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## **METODI CREATIVI PER L'EDUCAZIONE SESSUALE IN AMBITO SCOLASTICO: LINEE GUIDA E SUGGERIMENTI**



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# METODI CREATIVI PER L'EDUCAZIONE SESSUALE IN AMBITO SCOLASTICO: linee guida e suggerimenti

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- Regional Directorate for Primary and Secondary Education of Attica (Greece): <https://pdeattikis.gr/EU/>
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## INTRODUZIONE

L'Organizzazione Mondiale della Sanità (2006) ha definito il concetto di salute sessuale come “uno stato di benessere fisico, emotivo, mentale e sociale legato alla sessualità; non riducibile all'assenza di malattia, disfunzione o infermità”. Per raggiungere tale obiettivo è necessario “un approccio positivo e rispettoso alla sessualità e alle relazioni sessuali, così come la possibilità di avere esperienze sessuali piacevoli e sicure, libere da coercizioni, discriminazioni e violenza”. Come è possibile? La risposta sembrerebbe scontata ma occorre sottolineare che “per far sì che la salute sessuale venga raggiunta e mantenuta, i diritti sessuali di ognuno devono essere rispettati, protetti e soddisfatti”.

I diritti sessuali di ognuno devono essere rispettati, protetti e soddisfatti, e sotto questo punto di vista le persone con disabilità intellettive, cognitive e fisiche non sono diverse. Infatti, esprimono il bisogno e il desiderio di avere relazioni, di avere esperienze sessuali e di acquisire conoscenze in tema di sessualità (Kelly, Crowley, & Hamilton, 2009; Konstantareas & Lunskey, 1997; McCabe, 1999; Siebelink, de Jong, Taal, & Roelvink, 2006). Tuttavia, l'accesso all'educazione sessuale è limitato per molti giovani in generale e maggiormente per i giovani con disabilità intellettive, cognitive e fisiche.

Secondo l'UNESCO, l'educazione sessuale comprensiva (ESC) svolge un ruolo centrale nella preparazione dei giovani a una vita sicura, produttiva e appagante in un mondo in cui l'HIV e l'AIDS, le infezioni sessualmente trasmissibili (IST), le gravidanze indesiderate, la violenza di genere e la disuguaglianza di genere rappresentano ancora seri rischi per il loro benessere. Di cosa si tratta? L'educazione sessuale comprensiva (ESC) è un processo di insegnamento e apprendimento basato su un programma formativo incentrato sugli aspetti cognitivi, emotivi, fisici e sociali della sessualità. Lo scopo è fornire ai bambini e ai giovani conoscenze, competenze, modelli di comportamento e valori che a) li responsabilizzino riguardo alla loro salute, al loro benessere e alla loro dignità, b) li preparino a sviluppare relazioni sociali e sessuali rispettose, c) facciano sì che comprendano e sappiano tutelare i loro diritti e rispettare anche quelli degli altri.

Sebbene i benefici dell'Educazione Sessuale Comprensiva siano stati ampiamente dimostrati, l'UNESCO ha dichiarato che ci sono poche informazioni sul suo impatto sui gruppi più vulnerabili, compresi i giovani con disabilità intellettive, cognitive e fisiche. Inoltre, i metodi creativi che si sono rivelati particolarmente efficaci per questo gruppo target, come i laboratori teatrali e i giochi di ruolo, dovrebbero essere ulteriormente approfonditi.

In aggiunta, lo scoppio della pandemia di COVID-19 ha avuto un impatto notevole sull'educazione sessuale di tutti i bambini e i giovani in diversi modi: a) con la chiusura delle scuole, l'educazione sessuale ha ricevuto meno attenzione, perché nelle lezioni online a casa non era una priorità, b) l'aumento dell'uso di Internet a causa della pandemia di COVID-19 ha aumentato il rischio di molestie sessuali online sui bambini. Nuovamente a causa delle restrizioni imposte dalla pandemia, da una parte i genitori hanno avuto la possibilità di trascorrere più tempo in famiglia, dall'altra hanno dovuto spesso assumere anche il ruolo di insegnanti. D'altra parte, tali restrizioni hanno avuto un impatto



positivo nel dare ai genitori la possibilità di entrare maggiormente in relazione con i loro figli e di approfondire il tema della salute sessuale in modo più consapevole. Anche questo sforzo da parte dei genitori dovrebbe essere sostenuto.

Il progetto INCLUDED mira a rispondere a queste sfide progettando e realizzando un programma formativo di educazione sessuale inclusiva per gli studenti delle scuole superiori e un modello per promuovere un approccio all'educazione sessuale che coinvolga l'intero sistema scolastico: dagli studenti, agli insegnanti, dai genitori ai dirigenti scolastici e all'intera comunità. L'approccio utilizzato nell'ambito del progetto vede al centro dell'attenzione le tecniche teatrali creative e quindi prevede la realizzazione di giochi di ruolo e laboratori teatrali. Questi tipi di strumenti creativi si sono dimostrati efficaci nell'educazione dei giovani, e ancora maggiormente con i giovani con disabilità. Infatti, oltre al programma di educazione sessuale, il progetto INCLUDED mira a promuovere un ambiente positivo e inclusivo per i giovani con disabilità intellettive, cognitive e fisiche. Ad esempio, gli approcci della pedagogia critica e della pedagogia dell'oppresso offrono strumenti preziosi per promuovere relazioni dialogiche con gruppi di giovani. Il progetto mira anche a fornire agli insegnanti strumenti, mezzi e competenze importanti per accrescere le proprie conoscenze e competenze e per renderli in grado di insegnare il programma di educazione sessuale.

Gli obiettivi principali del progetto sono: a) sostenere gli studenti adolescenti, compresi quelli con disabilità intellettive, cognitive e fisiche, attraverso un programma di formazione curricolare. Attraverso questo programma gli studenti raggiungeranno efficacemente i risultati fondamentali di apprendimento dell'educazione sessuale secondo gli standard dell'Organizzazione Mondiale della Sanità (OMS), b) sostenere gli insegnanti e il personale scolastico attraverso un corso e-learning che li formi ad applicare pratiche innovative nell'educazione sessuale attraverso metodi creativi, c) coinvolgere i genitori e i tutori nella collaborazione attiva al programma di educazione sessuale attraverso una guida metodologica e d) sviluppare risorse educative aperte.

Questi obiettivi sono collegati ai seguenti risultati:

- Un manuale per le scuole per insegnare l'educazione sessuale inclusiva attraverso metodi creativi: un programma di formazione curricolare per gli studenti. (IO1)
- Un corso e-learning per insegnanti sull'insegnamento dell'educazione sessuale inclusiva attraverso metodi creativi (IO2)
- Una guida per le scuole su come includere la famiglia nell'educazione sessuale inclusiva, basata sui metodi della pedagogia critica (IO3)
- Metodi creativi per l'educazione sessuale in ambito scolastico: linee guida e suggerimenti (IO4)

Il presente documento è la seconda guida ed ultimo risultato del progetto. Esso comprende linee guida politiche e una serie di raccomandazioni dettagliate basate sull'esperienza di ciascun Paese partner e si rivolge alle autorità scolastiche e ai responsabili politici.

Tali strumenti sono stati sviluppati in conformità con il quadro politico dell'OMS "Standard per l'educazione alla sessualità in Europa", che promuove l'attenzione alla diversità basata





sull'approccio intersezionale in cui vengono presi in considerazione etnia, genere, abilità, classe sociale, status migratorio, orientamento sessuale, ecc.

Gli strumenti proposti si basano su un approccio che è stato sperimentato, centrato sul destinatario ed è partito dal basso, ed è basato su risorse educative aperte che possono contribuire al benessere e all'inclusione sociale dei gruppi sociali vulnerabili. Pertanto, in questo documento vengono descritti la metodologia e i risultati emersi dalla fase di ricerca, i risultati raccolti sul campo in ciascun Paese partner delle precedenti attività del progetto, la descrizione di ciascun contesto nazionale in materia di educazione sessuale e le politiche esistenti. Attraverso il confronto tra le politiche esistenti e quelle mancanti in ogni Paese, abbiamo creato una roadmap politica con delle raccomandazioni.

## METODOLOGIA

Come già menzionato, gli obiettivi del progetto INCLUDED comprendono la progettazione, la sperimentazione e la valutazione di un curriculum di educazione sessuale inclusiva per gli studenti delle scuole secondarie, utilizzando metodi creativi e tecniche teatrali. Il progetto INCLUDED ha adottato un approccio interscolastico rivolto a tre target principali: 1) gli studenti adolescenti (compresi quelli con disabilità intellettive, cognitive e funzionali) che frequentano le scuole secondarie dei Paesi partner, 2) gli insegnanti e il personale scolastico (direttamente o indirettamente) coinvolti nelle attività di educazione sessuale e 3) i genitori/tutori/ dei ragazzi stessi. Il progetto è stato realizzato a partire da un approccio olistico e positivo all'educazione sessuale, in conformità con il quadro politico dell'OMS "Standard per l'educazione alla sessualità in Europa", combinato con un approccio metodologico creativo, che utilizza tecniche corporee, artistico, teatrale e intersezionale.

Oltre alla desk research che ogni partner ha condotto per comprendere il contesto approfondito dell'educazione sessuale in ogni contesto nazionale, è stata condotta anche una ricerca primaria con i gruppi target per definire le loro esigenze.

Più precisamente:

Nell'IO1, i partner hanno sviluppato un programma di formazione curriculare per gli studenti, un manuale per le scuole e raccomandazioni su come introdurre il programma nel curriculum scolastico. Il programma si basa sul contesto nazionale e su interviste con le autorità scolastiche, gli insegnanti, i genitori e gli studenti, per identificare le loro esigenze. Il percorso formativo è stato poi sperimentato con studenti di età compresa tra i 14 e i 20 anni.

Nell'IO2, i partner hanno sviluppato un corso e-learning per gli insegnanti su come introdurre nei loro programmi l'educazione sessuale inclusiva attraverso metodi creativi, basandosi anche sulle precedenti esperienze e sui risultati dell'IO1. I moduli del corso e-learning si basano su: a) la Metodologia dell'Incidente Critico, che è una tecnica sistematica e aperta che prevede l'analisi di



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situazioni specifiche per determinare quali azioni o comportamenti comunicativi porterebbero al miglior esito possibile di una determinata situazione, b) la Psicologia Orientata ai processi (POP), un modello che integra e utilizza i contributi di varie discipline per facilitare la trasformazione e la crescita sia individuale che collettiva, c) il Teatro dell'Oppresso, un insieme di tecniche teatrali il cui scopo è portare alla luce lo sfruttamento e l'oppressione sistemica all'interno di situazioni comuni e permettere agli spettatori di diventare attori, e d) l'inclusione. È stato realizzato un progetto pilota con 6-8 insegnanti per ogni Paese.

Infine, nell'IO3, i partner hanno incluso anche le famiglie e hanno sviluppato una guida per le scuole con workshop interattivi per genitori ed educatori. La ricerca primaria per questi workshop comprende due serie di interviste con il personale scolastico di ciascun Paese. Il materiale sviluppato si basa anche sull'approccio pedagogico della metodologia Universal Design for Learning e sulla pedagogia critica di Paulo Freire. È stato realizzato un pilota in cui sono stati coinvolti sia genitori che educatori.

## SUGGERIMENTI DALL'ESPERIENZA DI

### INCLUDED

#### Italia

##### Introduzione - Contesto nazionale

Come emerge dalla ricerca realizzata nella prima fase del progetto, in Italia manca un programma ministeriale integrato di educazione sessuale nelle scuole. Il MIUR (*Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca*) non ha ancora adottato e formalizzato l'inserimento di un programma di educazione sessuale nelle scuole, facendo dell'Italia uno dei pochi Stati membri dell'UE (insieme a Cipro, Bulgaria, Polonia, Romania e Lituania) a non avere un programma standard di educazione sessuale nelle scuole.

La mancanza di un curriculum comune per l'educazione sessuale fa sì che ogni scuola, in ogni regione, possa decidere se e come svolgere programmi di educazione sessuale: alcune coinvolgono gli insegnanti interni, altre aderiscono a iniziative regionali, altre ancora si affidano a organizzazioni esterne, mentre in alcune il tema dell'educazione sessuale non viene affrontato affatto. Questa situazione fa sì che l'educazione sessuale sia decisamente disomogenea sul territorio, a volte del tutto assente, frammentata o trattata con approcci diversi. A questo si aggiunge la totale assenza di indicazioni specifiche sull'educazione sessuale nell'educazione speciale e/o inclusiva, adatta anche ai percorsi scolastici degli studenti con disabilità. Tutto ciò lascia gli studenti in una condizione di disparità informativa.



L'indicazione governativa più recente che fa qualche accenno ai temi dell'educazione sessuale nelle scuole è la cosiddetta "Riforma della Buona Scuola" (2015), la quale afferma che: "Il piano triennale dell'offerta formativa assicura l'attuazione dei principi di pari opportunità, promuovendo nelle scuole di ogni ordine e grado l'educazione alla parità di genere, la prevenzione della violenza di genere e di tutte le discriminazioni". Si basa su una legge approvata nel 2013 per contrastare la violenza di genere e il femminicidio, che contiene disposizioni per l'attuazione di programmi di formazione alla parità di genere nelle scuole, affrontando temi come l'identità di genere e l'orientamento sessuale, che di solito fanno parte dei percorsi di educazione sessuale. Ma la realtà è che, nonostante questa legge, in Italia non esiste ancora una norma che miri a introdurre l'educazione sessuale nei programmi scolastici a livello nazionale.

Nelle scuole che scelgono di includere l'educazione sessuale nel loro programma di studi, l'argomento viene solitamente trattato nelle materie umanistiche, come italiano e/o storia, o nelle lezioni di scienze e biologia. Può anche essere un argomento trattato durante la lezione settimanale facoltativa di religione, utilizzando un'attività di dibattito o guardando film dedicati. Tuttavia, questi tentativi sono spesso poco strutturati e non neutrali.

Guardando ai singoli programmi di educazione sessuale esistenti nel panorama italiano, esistono percorsi educativi diversi per ogni specifica fascia d'età, indicativamente dagli 8 anni fino ai 18 anni. Rivolte alla stessa fascia d'età, ma al di fuori della scuola e dei programmi scolastici, l'Italia fa affidamento ad iniziative realizzate dai Consultori familiari, gli enti che generalmente propongono percorsi formativi specifici sull'educazione sessuale, con curriculum formativi che a seconda del *consultorio* specifico e dei professionisti coinvolti.

### Risultato 1

Il primo risultato del progetto (IO1) è un manuale per supportare gli insegnanti nella realizzazione del programma di educazione sessuale inclusiva. Questo programma è stato creato dai partner sulla base dei risultati emersi da una fase di ricerca sul contesto nazionale dei Paesi coinvolti in tema di educazione sessuale e sulla base di interviste con le parti interessate (studenti, scuole e genitori) per identificare le esigenze specifiche. Il programma di formazione è stato poi sperimentato in classi in cui erano presenti anche studenti con disabilità fisiche e/o intellettive.

### Ricerca

#### L'inclusione degli studenti con disabilità nel sistema scolastico italiano

Le classi speciali per persone con disabilità non esistono più nel sistema scolastico italiano. Sono state elaborate norme per facilitare l'inclusione degli studenti con disabilità intellettive, cognitive e fisiche all'interno di classi miste. Infatti, il MIUR (Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca) afferma che "*L'integrazione scolastica degli studenti con disabilità è uno dei punti di forza della scuola italiana, che si propone come una comunità accogliente in cui tutti gli studenti, indipendentemente dalle loro differenze funzionali, possano sperimentare una crescita individuale e sociale*". (1977). Per promuovere l'inclusione in classe e rispondere ai bisogni di ogni studente, è



stato istituito il PEI (*Piano Educativo Individualizzato*). Il PEI tiene conto degli obiettivi educativi, di socializzazione e di apprendimento di ogni studente ed è redatto dalla scuola insieme ai servizi (équipe psico-socio-sanitaria) con la collaborazione della famiglia. Il filo conduttore è l'approccio, adottato dal sistema scolastico italiano negli ultimi anni, di massima inclusione degli studenti con disabilità, abolendo le scuole speciali e le classi differenziate e sancendo il loro diritto a essere inclusi nel sistema scolastico regolare. Gli studenti con disabilità sono quindi distribuiti all'interno delle classi ordinarie in un numero che generalmente non supera i due studenti per classe. Questa scelta si basa sul fatto che, inserendo gli studenti con bisogni educativi speciali nelle classi ordinarie, è possibile favorirne l'inclusione e la partecipazione, consentendo loro di ricevere un'istruzione con l'aiuto di figure di supporto specifiche e sulla base del PEI stabilito per lo studente.

### **Tabù e stigmi presenti in Italia nell'educazione e nella cultura generale**

I programmi di educazione sessuale rivolti alle persone con disabilità, laddove presenti, sono arrivati tardi in Italia e sono ancora sporadici, a causa dei tabù estremamente diffusi sulla sessualità nella disabilità. In generale, parlare di sessualità ai giovani è ancora percepito come "immorale" o "scandaloso" da una parte dell'opinione pubblica italiana: più i ragazzi sono giovani, più la sessualità è percepita come qualcosa di inappropriato, di cui non bisognerebbe parlare. Radicato nel tempo e nella mente dei genitori, primi educatori "informali" alla sessualità, soprattutto nelle generazioni più anziane, è l'imbarazzo ad affrontare l'argomento: si tende a non parlarne, continuando a considerare il sesso come "sporco".

Alcuni settori conservatori della società, uniti alla chiesa cattolica, sono soliti considerare gli studi di genere e la sensibilizzazione antidiscriminatoria come una sorta di "indottrinamento ideologico", volto a cancellare la differenza tra maschio e femmina. Un grande tabù è legato anche al tema della sessualità nella disabilità. La percezione diffusa è che le persone con disabilità, soprattutto quelle con disabilità intellettiva, siano "asessuate" e quindi prive di bisogni sessuali. L'educazione sessuale tra i giovani adolescenti con disabilità è perciò considerata inutile o addirittura "pericolosa", perché si ritiene che le persone con disabilità non possano, o non dovrebbero, avere una vita sessuale. Anche le relazioni affettive sono viste dagli adulti/tutori come puerili; non viene data loro la serietà di una relazione amorosa adulta.

### **Educazione informale**

Spesso, a causa dei tabù esistenti e della mancanza di percorsi educativi formali offerti dalle scuole, gli studenti ricorrono a mezzi di educazione informale per informarsi sulla sessualità. Secondo recenti ricerche, gli studenti italiani si informano prevalentemente su Internet per quel che riguarda la sessualità e la riproduzione. Lo "Studio nazionale sulla fertilità" (2019), progetto patrocinato dal Ministero della Salute condotto nel 2018, raccoglie l'insieme dei risultati della ricerca che ha coinvolto oltre 16.000 studenti di 16-17 anni in 482 scuole, distribuite su tutto il territorio nazionale. *"Il campione è rappresentativo a livello nazionale, sia per la metodologia utilizzata sia per l'alta percentuale di giovani che hanno partecipato all'indagine. Ciò consente di estendere i risultati all'intera popolazione di 16-17 anni"*.



Dalle risposte all'indagine emerge una sovrastima da parte dei ragazzi e delle ragazze rispetto all'adeguatezza delle informazioni in loro possesso sui temi della salute sessuale e riproduttiva che nella maggior parte dei casi (89% dei maschi e 84% delle femmine) cercano su Internet. Gli amici sono la seconda fonte di informazione (38% dei maschi e 46% delle femmine), poi la famiglia (20% dei maschi e 25% delle femmine) e la scuola (18% dei maschi e 22% delle femmine). Il medico è la quinta fonte (11% dei maschi e 12% delle femmine) (*ibidem*).

Tuttavia, come rilevato nello "Studio Nazionale Fertilità", c'è una percentuale schiacciante di studenti che ritiene che la scuola debba fornire informazioni sulla sessualità e sulla riproduzione: per alcuni bisognerebbe partire già alle elementari (11%), per altri alle medie (50%) e per altri ancora alle superiori (32%). Solo il 6% degli intervistati dichiara di non ritenere utile questo insegnamento. Da parte dei giovani c'è una forte richiesta di educazione all'affettività e alla sessualità.

### **Il clima politico su temi come educazione sessuale, sex positivity, diritti sessuali, diversità (LGBTQIA+), inclusione e altri argomenti legati all'educazione sessuale.**

In Italia non esistono leggi ufficiali sull'educazione alla sessualità. Molte proposte sono state presentate a partire dal 1975, quando è stato proposto il primo disegno di legge sull'importanza di trattare le tematiche sessuali nelle scuole pubbliche (Disegno di legge 13 marzo 1975 - Iniziative per l'informazione sui problemi della sessualità nelle scuole statali), ma nessuno è stato approvato. Recentemente in Italia è stato presentato un disegno di legge, denominato "DDL Zan" (2018), dal nome del relatore Alessandro Zan, che riguarda la "violenza o la discriminazione per orientamento sessuale o identità di genere", e che è stato al centro del dibattito pubblico. È stato inteso come un *"intervento legislativo che sanziona le condotte dettate da intenti persecutori nei confronti di persone omo e transessuali o transgender, proprio in ragione del loro orientamento sessuale o della loro identità di genere"*.

Questa legge ha generato un forte dibattito tra le forze e i partiti politici più "progressisti", orientati verso una comunità più inclusiva, e quelli più "conservatori", che vedono nella legge un favoritismo nei confronti della comunità LGBTQIA+.

Queste due visioni sono riconoscibili osservando alcune manifestazioni socio-politiche che si sono diffuse negli ultimi anni. Da un lato, molte città italiane, non solo le più popolose e grandi, hanno realizzato le parate del Pride, con un importante aumento negli ultimi 3 anni. In questo contesto, molti gruppi sociali hanno rivendicato il diritto di affermare la propria identità di genere, sessuale e affettiva. Dall'altro lato, ci sono state manifestazioni di associazioni "Pro Vita e Famiglia", volte a proteggere la famiglia tradizionale cattolica, contro l'"ideologia gender"<sup>1</sup> e per protestare contro l'aborto. Tra le ultime dichiarazioni da parte di questi movimenti: *"Il Ddl Zan è una legge sessista e*

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<sup>1</sup> "Lo studio delle ideologie di genere si occupa di descrivere e spiegare le somiglianze e le differenze interculturali tra i punti di vista umani sulle donne, sugli uomini e sulle identità di genere alternative. L'uso del termine 'ideologia' riflette due aspetti della ricerca su questo argomento: (a) le sue radici nella posizione femminista secondo cui le donne sono concettualizzate come inferiori agli uomini per giustificare e sostenere i sistemi sociali e culturali dominati dagli uomini; e (b) la natura culturalmente costruita (in contrapposizione a quella 'naturale') del genere". (S.U. Philips, [Enciclopedia Internazionale delle Scienze Sociali e Comportamentali](#), 2001)



*discriminatoria che intende bollare come omofobe o transfobiche tutte le voci di dissenso o qualsiasi affermazione basata sull'orientamento sessuale che si dica ispirata al concetto di famiglia naturale formata da una mamma e un papà - ha argomentato il vicepresidente di Pro Life & Family Jacopo Coghe - e non possiamo accettare che si dia spazio a una nuova e ambigua dittatura, molto più nascosta e pericolosa." (Giuffrida, 2021)*

Tornando invece in tema di educazione sessuale, non da un punto di vista politico, ma strettamente sociale, stanno nascendo molti canali di informazione affidabili. Molti professionisti italiani del settore, come ginecologi, oncologi, andrologi, ma anche psicologi ed educatori, stanno utilizzando i social network per diffondere informazioni significative e rilevanti sul sesso, sulle relazioni, sulla necessità di conoscere il proprio corpo e i propri diritti, raggiungendo centinaia di migliaia di follower. Attraverso piattaforme come YouTube, TikTok e Instagram, si stanno aprendo canali di "buona informazione", con la volontà di contrastare le informazioni distorte e parziali che i giovani possono generalmente trovare sul web. D'altra parte, se da un lato è più facile veicolare informazioni più tecniche attraverso il web, secondo alcuni sex-ed "quello che manca è la mediazione umana, soprattutto per alcuni concetti fondamentali come il consenso, il rispetto, il diritto al piacere, l'empatia e la prevenzione." (Il Post, 2022)

### Iniziative sulla sessualità

Vedere gli individui con disabilità fisiche e/o intellettive come eterni bambini o come persone asessuate non ha aiutato lo sviluppo di programmi educativi in cui la sessualità assume un ruolo centrale; al contrario, purtroppo spesso viene completamente trascurata da genitori e caregiver perché considerata un'area di scarso interesse per le persone con disabilità.

Pertanto, l'insegnamento dell'educazione sessuale ai giovani con disabilità è spesso delegato a iniziative o progetti locali, come il progetto Included, che vengono proposti a scuole o istituti speciali. Gli operatori del settore, come educatori e psicologi, lamentano la mancanza di buone pratiche diffuse, e il fatto che le poche che esistono siano estremamente frammentate e non strutturate. Non esiste un programma diffuso, ogni iniziativa attua un proprio percorso. Tuttavia, in assenza di programmi formali di formazione, queste iniziative e progetti cercano di colmare le lacune presenti.

Ecco alcuni esempi significativi a livello locale ed europeo:

- ["Amicizia, amore, sesso: parliamone adesso - Conoscere se stessi, gli altri, le proprie emozioni"](#) - Anna Contardi, Monica Berarducci: questo materiale è un libro pubblicato da Erickson nella collana "Laboratori di autonomia", a cura dell'[AIPD](#) (Associazione Italiana Persone Down). Il libro affronta il tema dell'educazione sessuale nella disabilità, "perché esiste un diritto alla sessualità anche per le persone con disabilità", afferma Anna Contardi. L'approccio è quello di consentire un'educazione sessuale mirata a garantire la massima autonomia alle persone con disabilità fisica e/o intellettiva, per dare competenze che poi diventano una solida base anche per una riduzione dei comportamenti inappropriati o a rischio.
- ["La Sessualità nella disabilità"](#): L'Associazione [ANFFAS](#) (Associazione Nazionale Famiglie e Persone con Disabilità Intellettiva e Disturbi del Neurosviluppo) organizza da anni corsi di





formazione e seminari per aumentare la conoscenza e la consapevolezza di professionisti (medici, psicologi, terapisti, educatori, ecc.), insegnanti, famiglie e popolazione in generale sul tema del diritto alla sessualità e della sua educazione nelle persone con disabilità. Il filo conduttore di queste formazioni è il diritto alla sessualità, così come sancito dalle Nazioni Unite. Infatti, la Convenzione ONU sui diritti delle persone con disabilità riconosce il diritto all'autodeterminazione, così come a tutte le forme di espressione, e quindi anche alla sessualità. Le iniziative promosse dall'ANFFAS in Italia sono state pionieristiche su questi temi.

- "*La sessualità è uguale per tutti*" e "*Disabilità fa rima con Sessualità?*", corsi di formazione dell'[Istituto Besta di Treviso](#) per *studenti e insegnanti*: l'obiettivo della formazione per i ragazzi è quello di permettere a tutti i giovani, compresi quelli con disabilità, di acquisire consapevolezza di sé e degli altri, modulare la capacità di integrare i propri sentimenti con i modelli sociali e culturali di riferimento, affrontare il tema della relazione. L'obiettivo della formazione degli insegnanti è quello di affrontare la sessualità delle persone con disabilità, non trattandola come un contenuto isolato, ma applicando ad essa lo stesso atteggiamento umano, pedagogico e metodologico utilizzato per conoscere, insegnare e modificare tutte le altre esperienze della persona disabile.
- [AMAABILI](#) - Progetto Integrato Socio-Sanitario per la promozione affettiva e sessuale delle persone con disabilità finanziato nel 2010 dalla Direzione Regionale Salute e Servizi Sociali della Regione Umbria: l'obiettivo generale del progetto AMAABILI è quello di promuovere la salute affettiva e sessuale delle persone con disabilità attraverso la riduzione e/o neutralizzazione delle barriere socio-ambientali che ostacolano il benessere sociale di una comunità integrata.
- Progetto [DESEM](#): Il progetto Erasmus+ DESEM mira a sviluppare un modello/metodologia di educazione sessuale per *persone con disabilità intellettiva*. Ogni attività che costituisce il contenuto del progetto prevede il lavoro coordinato di educatori/specialisti di orientamento e famiglie, che sono i principali attori dell'educazione sessuale.
- Progetto [Stay Safe](#): il progetto Erasmus+ Safe mira a sensibilizzare ed educare le donne con disabilità su come rispondere alle molestie sessuali (sia online che offline) e agli episodi violenti, sviluppando un modello di formazione che applicherà l'approccio comportamentale di genere e sarà basato su tecniche di teatro creativo ed elementi di gioco. Inoltre, applicando le metodologie del teatro creativo, si intende formare i professionisti che lavorano nel campo della disabilità su come riconoscere i rischi di molestie sessuali a cui sono esposte le donne con disabilità psico-sociali e su come sostenerle.
- [InTandem](#) - Corso di formazione online sulla sessualità per [genitori](#) e [professionisti](#), tenuto da figure professionali come psicologi e psicoterapeuti.
- Percorso formativo promosso dal [Comune di Torino](#) - Il progetto ha l'obiettivo di sensibilizzare, informare e formare *professionisti e genitori* al sostegno dell'affettività e della sessualità dei giovani disabili.



### *Pilota*

In totale 48 studenti di età compresa tra i 13 e i 14 anni hanno partecipato al progetto pilota in Italia, in due scuole diverse. È stato necessario lavorare su due classi diverse perché in Italia non esistono scuole per giovani con bisogni speciali, che invece fanno parte di classi con studenti senza disabilità in numero non superiore a due. In totale erano presenti due studenti con disabilità: uno con un disturbo psichiatrico e uno con una disabilità cognitiva. Inoltre, erano presenti sette insegnanti, cinque insegnanti curricolari e due insegnanti di sostegno.

Le 6 ore per la realizzazione del programma sono state suddivise in tre incontri in tre giorni diversi.

### *Risultati*

La sperimentazione in Italia è stata un successo, il programma è stato accolto molto positivamente sia dagli studenti che dagli insegnanti, che erano presenti durante le lezioni, con diversi livelli di partecipazione e di supporto nell'analisi del feedback degli studenti. È risultato evidente che alcuni studenti avevano già familiarità con gli argomenti, ma volevano informazioni più specifiche e strutturate di quelle che già avevano. Hanno mostrato particolare interesse e necessità di chiarimenti sul tema dell'identità di genere e dell'orientamento sessuale, riferendosi alla comunità LGBTQ+.

Per quanto gli studenti abbiano mostrato questo interesse, non tutti gli insegnanti hanno accettato di trattare questi argomenti. In particolare, un insegnante ha ritenuto che il tema dell'omosessualità e dell'identità di genere fosse trattato in modo troppo approfondito rispetto all'età degli studenti. Nonostante una discussione separata con l'insegnante che ha permesso lo scambio di opinioni, le posizioni sono rimaste diverse. Questo non è stato l'unico caso in cui è stata messa in discussione l'adeguatezza di questi argomenti; nel questionario finale, alcuni altri insegnanti si sono lamentati della lunghezza e della profondità con cui sono stati discussi il genere, l'orientamento sessuale e le questioni LGBTQ. L'orientamento sessuale e il genere sembrano essere temi ancora molto delicati da trattare in ambito scolastico in Italia, facendo emergere opinioni personali diverse tra studenti e insegnanti. Nonostante ciò, gli insegnanti hanno ritenuto la formazione adeguata.

Per quanto riguarda i risultati positivi, tutti gli studenti si sono dimostrati curiosi ed interessati, hanno partecipato attivamente e colto al volo l'occasione di confronto tra pari, anche i giovani con disabilità. Hanno considerato come aspetti particolarmente positivi le attività pratiche, la possibilità di interagire e lavorare in gruppo, l'ambiente accogliente e l'atmosfera creata. Per quanto riguarda quest'ultimo aspetto, sono stati apprezzati lo stile informale dei formatori, il fatto che gli studenti non si siano sentiti valutati o giudicati per le loro domande e l'opportunità di discutere in gruppo con i loro coetanei argomenti che spesso non vengono affrontati. Tutti gli studenti hanno dichiarato che raccomanderebbero il programma INCLUDED a un coetaneo.

Quasi tutti gli insegnanti coinvolti sono stati soddisfatti del workshop e lo ritengono consigliabile ad altri insegnanti. L'approccio innovativo ed informale e i metodi utilizzati sono stati particolarmente apprezzati. Hanno scoperto che gli studenti erano coinvolti e interessati e hanno trovato estremamente utile affrontare gli argomenti trattati con naturalezza e senza giudizi.





Chiaramente ci sono state anche alcune difficoltà durante la fase di pilotaggio. La sfida principale è stata quella di inserire molte attività in un breve periodo di tempo. Poiché la maggior parte degli esercizi ha richiesto più tempo del previsto, dall'esperienza del pilota ci sentiamo di raccomandare di prolungare il tempo previsto. Un'altra difficoltà incontrata è stata quella di dover affrontare i piccoli dubbi dei genitori. Per superarla, è stato necessario collaborare con gli insegnanti per fornire un quadro dettagliato del progetto e degli obiettivi da raggiungere. In generale, il progetto è stato compreso dai genitori, che ne hanno riconosciuto il valore e condiviso gli obiettivi. Tuttavia, è bene tenerlo presente in termini di replicabilità, è consigliabile coinvolgere i genitori durante tutto il corso del programma di educazione sessuale. Ci sono stati momenti in cui, pur essendo generalmente impegnati e partecipativi, gli studenti hanno avuto bisogno di maggiori stimoli e indicazioni per seguire le attività.

Sono stati apportati alcuni cambiamenti anche nella realizzazione del programma in Italia. Innanzitutto, è stata richiesta la collaborazione di un ginecologo, per aiutare i formatori a trasmettere i concetti principali sull'anatomia e sul sesso da parte di un esperto. Questi argomenti specifici richiedono competenze e conoscenze specifiche ed è quindi utile essere supportati da un sessuologo o da un ginecologo per affrontare queste parti e le domande e le curiosità che possono sorgere da parte degli studenti. Sono state aggiunte anche alcune attività trasversali, utili per migliorare l'attenzione e il coinvolgimento degli studenti: la prima è stata la raccolta online di domande in forma anonima (tramite Google Forms) consegnata agli studenti attraverso i docenti, che ci ha permesso di raccogliere le domande degli studenti. I temi sollevati sono stati affrontati nel corso degli incontri, inserendoli negli argomenti del programma e preparando le risposte di conseguenza. All'inizio del primo incontro si è svolta l'attività "Redazione e definizione di regole condivise", scrivendo le regole proposte dagli studenti su un grande foglio di carta appeso. Questo ha fatto sì che gli studenti si sentissero più responsabili delle "loro" regole e ha creato un'atmosfera più rispettosa e co-costruita.

## Risultato 2

Nella fase IO2 del progetto, i partner hanno collaborato alla realizzazione di un corso di e-learning rivolto agli insegnanti delle scuole e al personale di supporto (insegnanti di sostegno, consulenti scolastici, infermieri scolastici, ecc.). I contenuti di "Insegnare l'educazione sessuale inclusiva con metodi creativi: corso e-learning per insegnanti" sono stati sviluppati a partire dalla ricerca svolta dai partner durante la fase 1 e dai risultati del pilota dell'IO1, cogliendo il potenziale del lavoro svolto nelle scuole. Il corso mira a far riflettere gli insegnanti e il personale scolastico sul loro ruolo di educatori, introducendoli passo dopo passo a diversi aspetti rilevanti dell'insegnamento dell'educazione sessuale, utilizzando metodi creativi, centrati sui partecipanti e tecniche corporee come il Teatro dell'Oppresso. Il corso è stato sviluppato a partire da un approccio olistico e inclusivo all'educazione sessuale, ispirato alla pedagogia critica e attento all'intersezionalità, per dare spazio e voce a ogni esperienza, creando un modello di educazione sessuale che sia inclusivo e che consideri ogni studente indipendentemente dall'orientamento sessuale, dal genere, dalla provenienza, dalle abilità.



Il corso e-learning è stato creato dal partenariato del progetto INCLUDED e, una volta finalizzata la versione inglese, sono stati creati corsi per ogni lingua del partenariato, adattati al contesto nazionale.

### *Pilota*

In Italia, il progetto pilota del corso e-learning è stato condotto contemporaneamente al pilota del successivo risultato (IO3) per ottimizzare la partecipazione alla sperimentazione. Sono stati coinvolti insegnanti, educatori, insegnanti di sostegno, psicologi e professionisti che lavorano nelle scuole di diversi ordini del territorio.

Il corso e-learning in italiano ha avuto un totale di 38 iscritti, 23 dei quali hanno completato il corso e hanno lasciato un feedback. L'età dei partecipanti varia da 20 a 59 anni. Di questi, il 55% lavora come educatore, il 20% come insegnante di sostegno, il 10% come psicologo e il 5% come insegnante di disciplina. Anche due studenti di psicologia (10%) si sono registrati per il pilota del corso.

### *Risultati*

Tutti i partecipanti al corso e-learning sono stati soddisfatti dell'opportunità di approfondire gli argomenti trattati. In particolare, è stata apprezzata la struttura interattiva del corso, che ha permesso ai partecipanti di partecipare attivamente, di mettersi in discussione attraverso le proprie riflessioni circa i propri valori e punti di vista e il proprio ruolo di educatore e di adulto per essere consapevoli di ciò che comporta affrontare l'educazione sessuale con gli studenti. È stata apprezzata anche la struttura modulare di facile utilizzo, che ha permesso di utilizzare il corso in base ai propri impegni professionali e personali. Questi approcci si differenziano dai corsi frequentati abitualmente dai partecipanti. Per quanto riguarda i miglioramenti da apportare al corso, la maggior parte dei suggerimenti è stata quella di abbreviare alcune attività e contenuti e di approfondire l'approccio alla disabilità. Quest'ultimo feedback è probabilmente dovuto al fatto che la maggior parte dei partecipanti erano educatori e quindi coinvolti quotidianamente nella gestione di giovani con disabilità fisiche e/o intellettive e con grande bisogno di suggerimenti pratici. Tuttavia, la maggior parte dei partecipanti raccomanderebbe il corso ai colleghi (soprattutto agli insegnanti curricolari) e afferma di aver migliorato le proprie conoscenze su come realizzare un programma di educazione sessuale.

### **Risultato 3**

Il terzo risultato (IO3) del progetto INCLUDED prevedeva la creazione di una guida rivolta alle scuole con l'obiettivo di includere le famiglie nell'insegnamento dell'educazione sessuale. Questo obiettivo è fondamentale per tentare di coinvolgere congiuntamente e in ottica di continuità educativa tutti i soggetti coinvolti nell'educazione sessuale, per condividere una direzione e degli obiettivi comuni e per essere più efficaci nel raggiungerli. A tal fine, il partenariato del progetto INCLUDED ha lavorato alla creazione di una guida metodologica destinata alle scuole per poter coinvolgere i genitori e i tutori e collaborare attivamente alla realizzazione di programmi di educazione sessuale per gli



studenti, seguendo l'approccio olistico e positivo all'educazione alla sessualità ed in conformità con il quadro politico dell'OMS "Standard per l'educazione alla sessualità in Europa". Come per i risultati precedenti, l'approccio metodologico si è basato su tre metodi creativi, centrati sui partecipanti e basati su tecniche corporee: Metodologia dell'Incidente Critico, Teatro dell'Oppresso e Psicologia Orientata al Processo, oltre a un approccio intersezionale incentrato sulla diversità, in cui vengono considerati etnia, genere, abilità, classe sociale, status migratorio, orientamento sessuale, ecc.

Il coinvolgimento delle famiglie è una priorità assoluta, in quanto fortemente raccomandato dal quadro politico dell'OMS: "per lo sviluppo dei programmi formativi, è utile organizzare una qualche forma di collaborazione con i genitori, non solo per assicurarsi il necessario supporto da parte loro, ma anche per garantire un "fit" ottimale tra il ruolo informale dei genitori e quello formale delle scuole". Tuttavia, ciò che è emerso dal rapporto del 2018 "Sexuality Education in Europe and Central Asia: State of the Art and Recent Development" è che le famiglie, in quanto rappresentanti della società nella scuola, possono scoraggiare l'introduzione di adeguati programmi di educazione sessuale. Nel contesto italiano, si noti che l'educazione sessuale non è obbligatoria nelle scuole e, quando si propongono programmi, la partecipazione deve essere autorizzata dalle famiglie e cercare un'alleanza con loro è di conseguenza fondamentale.

La guida sviluppata nell'ambito dell'IO3, quindi, è particolarmente tempestiva e utile per sostenere le famiglie a svolgere un ruolo efficace nell'educazione sessuale dei loro figli e a collaborare con le scuole per ottenere risultati di apprendimento positivi in relazione all'educazione sessuale. Ciò è ancora più vero nel caso di giovani con disabilità intellettiva e/o fisica, in quanto i messaggi trasmessi e i metodi di insegnamento necessari per trasmetterli richiedono un'attenzione ancora maggiore.

Prima di sviluppare le attività della Guida, sono state condotte interviste con gli insegnanti per avere una panoramica dei timori e delle difficoltà incontrate dagli insegnanti in Italia nell'affrontare un programma di educazione sessuale con i loro studenti, sulla base della loro esperienza personale, cosa è stato facile e cosa difficile, che tipo di strumenti sarebbero utili, come coinvolgere i genitori e in quale fase della formazione, come facilitare il dialogo tra scuola e famiglia sull'educazione sessuale. Questa fase ci ha permesso di individuare le criticità e le difficoltà nel coinvolgere le famiglie in questo processo, ma anche l'importanza di coinvolgerle. Tutti gli intervistati hanno sottolineato l'importanza di fornire alle scuole consigli pratici e attività stimolanti per invogliare anche i genitori più scettici a partecipare attivamente all'educazione sessuale dei figli.

Grazie a questi suggerimenti, sono state sviluppate le attività della Guida IO3 creata dal partenariato INCLUDED. Tutte le attività sono state concepite per essere interattive e coinvolgenti, al fine di favorire il dialogo tra scuola e famiglie.

### *Pilota*

In Italia, il pilota dell'IO3 è stato condotto contemporaneamente al pilota dell'IO2, al fine di ottimizzare la partecipazione alla sperimentazione. Nel settore scolastico sono stati coinvolti 38 partecipanti,



con un'età compresa tra i 20 e i 59 anni. Il 55% dei partecipanti lavora come educatore, il 20% come insegnante di sostegno, il 10% come psicologo e il 5% come insegnante di disciplina. Anche due studenti di psicologia (10%) si sono iscritti al progetto pilota. Per quanto riguarda le famiglie, sono stati coinvolti 12 genitori, di età compresa tra 37 e 61 anni. Di questi, 6 sono genitori di bambini e/o ragazzi con qualche tipo di disabilità (disturbo dello spettro autistico, sindrome di Down e ADHD). Il progetto pilota è stato condotto online attraverso l'uso della piattaforma Zoom, per facilitare la partecipazione di tutti nel rispetto degli impegni professionali e non. Un totale di 43 partecipanti è stato coinvolto nel pilota dell'IO3.

### *Risultati*

I partecipanti al pilota si sono detti soddisfatti dell'esperienza. La maggior parte di loro ritiene di aver acquisito informazioni e strumenti che saranno utili quando parleranno di educazione sessuale con i propri studenti e raccomanderebbe la formazione ai propri colleghi. L'aspetto più apprezzato è stata la modalità di partecipazione altamente interattiva, che ha permesso ai partecipanti di discutere ed esprimere i propri pensieri o preoccupazioni in un'atmosfera di ascolto rispettoso. Questo tipo di interazione non è comune durante le attività lavorative quotidiane, sebbene sia estremamente importante. Entrare in relazione e sentirsi a proprio agio è stato molto importante ed è una modalità da valorizzare nel rapporto tra colleghi insegnanti ed educatori. Sebbene la modalità interattiva e l'atmosfera rilassata siano state molto apprezzate, le difficoltà segnalate riguardavano proprio questo aspetto: inizialmente i partecipanti trovavano difficile esprimere le proprie idee di fronte a un gruppo di persone per paura di dire qualcosa di sbagliato o di sentirsi giudicati, soprattutto quando si parlava di qualcosa di personale. Questo timore non si è realizzato perché è stata favorita un'atmosfera di ascolto attivo e di rispetto, ma i partecipanti hanno detto di non essere abituati.

Per quanto riguarda la sperimentazione con le famiglie, anche loro sono state soddisfatte dell'esperienza. Tutti i genitori concordano sul fatto che l'educazione sessuale dovrebbe far parte del programma scolastico e che gli insegnanti dovrebbero essere adeguatamente formati per fornire questo tipo di insegnamento agli studenti. Al momento, non tutte le famiglie hanno espresso totale fiducia nella conoscenza e nella competenza degli insegnanti in materia di educazione sessuale. Tutte le famiglie, invece, ritengono importante il sostegno della famiglia all'insegnamento dell'educazione sessuale a scuola, in quanto ritengono che la famiglia debba integrare e sostenere l'insegnamento. Secondo le parole di un genitore che ha partecipato al progetto pilota, il coinvolgimento delle famiglie è molto importante nell'educazione sessuale, poiché "non può essere solo una delega alle istituzioni, ma deve coinvolgere i genitori, che sono i primi educatori".

### **Raccomandazioni politiche**

Raccomandazioni politiche chiave per i governi, i responsabili politici, i sistemi scolastici e le parti interessate per migliorare l'educazione alla salute sessuale, relazionale, affettiva e riproduttiva in un contesto nazionale.

- Realizzare un programma di formazione sull'educazione sessuale coerente a livello nazionale;



- Seguire le indicazioni dell'UNESCO e creare un programma di educazione sessuale "completo", che fornisca un insegnamento trasversale e olistico sugli aspetti cognitivi, emotivi, fisici e sociali della sessualità, attraverso le materie dei programmi scolastici e non come insegnamento individuale;
- Creare un programma educativo che tenga conto degli argomenti chiave raccomandati dall'UNESCO, che sono equamente importanti, di reciproco arricchimento e destinati a essere insegnati in parallelo:
  - Salute sessuale e riproduttiva
  - Sessualità e comportamento sessuale
  - Il corpo umano e lo sviluppo
  - Competenze per la salute e il benessere
  - Violenza e sicurezza
  - Capire il genere
  - Valori, diritti, cultura e sessualità
  - Relazioni
- Supportare il sistema scolastico e le autorità scolastiche a prendere l'iniziativa di incentivare e sostenere l'educazione sessuale, creando un ambiente positivo che possa facilitare la piena attuazione dei programmi educativi;
- Creare politiche e linee guida per sostenere il valore istituzionale dell'insegnamento dell'educazione sessuale, al fine di sottolineare che l'attuazione dell'ESC è una questione di politica istituzionale, piuttosto che una scelta personale degli insegnanti;
- Formare gli insegnanti sulle conoscenze e le competenze specifiche necessarie per insegnare in modo efficace e accurato l'educazione sessuale, sia in termini di contenuti (concetti chiave dell'UNESCO) che di metodologia per creare un ambiente sicuro e positivo per gli studenti, fornendo esempi pratici e attività da realizzare con gli studenti;
- Creare corsi di formazione specifici per gli insegnanti sull'educazione sessuale per le persone con disabilità fisiche e/o intellettive. Oltre alla formazione generale, si dovrebbero creare corsi personalizzati in base alle esigenze, alle difficoltà e ai punti di forza del singolo individuo;
- Promuovere l'uso di metodi creativi e tecniche corporee, centrati sul partecipante, come il teatro o le attività interattive, per tenere corsi di educazione sessuale, poiché questi metodi si sono dimostrati efficaci nel coinvolgere gli studenti e nel facilitare il dialogo su argomenti delicati;
- Fornire solo informazioni e conoscenze provenienti da fonti affidabili ed evidence-based;



- Coinvolgere esperti, operatori sanitari e altro personale non docente nella creazione, nello sviluppo, nell'adattamento e nella consegna del programma di formazione sull'educazione sessuale;
- Coinvolgere attivamente gli studenti nella creazione di un programma di educazione sessuale attraverso il consiglio scolastico e gruppi di rappresentanti di classe degli studenti per raccogliere input su bisogni e interessi reali degli studenti in materia di educazione sessuale;
- Coinvolgere attivamente i genitori e creare un sostegno reciproco tra insegnanti e famiglie nell'attuazione di un processo di insegnamento/apprendimento guidato e strutturato sull'educazione sessuale. È importante sottolineare la preoccupazione primaria di promuovere la sicurezza e il benessere dei bambini e dei giovani, condivisa sia dalle scuole che dai genitori/caregiver;
- Per superare le resistenze percepite o previste nei confronti dell'ESC, dovute a malintesi sulla natura, lo scopo e gli effetti dell'educazione alla sessualità, utilizzare prove che dimostrino le esigenze dei giovani nel contesto nazionale/locale e i quadri internazionali, regionali e locali esistenti e gli accordi internazionali che sostengono l'ESC.

### Conclusioni

In conclusione, il progetto INCLUDED si è rivelato di notevole rilevanza e valore per la creazione e l'attuazione di programmi di educazione sessuale completi e inclusivi per gli studenti e per lo sviluppo di materiali didattici e programmi di formazione innovativi, interattivi e incentrati sui partecipanti per insegnanti, educatori e genitori, attraverso l'uso di metodi creativi.

Il progetto INCLUDED è stato un successo e gli obiettivi prefissati sono stati raggiunti.

Questi obiettivi erano:

- Sostenere gli **studenti** delle scuole secondarie, compresi quelli con disabilità intellettiva, a raggiungere efficacemente i principali obiettivi di apprendimento in materia di educazione sessuale (secondo gli standard dell'OMS), quali: rendere gli studenti capaci di fare scelte informate basate sulla comprensione e sull'agire in modo responsabile verso se stessi e il proprio partner; essere in grado di maturare come essere sessuale, nel senso di imparare a esprimere sentimenti e bisogni, a sperimentare la sessualità in modo piacevole; aver acquisito informazioni appropriate sugli aspetti fisici, cognitivi, sociali, emotivi e culturali della sessualità, sulla contraccezione, sulla prevenzione delle IST e dell'HIV e sulla violenza sessuale; essere in grado di costruire relazioni (sessuali) in cui ci sia comprensione reciproca e rispetto per i bisogni e i confini dell'altro e avere relazioni improntate alla parità, ecc.
- Sostenere gli **insegnanti** e il **personale scolastico di supporto** affinché siano in grado di utilizzare gli attuali percorsi di educazione sessuale proposti per i loro studenti attraverso metodi creativi, migliorando le loro capacità di facilitazione per promuovere il coinvolgimento degli studenti, la pratica riflessiva, il pensiero critico e l'acquisizione di competenze.





- Sostenere i **genitori** a svolgere un ruolo efficace nell'educazione sessuale dei loro figli con disabilità intellettiva e a collaborare con le scuole per ottenere risultati di apprendimento positivi in relazione all'educazione sessuale.
- Sviluppare **risorse educative aperte** che possano contribuire al benessere e all'inclusione sociale di gruppi sociali vulnerabili.

L'esperienza dei progetti pilota con i gruppi target di studenti, insegnanti e famiglie ha sottolineato l'urgenza e l'importanza di strutturare l'insegnamento dell'educazione sessuale nel contesto nazionale, dove attualmente non esistono programmi curriculari per tale insegnamento. Il progetto INCLUDED ha contribuito ad aumentare il benessere e la salute degli studenti, compresi quelli con disabilità fisiche e/o intellettive; a sostenere gli insegnanti nell'educazione attraverso pratiche inclusive, rispettose e reattive; a creare un dialogo fondamentale tra la scuola e i genitori, affinché possano svolgere un ruolo efficace nell'educazione sessuale dei loro figli. Con il presente ed ultimo contributo del progetto, sono stati formulati suggerimenti e raccomandazioni che possono promuovere l'istituzionalizzazione dell'educazione sessuale nelle scuole. Grazie al coinvolgimento di associazioni, studenti, insegnanti, educatori, scuole, personale scolastico e stakeholder, il progetto INCLUDED ha contribuito ad aumentare la consapevolezza su questi temi ed è in questa direzione che le istituzioni politiche dovrebbero dirigere la loro attenzione per garantire l'educazione sessuale a tutti gli studenti italiani.

L'esperienza di successo del progetto INCLUDED dimostra che insegnare l'educazione sessuale nelle scuole è possibile e deve prevedere la partecipazione attiva di tutti gli attori coinvolti: in primo luogo gli studenti, che devono sentirsi liberi di esprimere i propri bisogni, poi gli insegnanti e le famiglie, che devono costruire un sistema di sostegno reciproco che favorisca la continuità educativa. L'educazione sessuale è un'esigenza che gli studenti sentono come urgente, un dovere che gli insegnanti sono disposti ad assolvere e un impegno che le famiglie sentono di poter condividere con la scuola e con gli esperti in materia.

## Spain

### Introduction – National Context

According to the research conducted by La Xixa and focusing on sex education within the Spanish national context, at the legislative level, Spain appears to not fully comply with UNESCO and WHO standards. In fact, sex education is not compulsory, nor is part of the curriculum in all educational establishments. Apart from a few teaching hours introduced as part of the biology class in secondary schools, everything else related to sex education is left to the discretion and/or dependent on the schools. Some schools offer sex education to their students, but usually the programme involves talks, one-off workshops, or classes given by professionals from outside the schools.

A study conducted in 2011 (*Álvarez et al. 2011*) revealed that approximately half of preschool, primary and secondary school teachers have not addressed sex education during their professional



practice. In addition, 50% of the teachers interviewed stated that sex education is not considered a priority in their schools and 60% added that they do not have sufficient resources to carry it out and that textbooks still maintain the androcentric model. Finally, only 0.5% of the teachers surveyed acknowledged having postgraduate training in sex education.

In practice, sex education continues to be a pending subject in the Spanish education system. With some exceptions, when sex education is tackled during biology classes, the focus is given to health promotion. The topics most commonly discussed are contraceptive methods, sexually transmitted infections, anatomy, sexual health, among other contents, with an approach that prioritises the biological and risk prevention model, and which does not incorporate the view of a comprehensive and inclusive sexual education (*"La salud afectivo sexual de la juventud en España" s. f. Revista de estudio de Juventud 2019*).

As mentioned previously, sex education is often outsourced to professionals who are external to the school environment. When not delegated to external entities, sex education is usually assigned to biology teachers, who are not required to have any preparation other than that related to their subject, which means they are not obliged to have taken part in a specific training dedicated to sex education. Moreover, the use of informal or alternative methodologies, as well as the use of specific outreach materials, are elements that are left to the discretion of teachers, who often encounter difficulties in terms of training and in finding suitable methodological resources, as well as reliable tools and sources to deal with sex education in the classroom (*Montes Antúnez, 2014*).

In the National Survey on Sexuality and Contraception among Spanish youngsters (16-25 years old), published in September 2019 by the Spanish Society of Contraception (SEC), when asked the question "From whom have you received information on sexuality?" respondents indicated internet (47.8%) and friends (45.5%) as the main sources, leaving teachers (28%), mothers (23.1%) and fathers (12.4%) far behind. (*Encuesta nacional sobre sexualidad y anticoncepción entre los jóvenes españoles (16-25 años), s. F., 2019*)

Finally, there is serious opposition from right-wing parties to the teaching of sex education in schools, appealing to ideological, religious and other issues (*Menárguez, Gonzales, 2021*).

## Intellectual Output 1

### Desk research

Although it does not explicitly mention sex education, the first Spanish law that , begins to introduce a less sexist and more integral and holistic vision of education is the Socialist LOGSE of 1990 (*Diez Prieto, 2018, pp 6*). However, its contribution is minimal and the references to sexuality and gender end with the prologue:





*"Finally, education makes it possible to make progress in the fight against discrimination and inequality, whether they are based on birth, race, sex, religion or opinion, whether they have a family or social origin, whether they are traditionally rooted or whether they are constantly emerging as a result of the dynamics of society.*

(...)

*These will be the aims that will guide the Spanish education system, in accordance with the Preliminary Title of this law, and within the scope of these aims, education can and must become a decisive element in overcoming social stereotypes assimilated to gender differentiation, starting with the very construction and use of language."*

*(BOE-A-1990-24172 Ley Orgánica 1/1990, de 3 de octubre, de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo., s. f.)*

In 2006, the LOE (*BOE-A-2006-7899 Ley Orgánica 2/2006, de 3 de mayo, de Educación., s. f.<sup>8)</sup>*) introduced some advances in this area. The text of the law showed greater concern for the development of students' affectivity and left the way open for the various autonomous communities to legislate in this respect. The introduction of the new subject of Education for Citizenship and Human Rights facilitated the inclusion of such content in the school curriculum. However, the development of teaching units related to affective-sexual education raised a great deal of controversy. (*Díez Prieto, 2018, pp 7*)

The following law, promoted by a conservative party (*BOE-A-2013-12886 Ley Orgánica 8/2013, de 9 de diciembre, para la mejora de la calidad educativa s.f.*) eliminated any reference to "sexual-affective education", although if, on the other hand, introduced some relevant content such as defending the values associated with gender equality, preventing gender-based violence and preventing the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse. (*Díez Prieto, 2018, pp 7*)

In 2020, the LOMLOE (*BOE-A-2020-17264 Ley Orgánica 3/2020, de 29 de diciembre, por la que se modifica la Ley Orgánica 2/2006, de 3 de mayo, de Educación., s. f.<sup>1)</sup>*) was approved with clear recognition of gender equality, prevention of gender-based violence and respect for sexual-affective diversity among its basic principles. Even if this law was interpreted as an important step forward in the implementation of an integral and respectful sex education in the education system, it has been also strongly criticised because of the shyness with which it tries to introduce a change. In fact, the LOMLOE only provides some guidelines and recommendations about sex education, but it does not make it compulsory or integrated into the educational curriculum. Because of this, the indications about sex education included in this new law have been put into practice only from a few schools (*«¿Que es la LOMLOE?», 2021*).

The Organic Law 2/2010 on sexual and reproductive health and the voluntary interruption of pregnancy (*BOE-A-2010-3514 Ley Orgánica 2/2010, de 3 de marzo, de salud sexual y reproductiva*



*y de la interrupción voluntaria del embarazo.*, s. f.) states that the public authorities, shall guarantee information and affective, sexual and reproductive education in the formal contents of the educational system. However, in the Spanish system, the autonomous communities are the ones responsible for education; this situation makes it difficult to have a national policy regarding sex education in schools (Fernández, 2022, “La (falta de) educación sexual en España.” *The Conversation*).

Finally, these laws place an almost exclusive emphasis on sexual health, thereby contributing to a genitalised, biological, risk-focused, and preventionist view of sexuality.

The legislation described above seems to not take into account nor reflect the importance that a comprehensive sex education has for youngsters (Ávila, 2022, “Es hora de hablar de la Educación Sexual en España.” *every Noticias LGBT*), nor does it seem to be coherent with the actions undertaken by executive bodies such as the General Directorate for Sexual Diversity and LGBTI Rights or the Secretary of State for Equality and against Gender Violence to prevent and address sexual aggressions and gender-based discrimination and violence (Millán, 2022, “La larga lucha contra la violencia de género en España.” *Amnesty International España*).

A study by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) carried out in 2019 places Spain as the eleventh European country with the most progressive legislation in favour of LGBTI rights (*Rainbow Europe Map and Index - ILGA-Europe, 2017*). A result that nevertheless clashes with the results in 2018, when Spain ranked sixth (*Rainbow Europe Map and Index - ILGA-Europe, 2018*<sup>18</sup>). In this regard, the most significant Spanish legislative tool is provided by Article 14 of the Spanish Constitution, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of any personal or social condition or circumstance, including sexual orientation and gender identity.

*"Spaniards are equal before the law, and no discrimination may prevail on the grounds of birth, race, sex, religion, opinion or any other personal or social condition or circumstance."*

(*BOE-A-1978-31229 Constitución Española.*, s. f.)

Spain has also been a pioneer in several legal initiatives, becoming the third country to approve same-sex marriage and the first to legalise single-parent adoption (Martín Sánchez, M., 2016). With regard to the rights of the transgender community, Spain passed the Gender Identity Law in 2007, which allows the change of name and sex in the Civil Registry (*BOE-A-2007-5585 Ley 3/2007, de 15 de marzo, reguladora de la rectificación registral de la mención relativa al sexo de las personas.*, s. f). When it comes to hate crimes, the Spanish Penal Code considers it an aggravating circumstance when the crime is committed because of the sexual orientation or gender identity of the victim. The same legislation expressly prohibits discrimination at work (Article 314) and in access to public or private services (Articles 511 and 512) on the grounds of sex or sexual orientation. It also prohibits associations that directly or indirectly foster, promote or incite hatred, hostility, discrimination or violence against persons on the basis of their sexual orientation and criminalises



hate speech on this ground. (*BOE-A-1995-25444 Ley Orgánica 10/1995, de 23 de noviembre, del Código Penal., s. f.*)

Regarding consent, sexual aggression, and violations, in 2022 the law called “Only yes it’s yes” has been approved. This law recognises sexual aggression and all conduct that violate sexual freedom without the consent of the other person. (*BOE-A-2022-14630 Ley Orgánica 10/2022, de 6 de septiembre, de garantía integral de la libertad sexual., s. f.*) The law recognises that there is consent “when it has been freely expressed by acts which, having regard to the circumstances, clearly express the will of the person”. In other words, “Yes” is consent. Saying or doing nothing is not consent. (*Sanchis, 2022*)

The 28<sup>th</sup> of February 2023 the so-called “Trans-Law”, has been definitively approved. (*BOE-A-2023-5366 Ley 4/2023, de 28 de febrero, para la igualdad real y efectiva de las personas trans y para la garantía de los derechos de las personas LGTBI., s. f*)

Previously, for a change of gender identity registration, requirements such as “hormone treatment for two years, diagnosis of gender dysphoria and medical reports” were necessary.

This new law that aims to change this picture, includes:

- Sex change without evidence or medical reports.
- Hormone treatment will no longer be a requirement to apply for a sex change, nor will it be compulsory once it has been performed.
- Lesbian, bisexual, trans people, and single women will be able to access assisted human reproduction techniques.
- Prohibition of conversion, version or counter-conditioning therapies aimed at modifying the sexual orientation or identity of LGTBI persons.
- There is a system of infractions and sanctions to protect LGTBI people against discrimination or violence, whether in the workplace, in sport or leisure.
- It also legislates for the rights of intersex people, prohibiting non-essential surgeries on intersex children under the age of 12 and extending to one year the period for determining the sex on registration.

The law also set down the inclusion in the basic curriculum of knowledge and respect for sexual, gender and family diversity as an objective at all educational stages, as well as training in the subject for all teachers. Sexual and reproductive education and STI prevention programmes will be promoted, with special consideration for HIV. (*RTVE.es, “Ley Trans: claves, detalles y derechos con la nueva normativa”. 2023*)

When it comes to people with intellectual, cognitive and/or functional diversity, the issue of sex education is almost forgotten both in politics and public opinion (*Lopez Sanchez, 2006*)., so much



so that the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2018 denounced that the education system in Spain was segregating people with disabilities (*Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2018*). In this educational vacuum, the needs of these individuals for affective and sexual intimacy are particularly neglected, and although some progress has been made in other aspects; issues related to sexuality are often ignored and even rejected by both families and institutions (*Torrigo, 2016*).

According to the conclusions of the conference on "Disability and intersectional Discrimination" organised by the Spanish Confederation of People with Physical and Organic Disabilities (COCEMFE) having a dissident sexual orientation or gender identity and being a person with a disability is a highly invisible political and economic spheres. For this reason, COCEMFE demanded an intersectional approach in public policies. (*Valencia, 2022*)

### **Piloting**

"Inclusive sex-ed through creative methods" is a handbook co-created by the partners, based on the national context analysis and interviews with school authorities, teachers, parents and pupils. The handbook includes a curricular programme for students and schools, full of dynamic, creative, interactive activities, theoretical contents, tips and tricks for the facilitators and recommendations on how to introduce it into the school curriculum.

The handbook is divided in four main chapters, each one dedicated to a different aspect of sexuality:

1. Body, anatomy and reproduction;
2. Gender;
3. Sexuality and Sex;
4. Consent.

For the creation of this tool, the consortium developed a proposal for a learning path that addresses sex education through non-formal, participatory, and creative activities.

In January 2022, La Xixa Teatre tested the activities created within the framework of the INCLUDED project through a pilot workshop carried out at the Escola de les Aigües in Mataró (Barcelona), a special education institution for students with cognitive and intellectual diversity. Altogether, 14 students with special needs between 18 and 20 supported by 3 teachers and educators, participated in the proposed activities. The workshop lasted a total of 6 hours and was divided in 4 sessions, each one dedicated to one of modules/topics of IO1.

The first session, that took place on the 24th of January 2022 was aimed to foster teambuilding and trust between participants, but also to address topics related to Body and Anatomy. The main activity carried out in this session was called "*Drawing our bodies*", in which participants were asked to draw



the body contour of each person of the group one by one on a big piece of paper. In groups, they were then asked to create the identity of their characters, choosing a name, gender/s, age, personality, sexual behaviour, and dressing them up with some clothes and accessories we brought (including different types of underwear). The activity turned out to be very useful and fruitful in facilitating the expression of curiosity and ideas of the participants that transferred on their characters a wide range of habits related to sexual orientation, gender identification and expression, and social and sentimental relationships. Through questions on the characters, the facilitators could foster the dialogue among participants and address many relevant topics such as gender, consent, sex-affective relationships, STI, and contraception.

On the following day, La Xixa team came back to facilitate a session on gender. The main aim of the session was to think and share opinions about gender and relationships, to identify the prejudices connected to gender and sexual orientation, and to reflect and question the social pressure connected to it. We carried out two main activities:

1. *"Hello NO"*: The participants, divided in two groups according to the pronoun they wished to be called with, discussed a situation represented through a short theatre scene in which one person refusing to have sexual intercourse with their partner had to face the other person's insistence. The separation by gender helped identifying and tackling gender-based stereotypes. During this activity an enormous amount of complementary topics were also discussed such as consent, pornography, sexual desire, excitement, masturbation etc.
2. *"Opinion Line"*: Separating the room in two halves, one for the "no" and the other for the "yes", participants were invited to react to a set of statements by moving in the space in accordance to their grade of agreement. Some of the proposed statements were: *"Women have less sexual desire than men"*, *"Guys masturbate more than girls"* *"Girls and boys are the same"*. Per each statement, a space for debate was created so that participants could express their opinions and feelings around the topics presented. They were also invited to move in case they changed their opinion during the discussion.

The following session was carried out on the 27th of January 2022 and focused on Sex and Sexuality. The main activity was called *"Touch and find out"* during which participants were guided through an introspective journey which connected them with the sensation of pleasure. The activity was used to share opinions and feelings about sexual desire, intimacy, the differences between public and private spaces and public and private behaviours.

In the last session, on the 30th of January 2022, we addressed the topic of Consent. The session started with an activity called *"Yes and No"* during which participants were invited to work on their own and others' limits and boundaries.

In the following activity, the team acted in three theatrical scenes about (lack of) consent. Each scene was followed by a forum (debate) and then the participants were divided into three groups, each one



working on the alternative solutions of the conflictive scene represented previously. This activity was very useful and gave the possibility to deeply discuss consent and respectful relationships, addressing them through the experience of imaginary characters.

### *Results*

The workshop was very successful and inspiring. All participants were engaged during the entire duration of the workshop and appeared to enjoy the activities and the discussions. They particularly enjoyed being able to openly talk about sex and genders, even if it meant getting out of their comfort zone. At the beginning most of them felt embarrassed and shy, but afterwards they could open up and learn many things, for instance, the importance to communicate one's sexual desires to their partner, the importance of consent and the possibility to change opinion during an intimate encounter, and to give the space that each one needs to express their feelings. Participants also enjoyed the fact that intimate and delicate topics were addressed through games, theatre exercises and acting; the methodologies used helped them achieve amazing progress in the openness to share their thoughts and opinions in front of the class. Many students stated that they would suggest the workshop to their friends.

The teachers and school staff that attended the sessions supported the students and the facilitation team, intermediating in some cases with those students who encountered more difficulties in verbal communication. After the workshop teachers assessed the content and methodologies applied as very useful to tackle such difficult topics. They felt the need to create such space in the school and to feel supported by other professionals on topics that resulted in being hard to discuss in class. They could reflect on the limits and freedoms they have as educators and their own intrinsic contradictions and dilemmas that arise all the time, especially when thinking about families' opinions on sex education. Teachers felt that by participating in the workshop they learned activities and acquired competences that will make them feel more comfortable when delivering sex education classes. They said they would suggest the workshop to their colleagues.

The biggest challenge of the workshop was to break the taboos around sex and sexuality. The creation of a respectful and positive environment in which everyone could feel safe to share thoughts and emotions and to listen and learn those of the other people was fundamental to do so.

During the first session, the facilitation team, supported by the teachers, dedicated time to work on team building (as the participants came from different classes) and on trust, creating a space where everyone could feel safe. The group set its own rules, participants were asked with which pronoun they wanted to be addressed to and were told that each one of them could decide until what point they felt able and/or wanted to participate in the activities proposed. Once the participants felt safe





to express themselves, they asked a lot of questions on the topics presented. It was also really important to give attention and accompany students without judgement when they reacted to something that was taking them out of their comfort zone.

### Intellectual Output 2

“Teaching inclusive sex-ed through creative methods” is a 5-hour e-course for teachers that aims to support teachers and schools' staff to be able to apply innovative practices in sexual education for their students through creative methods. The platform aims in particular to help teachers to be aware of and reflect on their cultural context and personal beliefs in order to deepen their relationship with students and teaching and enabling them to better fulfil their role as sexuality educators. The learning path is structured in 5 sections, linked to three different methodologies of introspection and analysis: the methodology of the critical incident, internal work, and theatre techniques. Among the materials available to teachers on the platform you can find interactive video-lessons, self-guided learning exercises, video-testimonies, additional learning material, and a self-evaluation questionnaire.

For the implementation of the e-course, La Xixa collaborated with a secondary school named INS Vallbona d’Anoia.

During an online session held on the 9th of January 2023, La Xixa presented the contents, structure, methodologies and objectives of the online training to 7 teachers.

On the 26th of January 2023, once the Spanish version of the platform was ready, a new session was held to support the teachers in the registration process and to navigate the different modules. A total of 9 teachers from INS Vallbona d’Anoia registered and up to now, 3 of them have already completed the course. All of them were asked to provide an evaluation on the platform, content and methodologies, which are very positive. The platform was designed to be flexible, offering a way to follow the lessons at any time and the possibility to interrupt and pick up where one left off. This aspect was much appreciated and allowed even the busiest people to participate in the course. The teachers found the course effective in stimulating reflection on the importance of sex education in schools and in helping to identify the internal processes triggered by these topics when occupying the role of teacher. The only defect identified seems to be that of not being able to share in a group the reflections gained from the exercises.

100% of those who completed the forms confirmed that they improved their knowledge of how to teach sex education lessons. Likewise, all participants stated that they were able, to do something at school to implement sex education programmes after the course.

### Intellectual Output 3

“Including the family in inclusive sex-ed” is a guide for schools aimed to provide methods, contents, and tools to:

- Support parents to play an effective role in the sexual education of their children and to partner with schools.



- Support schools with easy-to-apply, easy-to-access guidance to reach out and involve families in sexual education.
- Develop open educational resources that can contribute to the well-being and social inclusion of vulnerable societal groups.

The content of the guide and activities provided are based on Universal Design for Learning methodology and Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy (Pedagogical approach) and on three creative-based, participant centred, embodied methods: Critical Incident Methodology, Theatre of the Oppressed and Process Oriented Psychology (Methodological approach).

In order to identify the needs of the Catalan secondary education sector, La Xixa interviewed 9 teachers working at the INS Vallbona d'Anoia. Of these, 5 said that they had never participated in sex education trainings for teachers, 1 had attended a conference on the inclusion of the gender perspective in education in which sexuality issues were also touched upon, and 3 –all biology teachers– had taken part in specific trainings on teaching sex education years before, which they recalled as being very much related to the biological/health field. In the interviews, the teachers emphasised the urgency for the educational system to provide students with structured and continuous pathways of integral sex education, which should not only be entrusted to the sporadic intervention of external professionals or the goodwill of teachers and tutors. The interviewees emphasised the importance of being able to complement the contents offered in the framework of biology, anatomy, disease prevention, and sexual safety already normally taught in many schools with a deeper and comprehensive approach linked to the emotional and relational health of young people and connected to their real needs and curiosity. Many pointed out that tackling sexuality issues in the classroom is difficult and risky, not only because of the lack of preparation on the subject by school staff and the lack of clear and favourable legislation, but also because of the difficulty in finding effective tools, resources and exercises to make sex education more dynamic and less formal. All the teachers interviewed agreed that families are essential allies in guaranteeing quality sex education for pupils, stressing, however, that it is often difficult for a school to engage family members in the educational life of students, especially on topics such as sex education.

On the basis of the information collected through the interviews carried out both in Spain and in the rest of the partner countries, the consortium created a learning path and set of activities divided in four modules: 1. Team building and body activation; 2. Internal work; 3. Sex ed key concepts; 4. Dialogue with families. At the local level, La Xixa adapted the programme to the specific needs of the context.

The pilot workshop was held at INS Vallbona d'Anoia, applying theatre and creative methods to generate dialogue between schools, pupils, and families on sex education. The objective was to provide teachers with tools and creative resources to foster integral sex education and to create a space for dialogue within the school community (school-students-families) through innovative methodologies.





The training combined online and face-to-face sessions and was carried out between the 9th and the 26th of January 2023. It included:

- 9th of January 2023: One-hour online session with teachers to present the project, introduce the e-course and the face-to-face training. This session was used to get to know each other and foster a space of dialogue and open learning.
- 12th of January 2023: Three-hour face-to-face session with teachers in which theatrical activities were carried out to recognise and value diversity, to rediscover and reconnect with the profound motivation that drove participants towards their profession and to investigate and value the role of teachers in sex education, together with the fears and difficulties that it triggers.
- 19th of January 2023: Three-hour face-to-face session in which teachers and students collaborated in the creation of a forum theatre performance on topics related to sex education.
- 20th of January: Two-hour face-to-face session in which together, teachers and students presented the theatre play they had created in front of an audience of pupils, school staff and family members. Thanks to the forum theatre technique, which allows the audience to intervene in the scene, it was possible to generate a fruitful dialogue and reflection between the students, their families and the teachers in the audience on the issues presented on stage (gender roles, consent, and homophobia).
- 26th of January 2023: One-hour online session with teachers in which the participants reflected on their learnings and assessed the quality of the workshop's structure, content and methodology.
- 26th of January 2023: One-hour online session with families, in which the debate started during the forum theatre was deepened, the need to introduce integral sex education in schools was reflected upon, and the importance of dialogue and the alliance between school institutions and families was discussed.

The training directly involved a total of 8 teachers, 7 students, and 10 family members. Aside from these participants, on the day of the performance, 4 other teachers and 17 pupils from the school were present in the audience and participated in the discussion.

At the end of the training, the participants gave their feedback via evaluation forms. The pilot workshop was a great success. All participating teachers agreed that they had acquired useful information and tools to be able to talk about sex education with their pupils in the classroom. The activities conducted helped them “normalise” sexual topics and motivated them to discuss them in class. The teachers discovered participatory activities and fun exercises with which it is possible to value and protect the diversity of experiences and sensitivities while breaking the taboo that sees sexuality as something forbidden or dangerous.



The training seems to have been equally effective in providing opportunities and tools to generate dialogue with families, an element that reaffirms itself as essential to ensuring a quality sex ed for students. According to the teachers' feedback, they greatly appreciated the methodologies and tools applied during the training, arguing that theatre should be practised more in schools to improve teacher-pupil-family communication and deal creatively with often difficult topics such as sexuality. Some teachers stated that they would like to introduce the activities they learned in their lessons. Some teachers also reported that they would have liked to have had more hours to be able to explore more topics.

Forum theatre demonstrated to be an excellent tool for dealing with topics related to sex education with the families. Those who took part in the presentation and in the follow-up session greatly appreciated the proposal. They acknowledged the potential of the methodologies used and stated that their participation in the event made them reflect and partly changed their perspective on the importance of sex education in schools. This led them to recognise the school's commitment to sex education topics, the supportive and accompanying role that families should have at home, and the difficulty of schools in establishing a fruitful and organic dialogue with students' families regarding sexuality.

### Policy Recommendations

- Implement a compulsory and integrated sex education curriculum in all schools, which should not only follow a biological and risk prevention model, but instead incorporate a comprehensive, sexual-affective, and inclusive education.
- Strengthen legislation on integral sex education in schools and the alliance between public institutions and schools.
- Make comprehensive and inclusive sex education training for teachers and school staff mandatory.
- Guarantee support and dedicated resources for the implementation of sex education. Educational institutions and public administration should back teachers and educators who offer integral sex education to students.
- Introduce integral and inclusive sex education from the earliest years of school, producing and adapting the content to the different ages, stages of development, and sensibilities of the students.
- Promote the production and availability of materials, texts, sources, and training programmes on comprehensive sex education for different age groups.
- Encourage and facilitate the involvement of parents and families in sex education programmes, through their active participation in sex education training and while creating space of dialogue for families and school staff.



- Promote the use of creative-based, participant-centred, and embodied methods, such as theatre or interactive activities, to deliver sex education courses, as these methods have proven to be effective in engaging students and facilitating dialogue on sensitive topics.
- Develop and implement strategies to combat stigma and discrimination based on gender identity, sexual orientation, race, and intellectual, cognitive and/or functional diversity, within schools and communities, to create a safe and inclusive environment for all students.
- Give visibility to the specific needs of people with intellectual, cognitive and/or functional diversity, and dissident sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Strengthen and create more structured and frequent sex education courses for people with intellectual, cognitive and/or functional diversity, implementing their right to a quality education.
- Increase the preparation of teachers and school staff on multiculturalism, so that they are able to deal with and include students and families from other cultures and with other beliefs or traditions, enhancing the added value of diversity in the school community, but also ensuring an integral and respectful education for everyone.
- Monitor and assess the effectiveness of sex education programmes regularly, through the use of surveys and feedback from students, parents, and teachers, to ensure they are meeting the needs of students and addressing the concerns of all stakeholders.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the INCLUDED project proved to be of great value and importance. There is a strong need in schools to foresee and implement comprehensive and inclusive sex education programmes, which offer structured paths and not occasional interventions, which take place in synergy and complementarity with the entire educating community and with the support of the institutions, and which do not rely solely on the good will and scarce resources of the most sensible teachers.

Students, whether children or young people, and regardless of their physical, cultural or social condition, have the right and need to receive information, accompaniment and support from adults who should guide them towards healthy, inclusive and respectful relational and sexual practices. It is not through taboos and prohibitions that society can protect the present and future of young people, but by guaranteeing them the opportunity to learn and to express themselves.

In order to respond to this call and perform this arduous task, it is necessary that the reference figures, first of all, receive sex education. It is fundamental that they acquire familiarity with the subject, new tools to approach it in a dynamic and innovative manner, that they integrate updated concepts, words, and content. But above all, it takes adults to learn to listen to themselves, to confront their own taboos and prejudices, their own sorrows and traumas, in order to understand and accompany the youngest towards healthier relationships and a fairer society.



In this sense, the INCLUDED project demonstrated the effectiveness of creative and theatrical methodologies to introduce integral sex education in groups of young people as well as families and school staff. To the former, the project offered dynamic and non-formal exercises and practices to express and investigate their curiosities and knowledge, generating a constructive, equal, light-hearted, and judgement-free listening space in which the students themselves were the protagonists. INCLUDED also proposed innovative resources and tools for teachers to provide sex and relational education in the classroom and build a fruitful dialogue with students' families.

Theatre and creativity ultimately can and must be great allies to deepen and improve sex education in schools and to promote, establish and maintain the essential dialogue among students, schools and families.

## Greece

### Introduction – National Context

According to Greece's primary research, human/sexual rights, diversity issues, gender identities, sexual orientation, gender issues, and sexuality, remain stigmatised subjects in Greek schools. Hence, there is not a specific course on sexual education in special and/or inclusive education. Topics like these are taught as special/separate thematic units in an interdisciplinary approach within other subjects or courses (social skills, communication skills, emotional skills...) by teachers, psychologists, social workers, etc. The module's length depends on the needs of every teacher's class or group of students as well as on their relative programme's design. Sexual education, therefore, is not a compulsory subject for secondary general, special, or vocational education, and it is not included as a distinct subject in the national, formal curriculum. The ages of the students who attend sex-ed programmes in the two different types of secondary special and inclusive education schools are 12 to 24 years of age. The only formal sexual education introduced by the Greek Ministry of Education in 2021 is a part of the thematic unit "Well-being". It is a workshop programme for junior high school students (13-16 years old), but again it will be taught only if the teacher board chooses to be relevant to the schools' needs and for one teaching hour per week for up to 7 weeks.

For example, anatomy is taught in biology, and gender issues or relationships are taught in social sciences, art education, literature, or through after-school extracurricular activities. At the beginning of every school year, the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs issues a list of professionals, primarily midwives, gynaecologists, and health care professionals, that are allowed to offer short edifying meetings (2 teaching hours) for students. In addition, some institutions provide informative and intervention opportunities in collaboration with schools. For students to attend these meetings, written parental consent must be submitted to the school before the meeting. These meetings focus mainly on anatomy, disease prevention and contraception, gender issues, and sexuality. Overall, there is no national and formal programme in the Greek education system.



## Intellectual Output 1

As mentioned above, IO1 includes a curricular training programme for students, a handbook for schools, and recommendations on how to introduce it into the school curriculum. The programme is based on the national context and interviews with school authorities, teachers, parents, and students that identified their needs. Finally, a pilot implementation took place with students.

### *Desk research*

Since last September, the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, with a law that was brought to the Parliament for voting on June 2020 (N4692 / 2020)<sup>1</sup> concerning the reform of public schools, has already included skill workshops that aim to cultivate the student's life skills, soft skills, and technology skills in the compulsory schedule of kindergartens, primary and secondary schools. The action included 218 schools in the first pilot phase, while it also scheduled a second one, to gradually spread to all the country's schools. In these workshops, in the thematic cycle "Well-being", sex education is taught, while the thematic cycle "Social empathy and responsibility" includes the strengthening of values such as mutual respect, respect for diversity, and protection of human rights (Trigka, 2021). The new sex education program will be implemented at all levels of education, including kindergarten, primary, and secondary schools, according to the aforementioned law (N4692/2020). Until the first pilot of the new sex education program, which was implemented during the school year of 2020-2021, the issue was usually left to a few progressive teachers and professors who decided to tackle the issue of sexual life, e.g., in the framework of the Health Education program, which took place after the end of the teaching schedule and was optional for students.

According to data that has been retrieved from the Institute of Mental and Sexual Health, adolescents in Greece have their friends as their primary source of information regarding sex (52%) because they feel more comfortable discussing such issues with them and asking relevant questions. The internet is the second most popular source of information for children and adolescents (23%). Parents and schools are also sources of information regarding sex, but in very low percentages (14% and 11%) (Liaka, 2010).

In 2021, the general public, especially youth, was shocked by the Greek version of the "Me Too" movement, which concerned the publication of cases of sexual abuse in Greece by survivors. It started in the winter of 2020 after the public narration by athlete Sofia Bekatorou of the sexual assault she endured many years ago (1998). She named the aggressor was a member of the Hellenic Sailing Federation (Tshivola, 2021). Bekatorou's revelations were accompanied by a wave of applause and support that manifested itself mainly through social networks and the media. After these revelations, similar revelations were made public by other professional athletes, university students, journalists, politicians, and finally, actors. A culmination of the complaints led to the arrest of the former artistic director of the National Theater, Dimitris Lignadis, after the announcement of complaints against the actor and director for rape and pederasty.

Another topic is the rights of LGBTQ+ people in Greece. In April 2021, the Prime Minister created a special commission to investigate the state of the LGBTQ+ community in Greece and propose policy



reforms that will bring equal rights and opportunities for the people. The commission finalised its work in June 2021. Some of the most important topics that have been debated a lot in the public sphere are same-sex marriage recognition (for the moment, only civil unions are recognised in Greece) and adoption rights. During the Athens Pride 2021 (held in September 2021), the debate was sparked once more. Currently, no political initiatives are undertaken regarding this commission's results.

Nowadays, the taboo/stigma subjects in Greek education and Greek society generally are:

1. **Sex:** The new law that introduces sex education at schools has met a lot of negative reactions from parents, some members of the church, and conservatives.
2. **Mental Health:** Mental health issues have been taboo in Greece for years. However, the ten-year socio-economic crisis has helped make them more visible in society, with people now talking more openly about them (naftemporiki.gr, 2019).
3. **Homosexuality:** Homosexuality is still a taboo subject in Greek society and education. Until recently, same-sex kisses that were part of a Greek television series led to the imposition of fines by the National Broadcasting Council.

Depending on their educational needs, students with special educational needs can attend either general education (typical schools with additional, supportive educational programs, applied by special and inclusive education teachers) or they can attend special education schools. This is determined on a case-by-case basis by the KEDASY (Diagnostic Assessment, Counseling and Support Centers).

Students with mild learning difficulties can attend typical classes at the general school with parallel support and co-education by special and inclusive education teachers if this is required by the type and degree of special educational needs. Specially organised and properly staffed inclusive education classes operate within the schools of general and vocational education with two types of programs (Doe, 2017a):

- A common and specialised program (up to 15 teaching hours per week) determined by a proposal of the relevant KEDASY for students with milder special educational needs.
- Specialised group or individual program of extended hours, determined by a proposal of the relevant KEDASY, for students with more severe forms of special educational needs, which are not covered by independent special education units corresponding to the necessary type and degree. The specialised program can be independent of the public, according to the needs of the students.

Students with significant difficulties can attend (Doe, 2017b):

- Independent SMEAE (Special Educational Schools).
- Schools or departments that operate independently or as branches of other schools in hospitals, rehabilitation centres, juvenile care institutions, institutions for the chronically ill, or mental health education and rehabilitation services, if people with disabilities inhabit them.





These educational structures are considered SMEAE and are under the authority of the Ministry of Education.

- Homeschooling, when deemed necessary, can be done for serious short-term or chronic health problems, which do not allow students to move and attend school. A Special Education teacher does not necessarily provide home teaching unless the relevant KEDASY provides such a directive.

The lesson material taught at school is approved after a specific procedure. Books are assigned to an author or a writing team. After this choice, the respective person in charge of a specific course submits a proposal that must be approved by the relevant department of the Institute of Educational Policy. Then, the Institute's department makes the approval, and the relevant ministerial decision is issued, including specifications of the teaching material under production. The teaching material is supervised by the assigned Advisor or Assistant of the Institute and is ultimately judged by an external evaluation committee (Pedagogical Institute, 2009).

Since 2003, all-new compulsory education textbooks have been produced following a call for tenders. Then, during their writing, they are evaluated by an external crisis committee consisting of a university student specialising in the book's subject, one school counsellor, and a teacher.

Greece is one of the countries where transgender and homosexual people are less likely to experience a positive school atmosphere, as well as the countries with the lowest ranking in terms of how satisfied with their lives they are (Moshovakou & Ntani, 2018). The legislative reforms of 2015 improved the position of LGBTQI+ people in Greece. Also, the LGBTQI+ candidates in the previous elections prove that the model of the politician, who until now (almost should have been) a heteronormal—preferably masculine—male, is changing. A big step was made after the recent incidents and allegations of sexual assault and sexual abuse in the sectors of sports and theatre when the government decided to implement immediate sex education programmes at schools as a preventive measure.

### *Piloting*

In total, 32 students participated in the piloting from two different schools.

Twenty-five (25) students were from a general education school, and seven (7) were from a special education school. More specifically, there were students with intellectual and cognitive diversities, among them two students with ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder) and two students with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) who attended additional inclusive-educational programs in the typical educational setting—high school, and they had additional support. Additionally, four educators were present—three general education and one special education—and one psychologist who works at the special education school.

### *Results*



The piloting in Greece was fruitful and identified the needs of the students. Even though they stated they had knowledge about sexual education, in reality, there were many misconceptions, prejudices, and stereotypes. Additionally, the piloting was also helpful for the educators because they referred to homophobic attitudes. Specifically, they verified that many students seem to be homophobic and that toxic masculinity is prevalent. These students have little tolerance for anything different; they said they would use violence if someone tried to harass them and wouldn't interact with a gay student. These students thought they knew a lot about sex and asked why the facilitators pushed a gay agenda. For example, before the Image Theatre, there was a very brief reference to the Theatre of the Oppressed method, focusing on the forms of oppression and the oppressed person. A student from the special school asked our team, "What should we do if we saw two boys kissing?" The question was the reason for creating a still image by a student. Then, an accurate description was given, titles of the image and a discussion of the oppression. The children were asked to intervene and change the image. We had two interventions: a reaction to the homophobic incident and another to change the kissing position of the two boys. Unfortunately, the time was too short to get to the ideal picture. This was an unexpected result of the piloting.

Regarding the positive results, first of all, all the students participated actively and interacted with each other. It is important to mention that the general school's students interacted and communicated during the training with the students from the special school. Also, the Theatre of the Oppressed was a significant asset of the training, and the students participated actively and worked as a team. Both teachers and students were interested and satisfied. Specifically, the educators asked to be informed about the next steps of the project to enhance their sexual education methods to be more inclusive and prepared for discriminative and violent incidents, while the students asked for more audio-visual material and content on the sexuality topic.

Of course, there were also some difficulties in the piloting. First of all, the restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Secondly, some of the activities were unsuitable for the specific target group because the students were unfamiliar with them, making them uncomfortable. The reasons behind this can be: i) the absence of somatic and experiential activities in the Greek educational system, ii) the pandemic that limited children physically and socially, iii) the large number of students participating, iv) and the pressure of time to complete the activities. Regarding the Greek Educational System educators, they are not as well used to somatic and experiential activities. Hence, their participation in this kind of activity was not so active. In contrast, their involvement in the activities that required oral speech was engaged and very supportive. Finally, the module "Anatomy, Puberty and Body Changes" was considered boring since the participants were already familiar with the content.

It is also important to mention in the results of the piloting that during the first day of the piloting phase, students were not so active, so the Greek team decided to propose a more interactive activity for the Module of "Sex and Sexuality". The activity is called "Mystery Box". The students were asked to write a question anonymously and place it in a basket with the purpose of answering all the questions the next day. Several students stated that they already knew everything and didn't have any questions, which is interesting since, as mentioned above, there were a lot of misconceptions and prejudices. This could be because the students wanted to appear as if they knew everything





and succumb to peer conformity. The rest of the questions that we received were eye-openers. What the students care about is some answers to crucial subjects for them. For example: *when is the right time to start their sexual life, how to flirt, why people rape, how can we deal with sexual harassment, what if the harassment comes from a family member, and even how to enlarge a penis*. It is common for students at this age to compare themselves to the images they see around them (in pornography or even in discussions with their peers). They were interested in discussing important matters that caused them anxiety. This activity lasted for 40 minutes, but more time was needed. The participants were excited with the concept of this activity, as they were going to discuss important issues and receive answers to their questions.

During the collection of the answers, it was identified that two of the students might have faced sexual harassment in the family. One of them asked *what the student should do if a family member sexually harassed them*. The second one asked for guidance on *how to help a friend who is sexually harassed by a member of their family without putting themselves or a friend in danger*. Of course, the educators and the school's psychologist were informed about these two situations to intervene to assist the students in need. The students were given the necessary information on how to deal with similar situations and access to a national anonymous helpline and sources for more information. The importance of including the "sexual harassment" topic in the INCLUDED materials is evident.

## Intellectual Output 2

As mentioned above, in IO2, all partners contributed to the development of a free multilingual e-course for school teachers and support staff (school nurses, school counsellors, etc.). The teaching inclusive sex-ed through creative methods e-course is based on each partner's research phase from IO1, and the results of the piloting of IO1, which also included educators and teachers. The e-course aimed to develop educational resources for the support of the school staff to be able to deliver sex education courses through creative-based, participant-centred and embodied methods such as the Theatre of the Oppressed. It is important to mention that the content was developed through a holistic, healthy, inclusive, critical and positive sex education, critical pedagogy, and an intersectional approach. The last one is very important because the project aims to include each student regardless of gender, race, abilities, sexual orientation, etc.

Each partner not only contributed to the development of the Modules but also translated and adapted the context in regard to their national contexts. In Greece, RDPSEA and KMOP collaborated again with the schools from the piloting of IO1, and one more school that it was interested in, but this time only with the teachers. The e-course was presented and explained to the participants during the piloting of IO3 (Guide for teachers and families), while the piloting of IO2 was asynchronous. We asked the teachers and school staff to sign in to the platform in their own time, take the course and the small tests for self-reflection and then provide their feedback and comments.



### Intellectual Output 3

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Intellectual Output of the project aimed to support families' role in the sex education of their children (including children with intellectual disabilities) and to improve their interaction and relationship with the school system. More specifically, in IO3 all partners contributed to developing a methodological guide (PDF) for schools with activities for parents and teachers/educators. This guide aims to engage families in sex education programmes, through their active participation and training in sex education.

Before the development of the content for the Guide, we conducted a set of interviews with teachers and educators regarding their relationship with families, and how families will be engaged, especially in the sex education subject. Even though only one of the interviewees has participated in proper training regarding sex education, all of them stated that they are interested in learning and being educated and informed on this topic. They also stated that not only through their education but also through the use of interactive tools students will be able to understand and actively participate in a sex education course. Regarding the relationship with the families and their engagement in sex education, they were not positive about it. One of the interviewees stated that she would be anxious if a conversation regarding sex education with the parents was needed, while one other said that there has been disapproval and negative reactions from parents regarding a sex education course. All of them believe that it is very important to have the families and the parents by their side because in that way the parents can become educators for their children and help them as well. Overall, there is not a common, national education for teachers and educators regarding sex education, and many of the stereotypes are the results of the family. Families are not so engaged in the school system, especially in sex education courses, so they have negative reactions. It is worth mentioning that it is really important to open a dialogue about sex education between schools, families, and students to break the taboos and provide knowledge.

After we gathered the results of the interviews, we developed the tools that we used in the Guide. All the tools are interactive activities for teachers and families which aim to open the dialogue between them. The piloting of IO3 took place at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Junior High School of Alimos on the 8 and 9 of February 2023 from 14:00 to 20:00. In the piloting 25 people in total participated (2 males and 23 females) from 24 to 60 years old. The group included teachers, parents, and school staff (psychologists, a school nurse, and social workers). The teachers were from two general education schools and one special education school.

After completing the training, the participants provided feedback through an evaluation questionnaire. Overall, the piloting was very successful, and the participants stated that they were satisfied with the design of the training. They gained new knowledge, interacted with colleagues and families, exchanged ideas and discussed challenging subjects. In their evaluation, all of the participants stated that the interactive, embodied theatre activities were the most challenging but at the same time the most interesting and helpful. Some of the teachers stated that it is important to open the dialogue between families through these kinds of activities and that the interaction between them helps to overcome their families' resistance and negative reactions. Regarding families, all of them highlighted the importance of sex education at schools, while some of them stated that the



training helped them to change their stereotypical perspectives. It is important to mention that only 2 out of 5 participants trust teachers on sex education implementation because they believe that they are not well-informed, well-prepared and educated.

### Policy Recommendations

- Implement a national sex education curriculum in all schools, general, special, vocational, which includes a comprehensive and inclusive approach to sex education, covering all aspects of sexual health, relationships, and gender identity.
- Provide mandatory and comprehensive training for teachers and school staff on sex education, including topics such as healthy relationships, consent, sexual orientation, and gender identity, to ensure they are well informed and prepared to deliver sex education courses.
- Encourage and facilitate the involvement of parents and families in sex education programs, through their active participation and training in sex education, to improve their relationship with the school system and support their role in the sex education of their children.
- Promote the use of creative-based, participant-centred, and embodied methods, such as theatre or interactive activities, to deliver sex education courses, as these methods have proven to be effective in engaging students and facilitating dialogue on sensitive topics.
- Develop and implement strategies to combat stigma and discrimination based on gender identity, sexual orientation, race, and disability, within schools and communities, to create a safe and inclusive environment for all students.
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of sex education programs regularly, through the use of surveys and feedback from students, parents, and teachers, to ensure they are meeting the needs of students and addressing the concerns of all stakeholders.
- Provide funding and support for the development and implementation of sex education programs and resources, to ensure that all schools and communities have access to the resources they need to provide comprehensive and inclusive sex education to all students.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the implementation of the INCLUDED project was a successful effort to provide comprehensive sex education to students in a way that is inclusive, intersectional, and respectful of diverse cultures and identities. Through the collaborative efforts of the project partners, the project achieved its main objectives, which were to develop innovative, interactive, and participant-centred teaching materials and training programs for teachers, educators, and parents to deliver sex education through creative methods.

The impact of the project is significant, as it addresses a crucial aspect of students' health and well-being, as well as their social and emotional development. The project has contributed to the promotion of sex education policies and practices that are inclusive, respectful, and responsive to



the needs of each student. It has also increased awareness and knowledge among teachers, educators, and parents regarding sex education, and provided them with the tools and strategies to deliver comprehensive sex education through creative and participatory methods.

## UK

### Introduction – National Context

In the UK, Relationships Education is compulsory for all pupils receiving primary education and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) is made obligatory for all students in secondary education.

Relationships Education (Primary) focuses on teaching the fundamental building blocks and characteristics of positive relationships, with particular reference to friendships, family relationships, and relationships with other children and with adults. The aim is to make pupils recognise and report abuse, including emotional, physical and sexual abuse by focusing on boundaries and privacy, ensuring young people understand that they have rights over their own bodies. Topics cover marriage, consent, including the age of consent, violence against women and girls, online behaviours including image and information sharing (including ‘sexting’, youth-produced sexual imagery, nudes, etc.), pornography, abortion, sexuality, gender identity, substance misuse, violence and exploitation by gangs, extremism/radicalisation criminal exploitation (for example, through gang involvement or “county lines” drugs operations), hate crimes, and female genital mutilation (FGM).

Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) is compulsory from age 11 onwards in the UK. It involves teaching children about reproduction, sexuality and sexual health. However, primary schools that choose to teach sex education (beyond the compulsory Relationship Education) must allow parents a right to withdraw their children. Turnbull et al. (2010) has reported that adolescents judged the sex education to be of high quality and enjoyed being taught by sexual-health workers at schools. Preferred sources of SRE included sexual-health workers, parents and peers as well as the media. Gender, school’s faith (Church of England or Catholic) and school type (mainstream, special needs) were predictors of preference for various aspects of SRE. The results highlighted the crucial role of experienced qualified SRE educators, but also the supplementary role of parents and peers as well as the role of Internet sites, magazines, phone lines and schools. Stereotypical preferences of boys and girls outside SRE seem to be perpetuated in SRE, and special needs and mainstream adolescents’ preferences are consistent with their communication and education outside SRE.

### Intellectual Output 1

IO1 includes a handbook for schools to implement inclusive sex education through creative methods with a curricular training programme for students and recommendations on how to introduce it into the school. In order to understand how the topic is addressed, held and understood in the British context, official structural definitions about sex education were collected during the desk-based research phase of the output.

“The aim of SRE is to give young people the information they need to help them develop healthy, nurturing relationships of all kinds, not just intimate relationships. It should enable them to know what



a healthy relationship looks like and what makes a good friend, a good colleague, and a successful marriage or other type of committed relationship. It should also cover contraception, developing intimate relationships and resisting pressure to have sex (and not applying pressure). It should teach what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in relationships.”

“Effective RSE does not encourage early sexual experimentation. It should teach young people to understand human sexuality and to respect themselves and others. It enables young people to mature, build their confidence and self-esteem and understand the reasons for delaying sexual activity. Effective RSE also supports people, throughout life, to develop safe, fulfilling and healthy sexual relationships, at the appropriate time.”

A short survey was developed in order to identify the current topics in the public eye in the U.K. The most common answers collected by mainly adult participants were: sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV, all kinds of STIs, Chlamydia and topics such as consent, sexual violence, underage sex, unprotected sex, abortion regulation, peer pressure, and sexting.

According to the results collected from our adult participants, the prevailing taboo/stigma subjects in education and in general culture are sexually transmitted diseases, sex education and gender/LBTQ issues, disabled people, abortion, sex trafficking, sexuality in general and informed consent. As a result, the answers are quite similar to those collected within the public eye in the UK. Aside from the topics related to sex education, other matters like mental health, Brexit, the Black Lives Matter movement, and religion were identified to be taboo/stigmatized subjects in the U.K.

MEH tested the INCLUDED activities in February 2022 with 15 students who have different levels of deafness aged between 14-22 and with students attending either college or special programme training schools. Deaf Active carries out an after-school youth club for D/deaf, hard of hearing, CODA (Child of Deaf Adult) and hearing children and young people. They also train their older students to become youth workers. There were students with different levels of deafness and 3 youth workers who usually work with them have helped us to deliver our modules by interpreting into sign language.

The following activities were tested;

- Module 1: puberty changes,
- Module 2: who is this professional?
- Module 3: sex and sexuality brainstorming,
- Module 4: red and green light scenarios.

Piloting was overall positive. Students have demonstrated high interest and attention in our activities. Their teachers and the interpreters were glad of the content of activities, methodologies and the reaction of the students. Communication was the most challenging part of the piloting as facilitators did not know sign language, but interpreters helped with translating and making the content of the activities accessible to all participants. In addition, some students showed a bit of hesitation to answer questions in open discussions with the whole group. However, they were more interactive



and communicative when they had to work in smaller groups with their peers. Another challenge we encountered was the low level of students' literacy. In order to solve this issue, words in the stories were adapted and made more understandable for the activity of the "consent module". Besides, students were given the possibility to share non-written evaluations.

The positive side of the piloting was the high interest shown by the students in the content of the piloting. Indeed, the initial challenge was the sensitive topic of the piloting and thus the probability of some students to be embarrassed or to refuse to engage in discussion. However, the teachers were very helpful, since they knew the group and the general environment was inclusive, and collaborative.

Some adjustments were made in order to meet the needs of the students who get easily tired due to their medical conditions if activities include too much discussions and efforts. As a result, a break was taken after the first two modules.

Evaluation questions showed that students were globally satisfied with the format of this lesson. According to their answers, they especially liked the informal way of talking, open group discussion, and group work. More specifically, they enjoyed taking part in the activities of the first module where they had to generate examples related to the topics of body and anatomy and social, emotional, and physical changes during puberty. Furthermore, all students unanimously liked the activity of module 4 regarding consent: red and green light scenarios. Most of them have indicated as an open answer that they wanted to discuss more and know more about the legal age of the sex, laws around this topic, and different scenarios that have been used during the activity. Finally, all the students would without hesitation suggest this training to their friends and peers.

## Intellectual Output 2

IO2 aims to support teachers and school staff to be able to apply current practices in sexual education for their students through creative methods. In order to achieve this goal, all partners contributed to the development of open educational resources that can contribute to the well-being and social inclusion of vulnerable societal groups. As a result, a free multilingual e-course for school teachers and support staff was created based on the outputs of IO1.

The e-course was shared and promoted to a wide audience of school teachers, staff and educators in the UK. The course was also presented to our participants during the piloting phase of IO3 in order to reach a bigger number of people and to take the opportunity of a face-to face encounter to explain more in detail the purpose and benefits of the project, the topics, and the platform. The participants were invited to register in the platform and take part in the MOOC which offers a structured learning pathway as well as support materials and activities in order to help teachers and educators to better understand the topic and equip them with the tools and skills required to answer the needs of their students. By registering into the course, the participants were given access to different modules and had the opportunity to do inner work exercises at their own pace. Thanks to their involvement, MEH could collect feedback and comments on how to improve the platform, the course and the activities in order to reach a high level of satisfaction and better answer the needs identified in the beginning





of the project. This feedback was also very important to rate the efficiency, the transferability and the impacts of the outputs and the project on the target groups.

### Intellectual Output 3

INCLUDED third Intellectual Output aimed at enforcing the involvement of families in the sexual education of young people including young people with intellectual disabilities, and improve their interaction with the school system through a guide with activities for parents and educators.

Prior to the guide creation, interviews were conducted with high school teachers regarding their previous sex education training to teach students, their relationship with families, and the engagement and dialogue with them about sexual education.

Two school teachers were previously involved in sexual education training, and only one teacher stated that they are interested in teaching sex education to students but will need to feel more well trained by specialist facilitators, and have more well-designed course materials.

Regarding the families' engagement, they highlighted the importance of communicating with parents about the shared information. One of the teachers referred to the sensitivity of the topic, and the necessity of the existence of a consultation evening where there is open dialogue. The second teacher stated the importance of having clear conversations with parents. Another teacher mentioned that sex education should be a conversation with parents, and that effective teaching depends on their willingness to discuss openly, however, it will not be something parents will prefer to discuss with teachers. Generally, the need to have dialogue was highlighted.

Accordingly, tools were developed in the guide, including interactive activities for teachers and families, to facilitate dialogue, enhance the professional skills of teachers, and engage families in the sex education.

The piloting sessions of this Intellectual Output took place at The Joseph Lappin Centre, Liverpool on the 28th of March, 2023, from 9:00 to 15:00 GMT, and on the 30th of March, 2023, from 14:00 to 20:00 GMT. The Piloting was conducted with our network, "Deaf Active", which is working closely on several programs with schools including the Broadgreen International School with a focus on deaf students. 21 people from different age segments (18-39) including families, educators, and staff, attended and participated in the activities.

According to the participants' evaluations, the piloting sessions were successful and developed their knowledge and skills. The participants stated that the activities were fun, easy, and interactive. A friendly atmosphere was created to exchange ideas. Educators could discuss challenges that they face with students, parents, and their children and develop suggestions, and families learned about gender and sex education terminologies. They became aware of the importance of participating in open and clear dialogue to support the sex education of their children.





### Policy Recommendations

- Relationships Education, SRE and Health Education must be accessible through high quality teaching for all pupils, especially for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities who represent a large minority.
- In special schools and for some SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) pupils in mainstream schools there may be a need to tailor content and teaching to meet the specific needs of pupils at different developmental stages.
- It may be appropriate to revisit topics more frequently with pupils with SEND to support “overlearning” for new and abstract topics. SEND pupils may need lots of support to generalise their learning outside of RSE lessons and support to personalise the learning to their own relationships, behaviours, and maturation.
- Materials should be available in appropriate learning media including tactile diagrams and physical materials when required.
- Follow up sessions may be used with smaller groups to personalise the learning from RSE group lessons. These may be targeted small group sessions, 1-1 as appropriate, or referrals to specific support staff.
- Schools must ensure that they comply with the relevant provisions of the Equality Act 2010, (The Equality Act 2010 and schools: Departmental advice), under which sexual orientation and gender reassignment are amongst the protected characteristics.
- When schools teach their pupils about LGBT issues, they should ensure that this content is fully integrated to their programmes of study for this area of the curriculum rather than delivered as a standalone unit or lesson. Schools are free to determine how they do this, and the Education Department of the UK expects all pupils to be taught LGBT content at a timely point as part of this area of the curriculum.

### Conclusion

To sum up, the implementation of the INCLUDED project as well as the local pilotings conducted in all partner countries enabled us to understand more the actual situation and identify the main needs regarding the sexual education of students and the approach to adopt between them, families, and teachers. We can thus assert that the project is successful in meeting and achieving its objectives and desired impact on all the target groups. The materials, courses and creative methods produced and implemented as part of the project thanks to the collaboration of all partners enabled us to break some taboos in all countries of the consortium and open up the dialogue towards a more inclusive and open society. Moreover, it provided support to help teachers and educators to better understand the topic and equip them with the tools and skills needed to answer the needs of their students. The project gave the opportunity to families to gain knowledge of gender and sex education so that they can better address the topic with their children and raise awareness among them. In addition, it



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helped educators to find solutions to problems they experience with students, parents, and students and engage in constructive dialogue and discussion.

## The Netherlands

### Introduction – National Context

In Dutch schools, sex education has been mandatory for years. This started around the seventies with lessons in high school about anatomy and reproduction. This coincided with protests for preconception and abortion rights, as well as sex being for pleasure, although condoms were not widely available yet. In the eighties, due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, lessons about STIs and the use of condoms were added (along with nationwide ad campaigns on TV and radio). The idea of sexual relationships being “free and just for fun” got tampered down somewhat. Many organisations in The Netherlands still tried to focus on the positive and fun sides of sex, since schools were more likely to warn and shame students about the dangerous aspects of sex. Since then, the government has almost looked at sex education as “complete” and finished, even though society’s view on the subject and connected themes have changed tremendously since the eighties.

In 2006, new laws around “civics education” meant that all schools from elementary schools to vocational education had to—among other things—teach their students about diversity in relationships and sexuality. This meant that new materials had to be produced to teach all classes age-appropriate lessons. Initially, teachers had to navigate this for themselves, but in later years, organisations like Rutgers, SoaAidsNederland, and the GGD (Municipal Health Service) produced materials that were free to use for all schools, and even provided teacher training based on the materials.

In 2019, Rutgers published a study (Cense *et al.*) in which students from several different Dutch high schools peer-researched students’ opinions in their schools and asked what they think about sexual education. The conclusion was that students want more focus on the positive side of sex and relationships, more skills around consent, and to know more about sexual and gender diversity, and the wide array of options that is available to them. The sexual education that they receive is focused more on anatomy, in addition to warnings about pregnancy and STIs. Students also stated that they wanted the lessons more often and in more than just biology classes. This publication spurred the Dutch government to pass an additional law for civics education and to make funding available for schools that want to strengthen their curriculum around sex education, or make use of guest educators on a structural basis.

Teachers often do not need to involve families in the sex education plans, due to most schools having written their justification and vision for the curriculum in their school guide. Parents can come to school with questions or concerns about the lessons, but by and large, there is very little family involvement. However, not all teachers get proper training on how to implement the vast array of options in methodologies that is available to them. Some don’t even know where to find all the



options. This is a hurdle for schools in delivering sex education that is as good as the government requires, or as the students want and deserve. Teachers that do get some form of training are most often biology teachers, because reproduction is a mandatory part of the biology curriculum for younger students (11-14), as well as older students who choose biology as an exam subject (15-17). The teacher education for elementary school teachers has some lessons on civics education, but from the stories we've heard at Sexmatters teacher trainings, that's not much to write home about.

Ideas about gender and sexuality start to form at a young age. Sexmatters therefore centres its work around adolescents and young adults (up to about 30 years of age) and is active wherever young people come together. In order to be able to be oneself, a safe social environment is important. For adolescents, peers begin to play a larger role in this than parents and other adults. For this reason, the Sexmatters team is both young and diverse in order to connect well with youth of all backgrounds. The goal of Sexmatters' activities is to make young people aware of gender and sexual diversity, and to teach them how to appreciate those who are different from themselves. Sexmatters engages youth in activities that reduce prejudice and stereotyping, as well as increases mutual understanding and acceptance.

The role Sexmatters fulfils within the current range of sexuality education methods for young people is based around the social aspect of sexuality. Sexmatters starts a conversation with young people about sexuality and diversity, including opinions, behaviours, and social manners, in addition to norms and values we have regarding gender and sexuality. In carrying out the activities, Sexmatters pays particular attention to the roles of society and culture and how they influence how people think about sex and gender. Sexmatters always pays attention to aspects of identity upon which people are socially included or excluded, such as ethnicity, culture, and religion, from an intersectional standpoint.

People learn early on that there are things that are typically considered "boy" and "girl" things. Not conforming to this dichotomy is often not accepted nor tolerated. Gender norms not only limit young people in who they are or who they can be, but also lay a foundation for societal gender inequality. Gender norms also shape ideas around sexuality and sexual identity. For example, people with non-heteronormative sexualities still face various forms of discrimination and harassment. A survey of LGBTQIA+ schoolchildren in the Netherlands shows that more than one third feel unsafe at school due to their sexual or gender identity. Additionally, recent studies show that LGBTQIA+ youth in secondary schools are more likely to be bullied by school staff than their heterosexual peers. Sometimes this bullying is subtle and the staff member in question does not realise it, nor is it noticed by bystanders (these could be microaggressions). With our teacher training, we make sure teachers and other school staff are aware of gender and sexual diversity and its impact on social safety in the classroom. With the "Speaking Up" workshop, we teach people to recognize these subtle comments and properly stand up for themselves and others, so that these comments are addressed and bullying, discrimination, and harassment is countered.

Because norms about gender and sexuality have an impact from an early age, it is important to discuss these norms and their consequences with young people early on. The Ministry of Education,



Culture and Science has therefore drawn up core objectives around sexuality and sexual diversity. Unfortunately, research by the Education Inspection shows that the implementation of these objectives often depends on individual teachers and they are not necessarily integrated into the curriculum. While schools usually meet the legal requirements, the quality of sex education could be better. As far as Sexmatters is concerned, the conversation about sexuality and gender is insufficiently conducted in schools, and where it is conducted, the tone should strive to be more positive and less normative. By discussing gender norms and their influence on one's identity, as well as how we treat each other (e.g., consent), Sexmatters creates social awareness among young people that counteracts the negative effects of gender-based stereotyping.

The desire among young people to learn more about the topics discussed in the Sexmatters workshops is significant, according to research by Rutgers (2019) on young people's wishes regarding sex education. This research titled "Just Take Away the Taboo" reveals that secondary school youth often lack information about sexuality and gender identity in current sex education. According to researchers, "Students want sex education to break through the normativity and make it clear that there is not one standard." Furthermore, young people want information about how to navigate relationships as well as how to discuss boundaries and desires during sex.

From our own experience, Sexmatters knows that young people are in the process of shaping their identity and regularly wonder if they are "normal." Young people encounter many images and ideas through the internet and social media, including more and more celebrities speaking out about being feminists, bisexual, or queer, for example. In the workshops that Sexmatters has been teaching in schools since 2015, we have found that the meaning of these terms is not always clear to adolescents. Despite the fact that young people are becoming increasingly acquainted with different gender and sexual identities, context and knowledge around them is frequently lacking. This is confirmed by the 2017 "Sex Under 25" survey which found that 60% of young people feel they did not receive enough information about homosexuality in school. Finally, recent research by Rutgers shows that young people want to talk more about gender diversity, sexual identity, desires, and boundaries, as well as sexual pleasure.

Young people's positive responses to our workshops clearly reinforce the need for an open conversation about sexuality, gender, and consent. Students indicate that they found it incredibly fun to talk about these topics with each other. They liked that the young adults gave the workshops because it made it more relaxed. The many questions the students ask during the workshops also show the need to talk about sexuality, gender, and consent.

For many students, a Sexmatters workshop is the first time they have contact with an LGBTQIA+ person. It is often also the first time they can ask questions and experience that talking about LGBTQIA+ identities are not a conversation *about* people (in an abstract sense) but a conversation *with people*. Several studies show that getting to know people who are "different" reduces prejudice. In addition, it is important that young people also see more normative workshop leaders (heterosexual, cisgender), who communicate positively about sexual and gender diversity. Youth who do not identify as LGBTQIA+ will recognize themselves more easily in a workshop leader who does not identify as LGBTQIA+ either. Because young people also get to see a cooperation and a



healthy bond between LGBTQIA+ and non-LGBTQIA+ workshop leaders during the workshops, they start to think more positively about a bond between LGBTQIA+ and non-LGBTQIA+ people, according to Extended Contact Theory. Finally, many personal experiences of workshop leaders are shared during the workshops. This ensures that conversations about difficult topics are easier to discuss and that students feel comfortable sharing their own experiences as well.

### Intellectual Output 1

Sexmatters was initially the lead partner for the development of IO1, due to the specific experience and knowledge that we have; Sexmatters has been teaching workshops on sexuality, gender, and consent since 2013 in various Dutch educational settings. We worked on creating the framework for the IO1 lessons, but after that we sadly had to leave the project for a few months due to administrative difficulties. That is why we missed the piloting phase for IO1.

Because we have been teaching workshops in different schools for so long, we have experience with how students and teachers react to lessons about sexuality, gender, and consent. Keep in mind that most of the time Dutch students are already more used to talking about these subjects because of the mandatory civics and sexual education lessons in schools, but that does not take away the initial shyness or awkward feelings that students may have when the lessons start. This is why we always start our workshops with an ice breaker exercise that is connected to the theme and energises the students by having them walk around or talk to each other. After this, introducing the subjects we will talk about is usually a lot easier.

We teach a variety of groups. This means we come in contact with people from a variety of cultural backgrounds, religions, genders, political views, etc. We strive to work with cultural sensitivity in mind. In one group it might be okay to discuss something like masturbation freely, while in other groups we focus more on relationships, love, and getting married. This means that we base the information (and way of delivering that information) on the group we have in front of us. The feedback we receive from the groups we teach is usually positive. Our approach is non-judgmental, open, and positive. We always specify that you don't have to talk or answer questions if it makes you feel uncomfortable. We see ourselves more as conversation facilitators than as trainers.

Sometimes students don't appreciate that we talk about diversity in sex and relationships, because—and this is especially true for kids going through puberty—being “normal” is very important to them. We keep in mind that we are planting seeds, not necessarily changing minds. The most important thing is for students to respectfully talk about what different options there are in life, whether they themselves feel a connection to those options or not. If you only ever hear one type of story, it is harder to find out what *your* story actually is.

Luckily, positive reactions from students are also abundant. Most students appreciate talking to guest educators about these subjects because it is less scary than talking to their own teachers, who they have to keep seeing every day for three to five more years. Students like that they get the opportunity to talk about these topics openly and without being judged by an adult. They learn from us as workshop leaders, but also from each other's thoughts and experiences. The team of





educators we have at Sexmatters is very diverse, so students will almost always be able to relate to at least one of the two people in front of the class. Sharing our own experiences helps make the experiences and themes more human, and thus more relatable for students.

In the way our lessons are structured, we manage most of the time to form a bond with students quickly within the hour and a half we have with them. This is thanks to the energising ice breaker activity we do and the building up to more “awkward” conversations over time. First, we share some theoretical knowledge or watch a video, or we ask students what they already know. After that we have them exchange ideas by doing interviews or having a brainstorming session. The last activities we do are mostly about students giving their own opinions, or sharing experiences, or role-playing exercises. This building up the “intensity” of the activities helps in creating a safer space for students and for them to get used to talking about the subject, with us and with each other.

From time to time, we also receive negative feedback. Usually, people who have negative feedback make themselves heard more than people who have positive feedback. This feedback usually comes from the parents of the kids we teach. Parents don't always have a clear understanding of the contents of our workshops. They are scared that our workshops are explicit or that we would indoctrinate their children. This is why our workshops need a lot of context and explanation to parents. We work closely with teachers and youth workers to ensure that they talk to parents beforehand. We also have a brief summary that we sometimes share with parents. In this summary we share our vision and what we are going to do during the workshops. This makes them feel included so that they also see that the content of our workshops is not as explicit as they might think.

## Intellectual Output 2

The second Intellectual Output for the Included Project saw all partners contribute to the development of an e-learning course for school teachers and support staff (nurses, counsellors, etc.) that will be available online for free in all five languages of the consortium partners. The e-learning, entitled “Teaching Inclusive Sex-Ed Through Creative Methods” is based on each partner’s research phase from IO1 and the results of the IO1 pilots. The e-course’s objective is to help school staff deliver the IO1 sex education curriculum, but also possibly others, through creative, participant-centred, and embodied methods, such as the Theatre of the Oppressed. The content of the e-learning was developed holistically, to promote a healthy, inclusive, critical, and positive sex education, using critical pedagogy and an intersectional approach. The intersectional aspect of the course is very important; the Included project aims to include all students regardless of gender, race, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, cultural background, etc.

Sexmatters has had a more consulting and feedback-oriented role in the development of the IO2, providing insights from our extensive experience in training teachers and school staff to teach inclusive and positive sex education. Additionally, Sexmatters also made sure to translate the e-course into Dutch and we provided videos with tips and tricks for teachers that are available in the e-course with subtitles in each partner language.



Piloting the IO2 e-learning course in The Netherlands was rather difficult, due to the school that we planned to pilot both IO2 and IO3 with pulling out of the agreement on short notice. Sexmatters ended up testing the e-learning with our own team, but only teachers who haven't had a role in the Included project before. The team members were asked to view this through the lens of teachers who do not have a lot of experience with sex education. As Sexmatters team members also train teachers, they knew just what things the Dutch teachers usually miss, and could give enough feedback that way. The self-reflection and visualisation activities were mostly appreciated, but what was missed was more specific theory or tools on how to have conversations with students, family, and colleagues as well.

### Intellectual Output 3

The objective of the third Intellectual Output of the Included project is to support schools in involving families in the sex education of their children, and to improve the pedagogical partnership, interaction, and relationship of the families and school. To ensure schools have the tools they need for effective family involvement, the project partners worked together to create a methodological guide for schools with activities that teachers and educators can do with families. This guide aims to engage families in the students' sex education programmes, because comprehensive sex education needs a holistic approach, and doesn't end at in-classroom lessons. This is in accordance with the WHO policy recommendations in the policy framework "Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe."

The development of the guide's contents is based on prior desk and field research, the results of the previous pilots, Sexmatters' previous experiences with teacher training and communication with families, and a set of interviews with teachers and educators. In these interviews we asked the teachers about their experiences in family involvement around the sex education of their students. All teachers interviewed reported minimal to no family involvement in the curriculum of their schools. Schools in The Netherlands never need a formal go-ahead from parents or families when it comes to teaching materials. What does happen is that sometimes a letter is sent out, or information is communicated through a newsletter. It is more of a notification than an ask for involvement. We know from experience and research however, that a holistic approach is necessary, as sex education does not end in the classroom, but goes beyond that. If schools can have dialogues with parents around their children's sex education, parents will be equipped with more theory and tools to keep having these conversations at home, as well as paving the way for equality among all students because taboos will be broken and respect and tolerance will be encouraged. A pedagogical partnership between families and schools is therefore ideal.

The pilot of IO3 had the same trouble as the pilot for IO2, as initially they were meant to coincide and run parallel, so eventually the choice was made to pilot online (in a Zoom video call) with parents from Sexmatters' own network. Seven participants attended the pilot, all of whom were familiar with Sexmatters but had not previously participated in the Included project. The group consisted of three men and four women, all of whom identified as cisgender and heterosexual and were aged between 35 and 50. Participants were white, residing in urban areas, and possessed varying educational





backgrounds, ranging from college to university degrees. Although not religious, some participants had Christian backgrounds or childhoods. The pilot facilitator was one of the Sexmatters' team who has been involved with the Included project since early on.

All participants of the pilot believed that sex education is crucial. The participants expressed enthusiasm about the pilot and reported enjoying taking part in it. They believed that teachers require additional tools to provide effective sex education lessons and that these tools are currently lacking. While not all parents agreed with being more involved in their children's sex education, some expressed they had enough trust in schools to deliver appropriate education, as long as teachers have access to the necessary training and resources.

### Policy Recommendations

- Teach lessons in comprehensive sexual education that fit the students' environment and experiences.
- Organise activities (for instance, a project week) around sex education, in which the Included curriculum can be taught to all students.
- Include a section about healthy relationships and sexual education in your school's vision or policies.
- Engage parents and caretakers by giving them information and inviting them to discover more about the lessons and lesson materials, by participating in parent-oriented workshops.
- Make sure students with problems regarding sexuality and relationships get the right help.
- Collaborate with partners like the GGD (Municipal Health Services) for extra information, short lines to professional help, training opportunities for teachers and other school staff, etc.
- Make sure the school environment is safe - this means to ensure that the entire school staff (not just teachers) is able to recognize and appropriately deal with discrimination and sexual harassment.

### Conclusion

When it comes to sex education in The Netherlands, the Included project is another addition to an already wide range of lesson materials teachers and schools can use to implement comprehensive sex education (CSE). This is due to the fact that The Netherlands has been implementing CSE in many schools for many years already. Sexmatters is a front runner in The Netherlands when it comes to positive, inclusive, culturally sensitive, and intersectional approach to teaching CSE themes. The focus of the Included project on also including students with disabilities, is rather new however. The largest positive contribution of Sexmatters' participation in the Included project is therefore probably the passing along of expertise and theoretical knowledge to the project partners, and thereby the partner countries.



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The main objectives of the project, which were to develop innovative, interactive, creative, embodied, and participant-centred teaching materials and training programs for students, as well as teachers and families. The results of the project definitely reflect those objectives.

The greatest impact of the project in The Netherlands is the expansion of CSE materials that are suitable for students with disabilities, and the addition of creative methods to teaching CSE themes. The impact of the project on Europe as a whole is significant, as it enhances the partner countries' abilities to implement the WHO policies around sexual education better than ever before, which hopefully sets off a domino effect of inspiration.

## North Macedonia

### Introduction – National Context

Human sexuality has been and it is still a taboo in many countries although it is one of the driving pillars of a living society (Coimbra França, J. V., & Sousa Costa, J. de L., 2020). Sexual and reproductive health and rights are still a taboo in Macedonia not just in the formal education and in the schools but in the families and at home as well. Although the educational system should play a key role in providing information, resources, and adequate tools for learning about sexual education and reproductive health, in Macedonia, the lack of proper approach on how to address and implement the sex education curriculum in the school system is evident. The absence of sex education curricula in the schools, consequently, can be linked with the increase in hate, violence, bullying, and discrimination which have been identified in the school settings (Hera, 2022) and have been constantly rising in the past years. As a result of the absence of sex education and lack of information, a lot of misconceptions can arise between the teenagers which can also lead to Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and teenage pregnancies.

The research findings taken from the document “Strategy for sexuality and reproductive health in Republic of Macedonia” by the Ministry of Health (2011) demonstrates that in the school curriculum, comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is only partially included in some other school subjects, such as STIs are only included in biology classes. However, a school subject entitled as Sex Education where other important topics such as sexual reproductive health, gender, sex or consent are discussed or addressed in the school settings is non-existent. Although a huge number of parents (82% to 96%) are in favour of introducing topics related to comprehensive sexuality education in the school curriculum in the country (Hera & IPPF, 2018), in Macedonia there is no mandatory or even optional subject Sex Education in the school curriculum (Ministry of Health, 2011).

Even though there are several civil society organisations who actively advocate for implementing comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) to become part of the curricula in primary and secondary schools in Macedonia (Hera, 2022), several pilot programmes in the schools have been tested but



the curricula for CSE have still not been incorporated in the formal education in the country (Ministry of Health, 2011).

## Intellectual Output 1

### *Desk research*

Although there is no specific subject entitled sex-ed in the school curriculum, the Ministry of Health (2011) has set strategic goals and priorities until the year 2020 and one of them is regarding the adolescent sexual and reproductive health and the improvement of access of information and education for the youth when it comes to sexual and reproductive health. Moreover, some of the interventions are the following (p. 15):

- Introduction of the sex-ed in the primary and secondary schools with materials which are adapted for the age of the students.
- Education on sexual and reproductive health for marginalised and vulnerable youth which is gender-sensitive.
- Implementing educational campaigns and activities for improving the sexual and reproductive health for youth in the scope of the programs and activities for mass mediums, education institutions, and civil society organisations.
- Education for parents for how to manage and meet the needs of the adolescent which are related to their sexual and reproductive health.

Some of the indicators are the following (Ministry of Health, 2011, p. 16):

- Implementing sexuality education in the primary and secondary schools adapted according to the age and which promotes positive aspects of sexuality, and materials which are gender-sensitive.
- Establishing programs for sexuality education and reproductive health for youth in the formal educational system for vulnerable and marginalized groups.
- Implementing topics in the field of sexual educational and reproductive health for adolescents and youth which are included in the mass mediums, activities and programmes of educational institutions and civil society organisations.
- Establishing mechanisms and programmes which are in the scope of the health and educational institutions and civil society organisations which actively work and include youth in the processes of creating, implementing and evaluating the informal-educational activities.
- Establishing parent education programmes for adolescent sexual and reproductive health within educational institutions and the civil sector.



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CSE has not been incorporated in the school curriculum in Macedonia despite the effort of several civil society organisations to actively advocate on implementing the sexual education curriculum. However, the piloting of a sexuality education curriculum was implemented in the country which was supported by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (PFIF) and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA). As part of the piloting, several lessons have been tested with professors who took part in a programme, which was piloted in four schools in the capital city of Skopje and Tetovo, in urban and rural areas. Each teacher, after completing the training received a package of manual materials for teaching which was prepared during 2020. The result from the pilot-program and the evaluation will be the basis for the creation of a long-term educational strategy of the Ministry of Education and Science for the compulsory study which will enable the preparation of an appropriate curriculum of the topics of sex education which will be taught in primary and secondary schools in the future, in accordance with the educational reforms (Hera, 2020).

All of these interventions indicate that the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education and Science are aiming toward involving the sexuality education as part of the school curriculum which in the *new concept note on primary education*, sexuality education can be an optional subject for the 9<sup>th</sup> grade students. However, the process is slow as a result of many reasons on local and national level in the country, such as the lack of strategic framework for integrating the CSE in the education system, lack of competence of the staff to implement, and delivery of the curricula and lack of preparation for the staff, etc.

### **Taboos and stigmas about the youth with disabilities**

Considering the current state of sexual education in Macedonia, sex-ed for young people with special needs is an even more stigmatized question in the country. When it comes to the sexuality of the people with disabilities, not only is the topic of sexuality and disability a taboo topic in Macedonia for years but also their personal, social and sexual development has been affected by discrimination, infrastructural barriers, and continuing prejudices on every level, Although the sexuality of the people with disabilities has been an inseparable part of each individual, this is still a topic left behind (Hera, 2022). Not only do people with special needs experience a lot of difficulties in the process of inclusion, but their families also experience a lot of difficulties integrating their children in the society. One main problem is the view that sexuality should not be an issue for the people with special needs (Hera, 2014).

As the First Children's Embassy in the world - Megjashi (2020) reports in the *Second alternative report on the situation of children's rights in Macedonia*, recording to the parents of the young people with disabilities, the young people with disabilities do not enjoy their rights equally as the others. Most of the time they are discriminated against in the healthcare system, in addition to the social protection and in the educational systems. There are a lot of stereotypes of the health professionals when it comes to the young people with disabilities and especially about their sexuality which further



complicates their access to services for sexual and reproductive health (Bojadzi V., First Children's Embassy in the world - Megjashi).

The civic society organisation Hera (the Health Education and Research Association) as an organisation was formed as a result of the country's need for sexual and reproductive health and rights and rights-based policies and programs that include these issues and questions that involve the people with special needs as well (IPPF, 2018). Hera is the largest non-governmental organization working in the field of sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR). Hera also runs several health and social services to young and marginalized communities and it is also a leading organization in delivering comprehensive sexual education (CSE) to young people.

The first Policy on Sexual and Reproductive Health for Persons with Disabilities was published in 2010, in which Hera together with 10-or-so civil society organisations and several institutions took part in the preparation and worked on inclusion and promotion of access to sexual and reproductive health information and services (Hera, 2022). In 2014 the "Platform for the Promotion of Sexual and Reproductive Health of Persons with Disabilities" was founded which has been a campaign focused on raising public awareness of the sexual and reproductive rights of persons with disabilities and emphasizing the importance of the existence of accessible services for sexual and reproductive health of persons with disabilities (Hera, 2022; Platformers, 2020).

### **The inclusion of young people with physical and/or cognitive disabilities in the school settings**

The research indicates that the inclusion of young people with physical and/or cognitive disabilities in the secondary education in Macedonia in general is a matter of improvisation. The process of inclusion of young persons with disabilities is rather slow paced as a result of the lack of proper conditions in the schools, lack of expertise of the staff that is working with students with physical and/or cognitive disabilities, lack of proper conditions to meet their needs, and the absence of clear strategy and models on improving the conditions and capacities for inclusion of young people with physical and/or cognitive disabilities. The lack of proper and defined standards for the inclusion of young persons with physical and/or cognitive disabilities in the school settings creates and unreal expectations for the inclusion as a process. Another main problem is also that there are no mechanisms and strategies in the country of exchanging experiences of good practices between schools, professional teams and teachers as well as the coordination between the different levels of secondary education (Unicef, 2022).

Despite of the research conclusions that have been drawn, the research findings indicate that apart from the lack of proper conditions for the inclusion of young people with physical and/or cognitive disabilities in the school system there are other concrete steps that need to be improved such as (Unicef, 2022, p. 51):

- providing sufficient support for inclusion among the general and professional public
- providing sufficient budget funds for support of the inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular secondary education



- spreading awareness about the needs, possibilities, and the abilities of the students with special needs in the school, community and in the general public
- fostering participation of the students with physical and/or cognitive disabilities in the participation in extracurricular activities
- fostering participation of the parents of the students with physical and/or cognitive disabilities in active participation in the school

### *Piloting*

In order to proceed with the pilot implementation and delivery of the training programme of the Included project to a class where young people with physical and/or cognitive disabilities have access to formal education, it was crucial first to map and identify high schools in the country where students with physical and/or cognitive disabilities are incorporated in the educational settings.

In the process of mapping and identifying high schools where young people with physical and/or cognitive disabilities have access to formal education, in Skopje only several gymnasiums were identified in which young people with disabilities have access to formal education and where their needs are met. The final piloting of the training programme of the Included project took place in March 2022 in the gymnasium Algoritam where eighteen students in total with two professors, one English teacher, and one psychologist who also took part in the piloting and in the implementation of the workshop. Among the students five had physical and/or cognitive disabilities; among them three students had ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder), one of them had a physical disability, and one had a learning disability. All of the students were 18-19 years old in their fourth year of secondary education. The duration of the whole workshop lasted for 6 hours. Apart from the ice-breakers and energizers some of the activities that were tested during the piloting were from the following modules:

- *Module 1 – Puberty and Body changes;*
- *Module 2 – Who is this profession;*
- *Module 2 – Opinion line;*
- *Module 3 – Case Studies;*
- *Module 4 – Safe Distance;*
- *Module 5 – Red light – green light game;*

### *Result*

As part of the first piloting phase of the project "INCLUDED: Inclusive sex-ed through creative methods" a workshop named "Creative educational methods for youth development" was piloted by KMOP Skopje on 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2022 in the Gymnasium Algoritam Centre in Skopje.





The overall results of the workshop demonstrated that most of the students were highly satisfied and interested in taking part in the activities that were implemented. The positive aspect of the implementation of the workshop was the satisfaction level of the students and the professors, the active participation and engagement in the activities, as well as their interest for future collaboration and activities. All teachers were satisfied with the implementation of the activities. After the piloting of the Included programme we are still in contact with the school and the professors who also contacted us and asked for the activities that we implemented because they found them useful and interesting for the students.

Another positive aspect of the workshop was the satisfaction level of students during the implementation of several activities in which the students got engaged and found the most interesting such as the activities “Opinion line”, “Puberty and Body Changes” and “Who is this profession”. During the evaluation at the end of the workshop, the students demonstrated that they enjoyed the activity “Opinion line” the most since they had a chance to express their opinions on the barometer line and engage in discussion on different topics. This activity was particularly interesting for the students because they had a chance to discuss with their fellow peers on questions that they have not discussed in school before and at the same time to express themselves by sharing their opinions. Most of the topics covered statements which were connected with topics such as forming and building friendships, maintaining trust, giving consent etc. The barometer activity gave the possibility to the students to show their opinions and beliefs on certain topics in a non-judgmental space which was built during the workshop. Since some of the students said that they are part of the theatre section in the school and, that they liked the activities where they used the Theatre of the oppressed as a method and the acting as a tool for showing the changes that are occurring during puberty.

Another activity we implemented was the “Who is this profession?” from the Gender module. The goal of this activity was to open a discussion about certain professions which are connected with certain gender as a result of social constructions in the society. The activity opened a debate and a discussion about different perceptions and stereotypes about gender, profession, roles, characteristics, beliefs, and opinions. This activity was a great way for the students to show how even though some students do not have stereotypes, they link some professions with a certain gender.

Although the students enjoyed and liked most of the activities, there were a few remarks about the case studies that were used during the piloting. Moreover, most of the students said that the scenarios are rather outdated and that those stereotypes or types of discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation no longer exist. Despite this, they suggested for instance, if KMOP Skopje implements these activities in other schools or cities, the views or the opinions would differ and vary depending on the environment. This was very unexpected, but this critique was also very constructive and helpful, especially for us as facilitators and creators of the modules to be aware that the generations have changed in positive ways and that the activities should be adapted. We as facilitators were positively surprised about the maturity of the views and opinions of most of the students.



The difficulties that we encountered during the implementation of the workshops were definitely the energizers. What was missing during the preparation of the piloting of the Included programme were energizers and ice-breakers who will be adapted for students with physical and/or cognitive disabilities. Since we already got some energizers and ice-breakers ready, before the workshop we adapted the activities for students with physical and/or cognitive disabilities so that everyone can take part. In order to overcome this problem, we wanted to ensure that all students can take part in all activities so that nobody will be left behind. Therefore, we adapted the activities. However, it would be useful if during the preparation of the programme energizers and ice breaking activities were also incorporated and adapted for students with physical and/or cognitive disabilities.

### Intellectual Output 2

All partners have contributed to the development of the “Teaching inclusive sex-ed through creative methods: e-course for teachers” (IO2), who will be delivering the curricular sex-ed training programme for students (IO1). The main target group of this output were the teachers and school staff that will deliver a sex-ed training programme that is inclusive, effective and the methods are pedagogically innovative. The main goal of this output is to support teachers and school support staff to be able to apply current practices in sexual education. The course developed creative methods and education resources which will contribute for the social inclusion of vulnerable societal groups, including young people with intellectual disabilities. The use of creative methods such as role-playing and theatre games have been proven to be effective in the education of young people and even more with young people with intellectual disabilities. The whole learning approach and methods of this output are not similar to the teacher-teaches-students approaches, rather, the course promotes creative and embodied methodology. The e-course for teachers was presented and shared to the target group of school staff from the gymnasium “Orce Nikolov” (which participated in the piloting of the third intellectual output), other school networks, and to the general public. The teachers and school staff from the gymnasium had a chance to go through the course individually after the piloting took place. Overall, 16 participants from North Macedonia completed the e-course for teachers.

### Intellectual Output 3

#### First set of interviews with school staff

The aim of the first set of interviews with school staff (educators and decision makers) was conducted in order to understand the school context for family engagement in sex education programmes. The analysis of the interviews contributed in the creation of learning paths, activities and in the development of the methodological guide (PDF) for schools with activities for parents and teachers. The aim of the third intellectual output was to support families’ role in sex education of their children (including children with intellectual disabilities).

The first set of interviews with school staff was carried out on the 5th of October 2022 in premises of the high school “Orce Nikolov” Skopje, N. Macedonia. In the interviews 3 school staff members aged



between 40 and 58 years old participated. The group included 2 psychology teachers and 1 biology teacher that are also teaching at the high school of “Orce Nikolov”.

Two of the teachers stated that they have not participated in a sex education training program before, while one of the teachers has participated in a similar program for sex-ed adopted for high school teachers several years ago. The biology teacher was already well informed on the content of sex-ed because some of the topics are already present in the biology school curriculum. The other two teachers had attended several trainings on topics that cover themes from sex education, but they did not participate in teacher training for sex-ed before.

All of the teachers agreed that they would be interested in teaching sex-ed to the students as a part of the school curriculum or as extracurricular activity. In particular, they have emphasized the importance of having training on sex-ed topics for teachers beforehand as well having adequate educational tools such as fliers, videos, podcasts, and a teacher’s book. All of teachers shared a strong view that the programme should be first approved by the parents so that they can be informed and give their consent to the content.

Two of the teachers stated that they did not have any conversation with the parents regarding sex-ed so far. However, they expressed their concern regarding having any conversation with the parents related to sex-ed since there are many prejudices and stereotypes about sex-ed in the country. The other teacher emphasized the importance of informing the parents regarding the importance of teaching the students information regarding unplanned pregnancy, sexually-transmitted diseases, and gender-based violence, because in this way, they will have more understanding regarding the importance of teaching the content. All of the teachers agreed that the dialogue with the families regarding sex-education is necessary for them in order to understand the need for sex-ed for their children.

#### *Pilot – Including the family in inclusive sex-ed guide for school*

The piloting of the “Including the family in inclusive sex-ed guide for school” in North Macedonia was organized in two separate workshops on two days with a duration of 8 hours each. The first piloting with the teachers and school educators (IO3/A6) was organized within the premises of KMOP Skopje office on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February from 09:30h to 17:30h. The group included 8 teachers and school staff (psychologists, pedagogists, special educators) from two general education schools and one special education school. The second piloting with families (IO3/A7) was organized within the premises of KMOP Skopje office on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February from 08:00h to 15:30h. The group included parents and one teacher that was also part of the workshop for teachers. After completing the training all of the participants provided feedback through evaluation questionnaires.

#### *Pilot implementation with teachers and school educators*

All of the teachers agreed that after the training the families will consider sex-ed programmes more important than before. Some of the teachers emphasized the importance of presenting and explaining the content to the parents adequately. While other participants stated that this activity was



a good way to see how sex-ed topics can be implemented with parents by taking into consideration the local culture and environment.

All of the teachers shared a strong view regarding the importance of the inclusion and the engagement of the families in all aspects of the implementation of the sex-ed. The teachers expressed their views regarding the role of the parents and their involvement in the whole process. Some of the teachers stated that since there are a lot of prejudices related to sex-ed, parents need to be prepared and well-educated on this topic beforehand. On the other hand, other participants stated that although the role of the parents is crucial when it comes to sex-ed, they did not have any conversation with parents related to sex-ed so far.

Overall, it can be concluded that teachers were very satisfied with the activities and the workshop. The majority of them agreed that the workshops were useful for them and that they have acquired information and tools that will help them when talking about sex-ed with their students. The teachers stated that the workshop met their expectations and they did not have any fears related to the topic, with an exception of one of the participants, who stated that they were generally concerned about the unknown content and topics. However, they were very enthusiastic and dedicated to the activities, enjoyed sharing and exchanging their experiences and challenges that they encountered. Of particular importance for teachers was the involvement, support and partnership with parents in order to be able to implement the program in schools.

#### *Pilot implementation with families*

All of the parents agreed about the importance of the sex-ed curriculum to be present in the school curriculum or at least to be introduced through various activities, programmes, or educational workshops.

In general, the parents do not have enough prior knowledge, especially about how to act in different situations that their children face, related to sex education. More background and information regarding the content of the sex-ed are needed for the parents, especially for the parents of children with special educational needs. All of the parents agreed that their involvement in the school and school activities of their children is needed.

The main problem that remains is that the majority of the parents do not trust teachers in teaching sex-ed at school nor that they believe that the teachers are well prepared and have the sufficient tools to teach sex-ed. The general view of the parents is that the teacher needs to be provided with training where they will be equipped with the necessary tools and support in order to be prepared to teach sex education programmes.

#### **Policy Recommendations**

Key policy recommendations for governments, civil society organisations, donors, and interested parties on improving the sexual and reproductive health education in a national context.

- Implement sex education curriculum program which is relevant, evidence-based and age-appropriate



- Implement policies that foster comprehensive approach and supportive environment for sexual health education
- Develop sex education curriculum which is culturally diverse and materials that are inclusive of ethnicity, race, language, gender identity, sexual orientation, different abilities
- Provide monitoring and evaluation mechanisms through action plans, questionnaires and other tools to ensure the implementation of the comprehensive sexuality education is adequate
- Equip the teachers with the needed knowledge and skills to deliver sexual health education by providing adequate trainings and support
- Engage parents, families and community members in the programmes of the sexual education
- Raise public awareness regarding the importance of sex education and familiarize the public with the content of the subject
- Build the competences of teachers to deliver comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in the school curriculum
- Maintain collaboration and involve the parents and families by having the right to contribute to their children's knowledge
- Provide sex-ed curriculum which is inclusive regarding the gender identity including the emotional, behavioural and cultural characteristics
- Establishing mechanisms for inclusion of the parents and families in the sex-education programme of their children

### Conclusion

To summarise, through the collaborative partnership, exchange of expertise and knowledge the partners have made great impact through the implementation of the project activities of the Included project. The use of the different techniques and approaches such as the use of role-play and theatre games developed through the Included project have proven to be effective ways of teaching through creative methods, especially for young adults with intellectual disabilities.

The involvement and collaboration between the students (including those with intellectual disabilities), teachers and school staff support, parents, guardians and families has proven to be effective, especially for implementation and monitoring of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in the school settings. It has also influenced raising awareness not just for students and teachers but also parents about the significance of sexual education and their involvement in the education of their children. The project contributed to teachers and educators acquiring new skills and knowledge needed to fully accomplish the task of delivering a holistic, healthy, inclusive, critical, and positive sexuality education, which truly puts the students' needs, rights and well-being at its centre.



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