

The right of children and young people to comprehensive sexual education is in danger

On Relationship and Sexuality Education in Slovakia

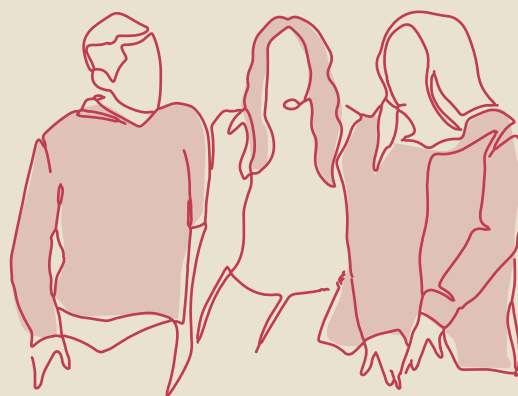
Comprehensive relationship and sexuality education (RSE) is one of the key ways of reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies. It helps young people make informed and responsible decisions concerning their health and sexuality. Currently, topics related to RSE are mainly taught within the cross-cutting subject called Education towards Marriage and Parenting. To some extent, they are also present in other subjects, such as civic education or ethics.

Regarding the teaching of RSE, Slovakia has repeatedly faced criticism from experts, as well as various human rights institutions such as the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child or the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

Qualitative research conducted by Freedom of Choice on teachers' experiences with teaching RSE confirms there are several problematic areas. This results in a situation when **the right of children and young people a good quality RSE is not fulfilled sufficiently.**

WHY DO WE NEED RELATIONSHIP AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION?

Children and young people deserve and have the right to be healthy, happy, and safe. Systematic and long-term comprehensive relationship and sexuality education equips young people with the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to make timely, responsible, and informed decisions about their relationships.



WHY DO WE NEED RELATIONSHIP AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION?

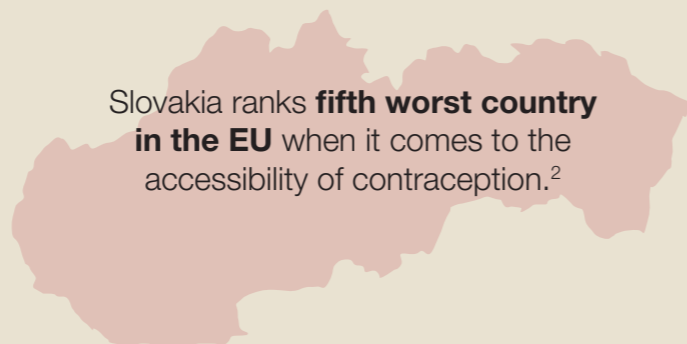


In Slovakia, one in every 38 girls aged 15 to 19 is pregnant.

Teenage pregnancies are 5 times more likely to occur compared to Finland, for instance.¹



Slovakia ranks **fifth worst country in the EU** when it comes to the accessibility of contraception.²



Every tenth woman has experienced **some type of sexual violence**.³



One in every five women aged 18 to 64 **has experienced intimate partner violence**.⁴



Approximately **10% of children and adolescents experienced someone asking them for intimate information online**, in the past year.⁵



Victims of sexual exploitation and grooming (a practice when usually an adult starts communication with a child or an adolescent with the intention of having sexual contact with them, often leading to exploitation or abuse) are overwhelmingly **girls aged 11 to 14**.⁶



As much as 26% of children and adolescents do not talk to anyone about their negative experiences online.⁷



12% of children **have encountered pornographic content** already at the age of 6. Most young people have an experience with porn between the ages of 12 to 14.⁸



WHAT IS COMPREHENSIVE RELATIONSHIP AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION?

Comprehensive relationship and sexuality education (RSE) deals with relationships, emotions, and the physical and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to equip young people with age-appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes that **will help them make responsible and informed decisions so they can have healthy, safe, and respectful relationships** (UNESCO).⁹

According to the World Health Organisation, studies in several European countries have shown that the **introduction of long-term nationwide programs on sexual education** has also led to:

- a decrease in the number of teenage pregnancies and abortions
- a decrease in sexually transmitted infections in young people aged 15 to 24
- a decrease in the occurrence of sexual abuse
- and to further positive developments¹⁰

THE PILLARS OF RELATIONSHIP AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION:



AGE ADEQUACY

Age adequacy, the content of the curriculum is adapted to the healthy psycho-sexual development of the individual.

OBJECTIVITY AND IMPARTIALITY

Objectivity and impartiality ensure that the content of RSE is backed by facts, evidence, and research.

ACTUALITY

Actuality of the information and the educational processes must always be based on the most up-to-date data, findings, and research.

RESPECT

Respect for diverse opinions, beliefs, and values.

INCLUSIVITY

Inclusivity, because every child is unique and has their own educational needs. The need for and commitment to non-discrimination on all grounds also emanates from international treaties (such as CEDAW) and the anti-discrimination law.

PROFESSIONALISM OF THE TEACHING PERSON

The professionalism of the teaching person assumes that the person who teaches RSE must have specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are clearly defined.

The World Health Organisation and UNESCO

RSE has its own, clearly defined requirements and didactic methods. It also places specific requirements on people who teach it. These requirements and procedures were developed by international authorities in the fields of health, education, and children's rights. They are defined by the standards created by UNESCO and the WHO as well as by other documents. For more information, please use the QR code:



WHAT KIND OF PROBLEMS DO WE EXPERIENCE IN SLOVAKIA?

The research conducted by Freedom of Choice has drawn attention to several problems that may have a negative impact on whether and what kind of education children and young people receive in this area.

The education on relationships and sexuality that pupils in Slovak schools receive greatly varies in both its scope and quality = pupils may not have access to adequate knowledge about sexuality and relationships.

WHY IS THAT?

- ✘ Teachers do not receive sufficient support and there is no educational system in place for teaching RSE in an appropriate manner. They mostly cited insufficient preparation at universities to teach this subject and a lack of opportunities to undergo further training.
- ✘ They are also missing teaching materials they could use directly in class. They either search for materials on their own or do not have capacity to do so at all.
- ✘ Textbooks for individual subjects do not cover all topics that should be taught.

“Teachers are not prepared for it. They are certainly not, because they have nowhere to acquire the education and knowledge required, about how to teach, what to teach, and what teaching methods should they apply.”

Teacher B

“I was thrown into the deep end and expected to swim.”

Teacher H

“Nothing at all is available on this topic. At the end of the day, you have to learn it all on your own.”

Teacher A

When describing why supporting teaching materials are necessary, teachers reported that having unified RSE teaching materials would contribute to the educational content being unified and of good quality. In practice, teaching materials would also take away some of the teachers' workload and save time during lessons. Moreover, these materials may serve as further help for parents.

WHY DO TEACHERS NEED MORE EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS?



- ✓ TO STANDARDIZE WHAT IS BEING TAUGHT
- ✓ TO GUARANTEE THE QUALITY OF THE EDUCATIONAL CONTENT
- ✓ TO SAVE TIME WHILE TEACHING
- ✓ TO REDUCE THE TEACHERS' WORKLOAD
- ✓ TO SUPPORT PARENTS

“

“How does it work? Well, it doesn't really. It does not work in any way, let's be honest about it.”

Teacher A

- ✘ Insufficient coordination when teaching the cross-cutting topic of RSE.

As it is a cross-cutting topic covered in different subjects, it is necessary for teachers of these subjects to actively coordinate their efforts. While this coordination does take place in some schools, in other schools it may be problematic or even entirely absent.

- ✘ The current syllabus for Education towards Marriage and parenting (MPE) does not sufficiently fulfill the needs of today's youth and does not meet expert standards.

There is not enough space dedicated to the teaching of topics related to RSE.

- ✘ In schools with higher allocation of lessons for subjects that include RSE/MPE, this can to some extent be dealt with through an adjustment of the curriculum - however, this depends on whether the individual teacher is interested in these issues.

- ✘ In some schools - secondary vocational schools in particular - subjects including the cross-cutting theme of MPE are entirely absent or there are very few allocated lessons in which this topic can be discussed.

SOLUTIONS



- ✓ Newly define high-quality educational content in line with international standards of relationship and sexuality education
- ✓ Support coherence and continuation in education
 - Instead of teaching this educational content within the cross-cutting topic of MPE, include it in other subjects and strengthen the coherence of related contents in these subjects (ethics, civic education, and others)
 - Create a separate subject with clearly defined educational content
 - If the cross-cutting aspect of RSE is kept in place, provide schools with sample materials on how to incorporate topics related to RSE into the school curriculum so that the content that pupils and students learn in different subjects is connected
- ✓ Revise existing methodological and teaching materials. Encourage the creation of high-quality methodological and teaching materials for topics related to RSE/MPE
- ✓ Support high-quality education of teachers in the field of RSE
- ✓ Ensure adequate opportunities for all pupils to have access to high-quality RSE

By ratifying several conventions on the protection of human rights, Slovakia has voluntarily committed itself to providing high-quality education on the topics of relationships and sexuality, so that the rights to health and education of Slovak citizens can be fulfilled. UN monitoring bodies keep record of how Slovakia honors its commitments when it comes to implementing high-quality relationship and sexuality education.

High-quality relationship and sexuality education is a key tool for preventing unwanted pregnancies.

Let Slovakia be a country that cares.
Women's health and lives are at stake.

#CaringCountry
#Women'sHealth

GIVEN THE SITUATION, THE UN APPEALS TO SLOVAKIA TO:



- ensure that education about sexual and reproductive health and related rights becomes part of standard school curricula. This education must be age-appropriate, based on scientific facts and international human rights standards.
- without delay adopt and implement a comprehensive program dealing with sexual and reproductive health and rights that complies with international human rights and the World Health Organisation's standards.
- allocate human, technical, and financial resources and instruments to implement this program and ensure that there are qualified and skilled educators
- make sure that organizations dedicated to protecting women's rights - especially those dealing with sexual and reproductive health and rights of women - freely, actively, and meaningfully participate in the creation, implementation, and monitoring of this program
- adopt effective measures to broaden access to affordable contraception, including educating the public and improving their knowledge about available forms of contraception



InTYMYta (formerly The Society for Planned Parenthood) has for more than 30 years provided adequate, high-quality, comprehensive relationship and sexuality education as well as awareness raising related to sexual and reproductive health.

InTYMYta offers inclusive education for children, youth, parents, adults, teachers, companies, doctors and other groups. InTYMYta's vision is a healthy, just, and respectful society for everyone, with the help of relationship and sexuality education.

This document was created based on research results conducted by Freedom of Choice and other expert materials:

Alexandra Ostretágová, Dagmar Horná, Adriana Mesochoritsová: **Sexuálna výchova – sondy do možnosti zlepšenia jej výučby v Slovenskej republike, republike** (Sexual education - exploring opportunities for improvement in Slovakia). 2021. Možnosť voľby;

The research report available HERE:

<http://moznostvolby.sk/sexualna-vychova-sondy-do-moznosti-zlepsenia-jej-vyucby-v-slovenskej-republike/>

A summary of the main findings and recommendations can be found HERE:

<http://moznostvolby.sk/hlavne-zistenia-a-odporucania/>

¹ WORLD BANK. Adolescent fertility rates (births per 1000 women ages 15-19). *The World Bank Data* [online]. 2019 [cit. 2022-04-21]. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.ADO.TFRT?end=2019&locations=SK&start=1960&view=chart>

² EPF. Contraception Policy Atlas Europe. *EPF* [online]. 2022 [cit. 2022-04-21]. Available at: https://www.epfweb.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/CCceptionInfoA3_EN%202022%20v10.pdf

³ OČENÁŠOVÁ, Zuzana a Peter MICHALÍK. Sexuálne násilie na ženách – správa z reprezentatívneho výskumu. (Sexual violence against women - representative research report) Bratislava, 2017. Inštitút pre výskum práce a rodiny.

⁴ Ministerstvo práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny SR. *Národný akčný plán na prevenciu a elimináciu násillia na ženách na roky 2014 - 2019*. (Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic: *National action plan to prevent and eliminate violence against women for 2014-2019*) Bratislava, 2013. ISBN 978-80-89125-17-3. Also available at: https://www.gender.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/NAP_nasilie_print.pdf

⁵ Izrael, P., Holdoš J., Ďurka R., Hasák M.. *Správa z výskumu EU KIDS ONLINE IV Slovensko. Národný projekt Podpora ochrany detí pred násillím*. (EU KIDS ONLINE IV Slovakia research report. *National project Promoting the protection of children from violence.*) 2020. Available at: http://www.ku.sk/images/dokumenty/ff/Sprava_z_vyskumu__EU_Kids_Online_Slovensko_2018_-_2020.pdf

⁶ CEOP. *Threat Assessment of Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*. 2013. Available at: https://www.norfolkscb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/CEOP_Threat-Assessment_CSE_JUN2013.pdf

⁷ Izrael, P., Holdoš J., Ďurka R., Hasák M.. *Správa z výskumu EU KIDS ONLINE IV Slovensko. Národný projekt Podpora ochrany detí pred násillím*. (EU KIDS ONLINE IV Slovakia research report. *National project Promoting the protection of children from violence.*) 2020. Available at: http://www.ku.sk/images/dokumenty/ff/Sprava_z_vyskumu__EU_Kids_Online_Slovensko_2018_-_2020.pdf

⁸ SEJBALOVÁ, MUDr. Petra a MUDr. Jana MARTINCOVÁ. *Průzkum na téma: Děti ohrožené pornografií a on-line sexuálními agresory* [online]. (Survey on the issue: *Children threatened by pornography and sexual predators online*) 2021 [cit. 2022-04-21]. Available at: doi:10.36290/psy.2021.040

⁹ International technical guidance on sexuality education an evidence-informed approach <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/ITGSE.pdf>

¹⁰ World Health Organization, regional office for Europe, and Federal Centre for Health Education

¹¹ Modeled by InTYMYta (formerly The Society for Planned Parenthood)

Freedom of Choice (Možnosť voľby, 2001) belongs to the most active advocacy organizations protecting reproductive rights and health. Since its establishment in 2001, it has systematically advocated for women's human rights. Besides reproductive health and justice, it is also dedicated to the prevention of gender-based violence and with the implementation of gender perspectives in public policies.

We respond to political decisions that have discriminatory effects and propose legislative changes: we comment on legislative proposals, organize public comments and protests. We conduct research, monitor the current situation, and inform the public as well as the international community. We engage in dialogue with state actors, public institutions and politicians. At the same time, we are actively engaged in participatory bodies (e.g. The Slovak Council for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality).

In order to mobilize as many people as possible for the defense of human rights and gender equality, we organize experiential hands-on gender equality training sessions.

Our organization has extensive experience providing gender equality education for adults. We have a wide range of educational programs aimed at various target groups, including politicians. In its work, Freedom of Choice consistently relies on international human rights conventions and advocates for solutions to achieve gender equality and the protection of human rights.

Our goal is for Slovakia to be a just and caring country, where all of us can live a dignified life.



You can also support our work financially.
We are thankful and deeply appreciate every contribution

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FREEDOM OF CHOICE

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