesson, I felt like shouting, 'I am happy!'"
- "I also have positive things! I thought I was unlikeable to everyone!"
- "What is love?" "Is diversity beautiful?" "Would it be nice if we were all the same?"
- "How can a guy become homosexual?"
- "Thank you for dedicating this time and project to getting to know... everything better!"

Insights from the Inside

“As an educator and educational planner who has experienced the project first-hand, I perceived its extreme care and effectiveness. The meetings provide for the direct involvement of children in the 4th grade classes with a language that is suitable for their age but at the same time clear, punctual, and which arrives with all its power by tiptoeing into such a delicate and at the same time fundamental subject, leaving the individual the possibility of opening up according to his or her needs and experiences. It can therefore be experienced by children from the perspective of prevention, which in my opinion is fundamental, but also from the perspective of intervention in cases of abuse/violence by activating a network of services that collaborate with the organisation. The impact of the project is therefore evident and offers practical tools to the children, so much so that it also convinces parents who sometimes start out prejudiced against the subject matter, but are then pleasantly enthusiastic about it.”

-Giulia Castelli - youth worker

THE BUTTERFLIES IN THE STOMACH PROJECT - ANFFAS ASSOCIATION



"The Butterflies in the Stomach Project," (in Italian "Farfalle nello Stomaco") funded by the Donor Foundation and executed at the ANFFAS Association in Mirandola (MO), emerged in response to the identified need by educators and the chairwoman to address issues related to body changes during adolescence, sexuality, and the management of encounters and relationships with young people and their parents.

ANFFAS, the National Association of Families and People with Intellectual Disabilities and Neurodevelopmental Disorders, is an ETS and APS dedicated to safeguarding the rights of individuals with intellectual disabilities and neurodevelopmental disorders, along with their families. The association's mission is to overcome barriers preventing full participation in social life for people with disabilities.

The project, developed in collaboration with Dr. Vanzini (psychologist and psychotherapist), engaged CALM's team (a youthful group of psychologists collaborating on various projects). CALM's team was responsible for the workshop proposal for children, while psychologist Bergamini and psychologist and art therapist Luppi in the proposal for the parents.

<https://anffasmirandola.it/>
Instagram: calm.progetti

Context in which it was created

The project aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- Encourage reflection on self-knowledge, changes during the adolescent phase, and the subsequent emotional and sexual needs of children with disabilities.
- Provide valuable guidance for parents in addressing situations of fragility related to affectivity and sexuality issues.
- Foster a safe and prejudice-free dialogue between facilitators and parents to support them during this significant transition.

The project encompassed three distinct pathways:

1. Popular events open to the entire community, featuring expert speakers addressing topics related to sexuality and affectivity, including gynecologists, midwives, and psychologists/psychotherapists.
2. Discussion groups for parents, allowing them to share concerns and reflect on the complex situations their children are experiencing.
3. Workshops for young people, incorporating playful and dynamic activities to facilitate discussions on various topics. The response, particularly from the youth, was very positive.

What makes this stand out?

The project was meticulously crafted to be clear and direct for both young people and parents. The intention was not to shy away from the theme of sexuality and its exploration in relationships with others. All materials, which were self-produced and customized for the audience, were designed to provide youngsters with a comprehensive understanding of various topics, including puberty changes, sexual organs, contraceptives, the sexual act, and relationships. The project aimed to consider the needs of both boys and girls, as well as the group of parents, fostering a conscious dialogue between them and their children while minimizing awkward situations that may be challenging to address.

To achieve this objective, the project was structured with the assistance of specialists who guided parents and facilitated activities for children during workshops. The chosen topic was innovative, confronting the prevailing taboo surrounding sexuality. In the world of disability, sexuality remains a significant taboo, often catching families by surprise.

There is a tendency to view individuals with disabilities in a childish light, assuming they remain children for an extended period. However, as external contexts and home environments are not always fully understood, there comes a point where, despite a lack of corresponding physical changes at the mental level, pubertal evolutions occur. This necessitates explanation and the provision of support for both understanding and addressing these changes. Another strength of the project is its structured design, making it replicable not only with people with disabilities but also with other target groups.

Impact

At the concluding event, the feedback from parents was overwhelmingly positive. Some of the children were able to approach challenging relational dynamics with greater serenity, simply by having had the opportunity to open up.

The children expressed satisfaction, and as a result, we will continue the workshop proposal into the new year, aiming to delve into the same themes. This consistency is crucial, particularly in relationships with children with disabilities, as it allows for frequent revisitation of the same topics, repetition of activities, and collaborative problem-solving.

The ongoing engagement helps reinforce understanding and provides ongoing support to address the unique needs of children with disabilities.

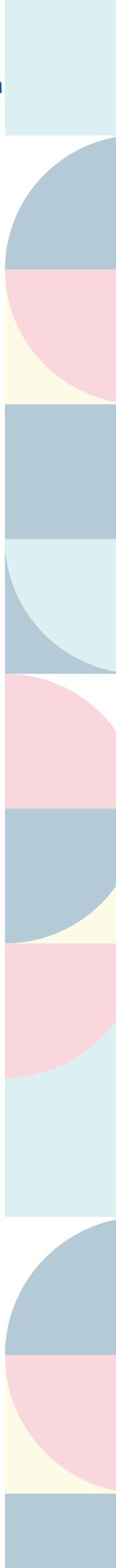
Insights from the Inside

“I think there are several strengths and values of this project.

Certainly, the topic chosen, sex still remains a taboo on many levels and in the world of disability it is difficult to even talk about it since families are often already burdened with various problems and do not expect their children to grow up and have certain needs, also because their vision of their children remains tied to their childhood needs and an eternal bonding so that they will not be able to live autonomous lives, at least some of them. Therefore, being able to speak directly with them, delegating some sensitive issues to experts, was an opportunity from our point of view. Moreover, it was very interesting that the paths for the children and parents were run side by side so that the topics could be dealt with in a parallel manner and also give the parents the opportunity to have a space where they could confide their difficulties and where they could feel listened to.”

-Chiara Ludovici - Youth worker and Psychologist

FRANCE



FRANCE - LOCAL CONTEXT

In France, since 2001, there has been a legal obligation to educate teenagers about emotional and sexual life. This obligation is governed by 2 articles of the French Education Code:

- Article L. 312-16, which stipulates that "information and education on sexuality are provided in schools, secondary school, and high school at a rate of at least three sessions a year and by homogeneous age groups. These sessions present an egalitarian vision of relations between women and men. They help teach human body respect and raise awareness of sexist or sexual violence and female genital mutilation." ¹
- Article L. 121-1 explains that "schools and secondary school are responsible for providing information on violence and education on sexuality, as well as for raising awareness among teachers about sexist and sexual violence and provide training about respect of consent." ²

In 2022, the NousToutes association published a survey showing that these laws were not respected. After receiving more than 10,000 responses, the survey showed that the respondents had not benefited from the mandatory 21 sessions. Between the start of middle school and the end of high school, 92% of respondents said they had benefited from fewer than 5 RSE sessions (including 12% who had never received any).

This lack of quantity and quality in Relational and Sexual Education (RSE) makes it impossible to achieve the objectives of tolerance and gender equality. In 2023, the Haut Conseil à l'Égalité published an alarming report showing that sexism "persists and gets worse"³. For instance, in recent years, we have witnessed the rise of reactionary discourse and policies portraying educators of emotional and sexual life as pedophiles seeking to pervert young people.

More and more associations and initiatives are springing up to counter this backlash atmosphere, whether through prevention work, victim support, public events, or other means. All this prevention work relies on structures that sometimes struggle to be financed and to offer decent salaries and working conditions to their employees. These structures deserve more recognition and political support for their actions. Here are two initiatives that we think are interesting, chosen from all those that exist and in which we believe.

¹ https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/article_lc/LEGIARTI000043982349

² https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/article_lc/LEGIARTI000042038999

³ <https://haut-conseil-egalite.gouv.fr/stereotypes-et-roles-sociaux/travaux-du-hce/article/rapport-2023-sur-l-etat-du-sexisme-en-france-le-sexisme-perdure-et-ses>

TEENAGERS' VOICES PROGRAM, BY CRIPS ILE-DE-FRANCE



Teenagers' Voices is a program set up by the CRIPS (Centre d'Information et de Prévention pour la Santé des Jeunes/Youth Health Information and Prevention Center) in secondary schools for 3rd-year vocational students, 2nd year and first-year CAP (certificate of professional aptitude) students. Teenagers' Voices is a prevention program covering a range of topics: drug use, well-being, body image, and, above all, emotional and sexual life. The association sends prevention counselors to schools in the Ile-de-France region to talk to young people about these subjects during 2-hour sessions. The facilitators offer discussion sessions where students can discuss and ask questions. Teenagers' Voices sessions are financed by the region and are therefore offered free of charge to schools. The objectives of the project are as follows:

- Encourage participants to express their thoughts and knowledge.
- Help participants identify appropriate prevention strategies.
- Enable participants to identify resource places and people.

CRIPS : <https://www.lecrips-idf.net/>

Teenagers' Voices: <http://tinyurl.com/bsr4yrst>

Context in which it was created:

CRIPS is an association under the French law of 1901, created in 1988 in response to the growing serophobia and misinformation surrounding the HIV epidemic. Since then, the association has been offering a wide range of services, mainly focusing on emotional and sexual issues, but also mental health, drug use, nutrition, and more.

Teenagers' voices is one of CRIPS Ile-De-France's main projects. It was set up in 1988, at the same time as the association, to tackle the HIV epidemic. The first interventions were about HIV prevention, but little by little, the topics were broadened to address questions of well-being in general, on emotional and sexual life in particular.

What makes this stand out?

Teenagers' Voices is a project aimed primarily at high-school students, with an emphasis on dialogue and exchange. The Teenagers' Voices sessions are all different, depending on the facilitator and the mobilized tools. The aim is to discuss topics relating to emotional and sexual life, without taboos, in a safe and healthy environment. The facilitators are not part of the school staff, so it's easier for young people to lift taboos and confide in someone they won't see again. CRIPS allows its facilitators to intervene as they wish (as long as they respect the facilitation charter), enabling them to establish a close relationship and a bond of trust with the teenagers. The high schools that benefit from the sessions sign a contract with CRIPS stipulating that they cannot forbid or impose any subject on teenagers. This rule enables them to provide the information they need without being restricted by the morals or convictions of the members of the high school.

The project is easily replicable: it involves a 2-hour intervention that's easy to set up in any establishment, and all the tools developed by CRIPS are available by download online. Each tool is accompanied by an instruction sheet with resources to enable anyone to use it with any teenagers.

Impact

Teenagers' Voices has been a success every year, with a huge number of students involved and very positive feedback from students and professionals alike. An evaluation summary showing the success of this project has been published by CRIPS (see [here](#)).

Evaluations are collected via questionnaires distributed to students, For the 2021-2022 school year, 848 sessions of education on emotional and sexual life were carried out (representing over 50% of Teenagers' Voices interventions) in 98 high schools, colleges and CFAs in the Ile-De-France region. 75.3% of beneficiaries surveyed consider these interventions as useful.

The themes most frequently addressed during RSE sessions were relationships and consent (70%), STIs and contraception (52%), and gender equality (44%). 92% of beneficiaries surveyed said they were satisfied with the topics covered. Among the beneficiary schools surveyed, 97% answered "very much" or "rather a lot" to the question "Are you satisfied with the partnership with CRIPS?", and 97% expressed their desire to involve CRIPS again in their establishment.

Insights from the Inside

"I've been working for the Teenagers' Voices project for 3 years. I've carried out dozens of interventions, mainly with young people aged 14 to 18. The freedom that CRIPS gives us as speakers has enabled me to "untangle" a number of subjects and gain the students' trust. Many of them came up to me at the end of my talk to thank me or ask me more intimate questions. This project, and the trust it fosters between me and the students, even enabled me to detect violence suffered by one student and help her to get out of the situation. I think projects like this are essential to answer teenagers' questions, empower them, and help them build a healthy and fulfilling emotional and sexual life."

-Salomé Darrigrand, emotional and sexual life educator at CRIPS

THE EUROPEAN SNAP: SEXUALITY, INTIMACY, ART, PODCAST



The European SNAP project was the fruit of collaboration between five associations based respectively in Paris, Marseille (France), Zrenjanin (Serbia), and Limerick (Ireland). The aim was to provide tools for youth workers and others wishing to use the radio to talk about gender and intimacy. The icebreakers, activities, and workshops were designed, tested, and corrected in the five national contexts. The ultimate goal was to offer an innovative approach to the use of radio, a relevant tool for a small group of participants. This method helped tackle taboo subjects with teenagers and young adults.

The project also sought to allow minoritized people, whose backgrounds, experiences, and lives are rarely heard, to have a voice through microphones and recorders. Through this training process, these people were able to replicate the workshops on their scale, passing on their knowledge and thus enabling the project to live on independently of the associations that supported it. The goal of the project was to also provide pedagogical tools to turn gender and sexuality issues into subjects for discussion and learning.

The overall objectives of the project were:

- To provide a safe pedagogical framework for discussing intimate topics.
- To democratize radio and make it an accessible tool.
- To provide a theoretical grounding in gender and sexuality issues in a playful atmosphere.

<https://snap-podcast.eu/>

Context in which it was created:

The project was born in 2020 under the impetus of Eloïse Dubrana (Elan Interculturel) and Constant Léon (Jouïr Podcast). They both recognized the lack of education about radio. Their feminist commitment prompted them to consider how radio tools could help promote gender equality and combat LGBTphobia. To propose an approach adapted to the realities of the various fields, and to use collaborative methods, the European partnership proved to be a relevant way to realize the project.

Thus, the two French associations were joined by other European structures. The first, SkaSka, is a Serbian association dedicated to the creation of educational projects for young people. It was the first to offer workshops on sexual and emotional education in Serbia. Also, Wired FM joined, a university radio station that offers plural representations and seeks to promote the expression of all. The HearSay Festival has also joined the project, giving it an artistic dimension.

Thereby, the SNAP project is driven by feminist values and commitment to the circulation of knowledge and experience in the field of sexual and emotional education.

What makes this stand out?

This project stands out for the quality of its products: 4 pedagogical guides offering ice breakers, activities, theoretical contributions, as well as listening lists or recommendations adapted to each workshop context. The guides were designed to follow one another, but can also be used independently.

They include :

- An introductory guide to radio tools.
- A guide to running radio workshops on emotional and sexual life.
- A guide to create your own podcast on intimacy issues.
- A guide to creating sound and art around gender.

All the elements in the guides are the fruit of collaboration between each association and adjustments made during test workshops. The guides are accompanied by videos available free of charge on YouTube. The project also offers pre-designed and timed learning paths, so that everyone can make them their own without having to think about logistics. Last but not least, SNAP's products, and in particular its podcasts on often taboo subjects, are available on all platforms, enabling different, inspiring voices, intimate stories, and realities to be heard.

Impact

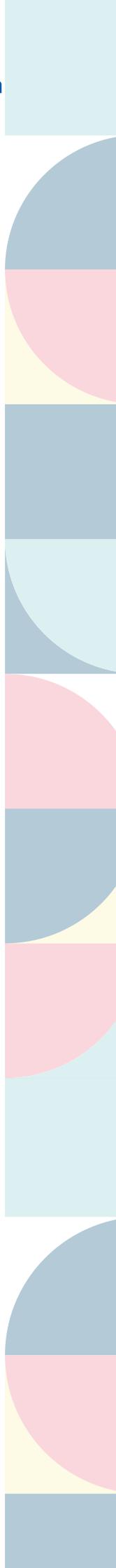
The SNAP project's products are diversified: 4 manuals, 17 educational videos, 23 audio contents, 20 artistic creations and an interactive platform. In all, 12 "pilot" workshop sessions were held, involving 300 young people. Events were built to attract as many people as possible. In all, 15 events were organized in the 4 countries and 325 professionals took part of them. The project's social networks received over 20,000 hits, while the website attracted 3,000 visitors. The podcasts available on the platforms were also a great success, with some episodes exceeding 1,000 listens!

Insights from the Inside

“The SNAP project was born out of a desire to encourage discussion and break down taboos around emotional and sexual life. The project was also born of the desire to give importance and value to the life stories that young people may encounter. For two years, we had the chance to create, concoct and experiment with activities combining artistic mediation, radio and education about emotional and sexual life! The result was a series of workshops that were sometimes awkward, but also full of motivation, desire and inventiveness!”

-Eloïse Dubrana, project manager

N. MACEDONIA



N. MACEDONIA - LOCAL CONTEXT

Historically, sexual education in N. Macedonia was limited and often influenced by the cultural norms, the information about sex and reproductive health provided to young people was usually done by their parents or informal sources. The topic was considered as a taboo and was not openly discussed neither in school nor society. Even though sexual and emotional education in N. Macedonia it's a topic of avoidance, it still has a growing concern. As the country underwent social and political changes, the need for comprehensive sexual education was well established.

Even nowadays N. Macedonia's comprehensive sexual education isn't formally regulated and incorporated into the educational system. In 2011 the strategy for Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) was adopted by the Government of the Republic of N. Macedonia. The document was made in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, the Institute of Public Health, supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and was developed through a process in which experts from the key areas of sexual and reproductive but also representative of citizens associations working in this area. Other strategic documents mentioned are:

- National Strategy for HIV/AIDS 2007 - 2011
- National Youth Strategy 2005 - 2015
- National Strategy for adolescent health and development 2008 - 2015
- National Plan for Gender Equality (2002)

Despite all the efforts made by non-governmental organizations for comprehensive sexual education, it has not yet been adopted and officially incorporated into the national educational system. Overall, NGOs are the source of sexual and emotional education in our society. In 2011 the Comprehensive Sexuality Education Framework was adopted, followed by HERA's preparation of the Primary School Teacher Handbook for SRHR Topics.

In 2018 a working group was formed in the Education Development Bureau to prepare a model for piloting CSE in formal education where the Government adopted a decision to pilot as an elective subject in the 9th grade in four primary schools. NGOs together with representatives of the Educational Development Bureau trained the first 15 teachers who will pilot the CSE in their schools from September 2021.

Overall, sexual education in Macedonia has gone through a long way of transformation from a subject that is in constant avoidance as well as from the institutions as from the society to a recognized necessity. Additional efforts are needed to further create an inclusive environment in which every young person will have full access to sexual education



HERA - WEBSITE FOR COMPREHENSIVE SEXUAL EDUCATION



HERA is an Association for Health Education and Research established in 2000 by six volunteers, medical students with a goal to do something about the insufficient education about HIV and AIDS as well as the lack of medicines and care for people living with HIV in Macedonia. In 2009 HERA advocated for a comprehensive sexual education (CSE) to become a part of the curricula in primary and secondary schools. Since then, the organization has been actively working as a medium for informal sexual education, launching the initiative to create a separated website designed to be user-friendly for youth, aimed to equip them with knowledge about comprehensive sexual education.

<https://seksualnoobrazovanie.mk/>
<https://www.instagram.com/heramladi/>
<https://www.facebook.com/hera.macedonia/>

Context in which it was created:

It is an ongoing pilot program, supported by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) European Network, The Sigrid Rausing Trust, and the Embassy of France in North Macedonia.

HERA since 2009 has advocated for Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) to be part of the curriculum in primary and secondary schools. The development and implementation of the idea of comprehensive sexual education required a long-term process that is still ongoing.

The website was created after the decision of the Macedonian Government to pilot comprehensive sexuality education as an optional subject in four primary schools in the 9th grade, in December 2019. The reactions of this initiative, as with the rest of the activities regarding the CSH on the national level have pro and anti reactions.

The implementation of this initiative was supported by the IPPF and the Embassy of France in North Macedonia.

What makes this stand out?

First of all, the CSE website is the first and only specialized and categorized place to offer comprehensive information about sexual health. The design of this website offers the visitors a user-friendly experience, easily accessible and well-categorized content. The very fact that this is the first fully accessible sexual education resource makes it original. Unfortunately, in N. Macedonia, information on this topic has always been sporadic, that is, if young people or anyone interested in this topic wants to research or be informed, they must do so by using a wide variety of sources.

This initiative with its content stands out from others due to its emphasis on addressing the needs and necessities of all individuals without making a difference in users' gender identity, cultural background, or sexual orientation, making it even more inclusive. Following this website as a starting point regarding the topic on which its concern can be adaptable and developed even more in direction on a local level. The website is multilingual, the users can choose between Macedonian and Albanian. Also, as a side content, there can be found three additional sub-communities [“Seksi maalo”](#), [Feminist Book Club](#), and a space for writing [Columns](#).

Impact

Establishing the website as one of the few places where each individual can be informed with topics regarding the CSE it's already considered as one giant leap towards more open public debate. The creation of this website was a result of a long process of development, but also it came out as an output to the 2018 working group that was formed in the Education Development Bureau working together with the NGO's in order to prepare a model for piloting CSE in the formal education where the Government adopted a decision to pilot as an elective subject in the 9th grade in four primary schools. Through this process, and with the help of this initiative 1982 young people were incorporated and had been studying about CSE through informal education while 31 schools had informal training about CSE.

The research that HERA provided about the “Attitudes of teachers on the introduction of comprehensive sexual education in schools” explores the assessments and attitudes about the importance of contents from the sphere of CSE. The focus of this research was to understand the motives for its incorporation in education, as well as the obstacles to the introduction of these contents in the teaching process.

According to educators testimonies regarding the researched topic, between 89 - 99% of the given responses support supplementing official curricula with topics like:

- Protection from sexual violence as well as violence in social media;
- Body changes in puberty;
- Gender differences and gender equality;
- Characteristics of healthy relationships.

Teachers, especially female teachers, are generally aware of the importance of the topics covered by the CSE.

Insights from the Inside

“In addition to health benefits, CSE has other social and emotional benefits for youth development. For example, CSE helps children build healthy intimate relationships that are based on respect and mutual consent. Where SSO is included in education, peer violence and hate towards people of different sexual orientation are reduced. When CSE is studied continuously, it positively affects empathy among young people, improves their communication skills and increases their self-confidence. Sexual education in schools is more than necessary for us today because it gives correct answers to all the questions that bother young people about sexuality - unlike the Internet, where information is very easily available, but often inaccurate and harmful.”

-HERA Association for Health Education and Research

SEKSI MAALO - A SHOW FOR CSE FROM YOUTH TO YOUTH



Seksi Maalo is a media space in the form of a radio show/podcast that deals with topics related to youth and the general situation of youth in Macedonia. Before being established as a radio show/podcast “Seksi Maalo” was a volunteering activity done by HERA’s youth center in a form of a newsletter with the same topics and contents which was distributed to high schools. In 2012 this initiative changed its medium from a newsletter to a radio show/podcast established by HERA’s youth center in a collaboration with Radio MOF (Youth Educational Forum)

The slogan of the show translated into English as "Sexy neighborhood" is "a show that deeply penetrates our taboos". The shows are hosted by HERA youth center who discuss topics related to sexual and reproductive health and rights, stigma and taboos, women's rights, abortion, HIV/AIDS, hate speech, human and sexual rights as a major concern, and mental and physical health. and well-being and inclusion of the young population in the decision-making process. Furthermore, the show strives to inform, but also to encourage dialogue and participation among young people about the norms related to sexuality, which often cause violence, homophobia, and inequality, but which can also be connected with risky practices for sexual and reproductive health.

<https://seksualnoobrazovanie.mk/sso-miks/seksi-maalo/>

<https://www.facebook.com/seksi.maalo/>

<https://open.spotify.com/show/7a2SV7dCsy9dtfin8pVRHH>

<https://www.radiomof.mk/seksi-maalo/>

Context in which it was created:

The development and the realization of this initiative started as a volunteering activity. At the beginning the idea was established as a newsletter done by HERA's youth volunteering group but with the change of the media that the targeted group was using, also to make it even more accessible HERA together in a collaboration with Radio Mof switched the media into radio show / podcast that is going on air every next Wednesday.

The concept of the shows are on a specific topic, each Wednesday a different topic was picked. The show always has a host and guest/s.

What makes this stand out?

Seksi Maalo is a show that covers topics related to all aspects of sexuality, topics that are interesting and important for all young people. Having in mind that each person has the right to be informed related to sexual and reproductive health this shows approaches to the contemporary needs of the individual as of the general public. One of the strongest elements of this initiative is that it represents a platform where people can openly talk about topics that end up avoided in the public sphere. The fact that this initiative was created by the need of young people and is the only open show of this type that is actively involved in the processing of topics that affect sexual and emotional education makes it innovative. In this way young people in Macedonia have more space in the media and in society to discuss important topics for them, topics that are related to sexual and reproductive health and rights, but also can stimulate a more open and accessible society.

Seksi Maalo can inspire other countries and communities to create a similar or similar platform where young people can freely discuss topics of important matters. Stimulate more public debates and raise awareness about the need of CSE and actively involve young people in processes of creation of topics similar to this one

Impact

The main measure of the impact that this platform has realized is the number of realized and processed episodes. This podcast has 10 series and produced a total of 144 episodes filled with content about sexual education and protection, violence against women, relations and relationships, men's health and many other topics related to emotional health. In this radio show more than 120 guests took part and contributed to the content of the show. Seksi maalo is a joint collaboration between HERA, i.e. the youth center of Hera with technical support from the Youth Educational Forum - Radio MOF it is completely made by young people, meaning that this initiative involves more than 100 young people.

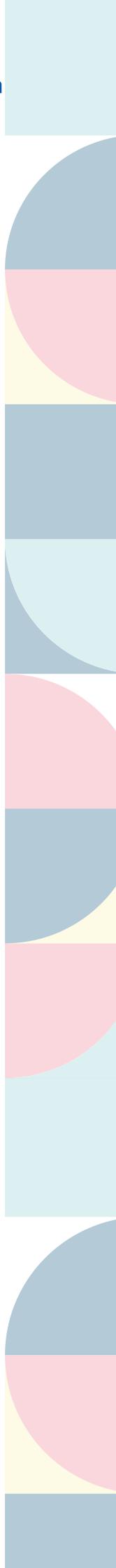
One radio show it's composed of a specific topic about which the host and the guest/s discuss, music and open space for the listeners to be included into the topic with questions, statements which are either shared on air or written to them through mail or social media. The general opinion of most of the youth that's addressing is the following "The already existing information that is available to young people through formal sources does not answer the questions of young people, so this is an excellent space through which young people will be able to get much more information regarding sexual and emotional education, but also a space where they will be able to express what they would like to hear about and what information they lack.

Insights from the Inside

"This initiative is especially important because when we speak up we can actually expect change to happen. Having a space where we can freely talk about these topics helps us young people to be informed more easily, but also to see what others are facing and therefore become more empathetic with others."

-Seksi maalo team

CYPRUS



CYPRUS - LOCAL CONTEXT

Sex Education in Cyprus was introduced in the education system in a consistent and regulated way in 2011 for Pre-school, Primary, and Secondary Education (High School), and in 2023 it was expanded to lyceums and technical schools. It is still changing in the midst of oppositional dynamics of politics and reactions from parents, teachers, and the church which influence public opinion.

In 2022, the Law on Holistic Sex Education (N. 205(I)/2022) was introduced based on several European and international conventions and treaties and which rendered sex education an obligatory subject for elementary, high schools, and technical schools. In 2023, the Ministry of Education published the analytical curriculum of the aforementioned educational levels which has a preventive approach and addresses health in a holistic way in the context of the subject "Health Education".

The curriculum emphasizes personal safety, healthy relationships, consent, and the importance of reporting any form of abuse. The goal is to empower children to make informed choices and contribute to creating a society that respects and protects everyone's rights and well-being. Issues related to sex education are mainly included in the thematic subsection: "Family Planning, Sexual and Reproductive Health" of the thematic unit Creating and Improving Social Self. The sub-module includes brief topics related to the stages of individual development, the underwear rule, friendship, conflict resolution in relation to relationships/friendships, managing emotions that fall more broadly within relationships, coping mechanisms for dealing with violence, gender stereotypes, responsible use of digital technologies and the internet, etc. Issues related to sexuality education are approached interdisciplinary together with other Health Education topics such as self-development and development, emotional health, safety, social skills development, rights and responsibilities, life values, substance use and abuse, living conditions, acceptance and management of diversity, etc. In short, the sub-module on sexuality education is not approached independently, but the possibility is offered to make connections with other thematic units of the curriculum to ensure that sexual health issues are addressed holistically.

Sex Education is quite controversial in Cyprus with many welcoming the decision of the Ministry and others opposing it, strongly upholding conservative views (for example [here](#) and [here](#)). Interestingly, the Archbishop of Cyprus positioned himself in favour of sex education in schools saying it is better for children to be enabled to protect themselves than to be left uninformed. He added that

assurances were given by the ministry that the courses offered would be closely monitored and that he would be kept informed. However, other church officials opposed the decision strongly, with some inviting the parents to excuse their children from the lessons.

Cases of gender-based violence, femicides, and homophobic attacks highlight the urgency for the establishment and advocacy for sex education, especially among Cypriot children and youth. The civil society has been active in the field, organizing events and workshops to inform the public and raise awareness. For example, the Cyprus Family Planning Association has been a strong advocate for conducting research, informing policies, and providing workshops to schools, teachers, parents, etc. Another influential stakeholder is ACCEPT LGBTI an NGO, advocating and supporting the queer communities and fight against LGBTQI-phobia, heteronormativity, sexism, toxic masculinity, and all forms of exclusion and discrimination.

Despite the progress in regulating and introducing systematic sex education for all children, there is still a lot of room for progress to convince those who still oppose it of its importance and make sure it becomes well-established.

CY CHECKPOINT (AIDS SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT)



Cy Checkpoint

The CY Checkpoint, an initiative that started in 2015, serves as the Testing, Prevention, and Information Centre of the AIDS Solidarity Movement - Cyprus, regarding HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). They follow the Community-Based Voluntary Counselling and Testing model, offering anonymous, free and rapid HIV, as well as other STI testing around Cyprus.

Examinations are conducted at diverse locations, including universities, bars, clubs, and public spaces, as well as events such as Cyprus Pride and European HIV Testing Week. Their collaborative efforts extend to partnerships with Athens Checkpoint, the Prevention and Testing Centre of the Association of People Living with HIV in Greece, Positive Voice, and several other European and international organisations.

http://asmcyprus.org/asm/Cy_Checkpoint_en.html

Context in which it was created:

Founded in 1989 in the Republic of Cyprus, the AIDS Solidarity Movement operates as a Non-profit and Non-Governmental Organisation. Their primary objective is to offer assistance to individuals living with HIV, as well as those whose lives have been impacted by HIV/AIDS, including their friends and families. They actively work towards raising awareness and providing education about the infection, while staunchly opposing the stigma and discrimination that these individuals often encounter.

What makes this stand out?

The Movement offers a range of free services, including:

- **CY Checkpoint:** Anonymous, free, and rapid HIV testing through their initiative. Rapid testing events are organised at pre-announced locations across Cyprus on specific days and times.
- **Psychosocial Support Program:** Placed at the Gregorios Clinic at the General Hospital of Larnaca, the AIDS Solidarity Movement provides psychosocial support for people living with HIV, their partners, friends, and chosen family.
- **Support Telephone Line:** Accessible in English, Greek, and Spanish.
- **Raising Awareness on the Internet:** Information dissemination on various social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Grindr. These pages are used to educate the queer community and the general public about safer sex practices, testing locations in Cyprus, the significance of 'U=U', and more.
- **Guide on Safer Sex Practices and Combination Prevention:** Comprehensive guide on safer sex practices which offers valuable information to promote healthy and responsible behaviour. Lubes + free condoms + info PEP + PREP

Impact

The AIDS Solidarity Movement has provided more than 750 HIV/Syphilis tests throughout Cyprus in 2023 alone. People who have reactive tests are being accompanied by Community Health Workers (CHW) of the organisation for a confirmatory test at a state hospital and later are linked to care at Gregorios Clinic, again with the support of the people of the organisation. In addition to the Free, Anonymous and Rapid HIV/Syphilis tests provided by AIDS Solidarity Movement since 2015 (through Cy Checkpoint, the organisation's testing centre), the organisation has been providing psychosocial support to people living with HIV/AIDS and their families/friends since 1995

Insights from the Inside

As a queer activist, working with the AIDS Solidarity Movement has been a very fulfilling experience. It inspired a sense of community for me and made me become aware of the synergies among various marginalized populations on the island. Working towards the betterment of conditions for People living with HIV, as well as catering to key populations through my work as a Community Health Worker for the AIDS Solidarity Movement has broadened my understanding on matters related to the LGBTQIA+ community, migrants (refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented), sex-workers etc. I'm witnessing personal growth on a daily basis through the various opportunities provided through my work within the organization, through training and various events.

-Yiannis Charilaou, Member of the AIDS Solidarity Movement

COMBATING HOMOPHOBIC AND TRANSPHOBIC BULLYING IN SCHOOLS - HOMBAT - EUROPEAN PROJECT



The HOMBAT project aimed to address and prevent homophobia and transphobia (HT) in Greece, Cyprus, and Lithuania. It specifically focused on combating HT bullying in schools by promoting prevention strategies and building the capacities of teachers and school advisors. The project sought to foster multi-actor cooperation, exchange knowledge, and raise awareness about HT bullying in educational settings. The project targeted primarily school advisors, teachers, students, parents, educational authorities, civil society, and other professionals. HOMBAT sought to enhance the knowledge and capacities of teachers and school advisors, strengthen multi-actor cooperation to combat HT bullying, and increase awareness and promote attitude changes among students, parents, teachers, school advisors, and professionals. The project was funded by the European Commission and ran for 24 months from October 2017 to September 2019.

<https://www.hombat.eu/>

Context in which it was created:

Hombat was developed and implemented in the framework and with the funds of the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020). It was informed by the local context of the partners' countries: Cyprus, Greece and Lithuania.

What makes this stand out?

The project was innovative and hence impactful as topics of homophobia and transphobia are still very controversial in Cyprus and they are hardly discussed in the school context. In response to the avoidance and lack of tools to address such topics, HOMBAT offered capacity building training for school advisors and teachers at primary and secondary levels who then trained others creating a cascading effect amplifying the impact. Additionally, the project offered an online learning platform through which professionals in the education sector can access the information at their own time and pace.

What makes HOMBAT stand out is the widespread promotion of the created materials in the teacher community and the fact that despite resistance by conservative voices, they were embraced by many teachers who were lacking the skills and tools to address such topics. The fact that the project has been a reference for educators, years after its completion is an indicator of its success.

Impact

The project had a very strong impact due to its wide dissemination to the public especially among professionals in education and civil society. This was achieved also through the development of a National Joint Strategy for the Combatting of Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying in Schools which involved high-profile, influential stakeholders. In Cyprus, the Cooperation Agreement and Declaration of Principles were signed by the HOMBAT Network which included:

- Cyprus Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth
- Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights
- Commissioner for Protection and Rights of the Child
- Cyprus Youth Board
- ACCEPT Cyprus
- University of Nicosia
- Frederick University
- CARDET
- Cyprus Family Planning Association

The curriculum is also available at the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus, the institution responsible for the continuous education of teachers of all levels.

Insights from the Inside

“It was a unique experience to participate as a trainer/ facilitator in this series of workshops about Combating Homophobia and Transphobia. The zero-tolerance policy against any incident of racism and homophobia-transphobia was reinforced among the participants, as well as the values of empathy and respect for diversity without judgment. While reflecting upon my stereotypes and perceptions, I tried to empower others to cultivate their mental health resilience regarding this topic.”

-Natasa Lampitsi - Hombat trainer