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Sexuality Education in Schools – the challenges, Dhianaraj Chetty, UNESCO

1. Globally, over the past 5-6 years sexuality education has gained widespread acceptance in education and health. UNESCO led the work by a number of UN agencies on sexuality education as a platform for HIV prevention culminating in the publication of the *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education* in 2009. UNESCO’s focus is on school based sexuality education, whilst recognizing the value of non-formal and out of school programming.
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001832/183281e.pdf>
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001832/183281s.pdf>
2. UNESCO’s approach to sexuality education still has HIV as a focus but it has expanded since 2009 to include a wider range of sexual and reproductive health issues affecting adolescents and young people – including early and unintended pregnancy, gender-based violence (including homophobic bullying in education), puberty education etc.
3. We experienced some early lessons in the political sensitivity of sexuality education. WHO Europe has recently experienced a similar backlash to its new *Implementation Guidelines on Sexuality Education* in Europe. <http://fissonline.it/pdf/Guidance%20for%20implementation.pdf>
4. The issues that typically set off a reaction are now familiar and are likely to include:
 - a. a misconception that knowledge of sexuality necessarily leads to early sexual initiation
 - b. age appropriateness (when to start sexuality education and why)
 - c. sexual pleasure
 - d. sexual diversity (LGBT and gender non-conforming children/young people)
 - e. abortion
 - f. condoms.
5. Spain has a vibrant community of experts and practitioners working in sexuality education and they are an important resource for any discussion about violence and sexual abuse of children. Education has a key role to play, particularly teachers who are trusted sources of support for children and young people.
6. Sexuality education is also a critical means of delivering knowledge and skills to children and young people related to recognizing, preventing and responding to all forms of violence, including sexual abuse. UNESCO’s recent work is focused particularly on gender-based violence and homophobic bullying in the school context – an issue which has generated a lot of interest globally and which is being adopted as the basis for programmatic responses.
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002164/216493e.pdf>
7. Gender-based violence in schools, including violence towards gender non-conforming students or perceived as such, undermines the right to quality education in a safe environment and efforts to achieve education for all children and young people. *It’s about the right to education.*

One of the best strategies to prevent and address gender-based violence in schools, including violence towards gender non-conforming students, is to provide children and young people and educators with evidence-based information that addresses misconceptions and prejudices about gender roles, gender expression and identity, and links with sexuality and sexual health.