

# Objective 1: Freedom from violence for all children



## Session on protecting children from violence through age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education

### Mid-Term Review Conference for the Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027)



Building a Europe  
for and with children  
Construire une Europe  
pour et avec les enfants



PRÉSIDENTIE DU / PRESIDENCY OF  
**LUXEMBOURG**  
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE / COUNCIL OF EUROPE  
11/2024 - 05/2025



# Protecting children from violence through age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education

***What if a comprehensive and age-appropriate sexuality education was the key to building a more respectful and informed society, where violence prevention starts with self-awareness and respect for others?***

What is age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education? Sometimes referred to as relationships, health and sex education, or affective and sexual life education, it aims at equipping children and young people with essential knowledge and skills to understand the physical, emotional, and social aspects of sexuality, with an emphasis on respect for oneself and others.

Preventing and protecting children from violence, including sexual violence and harmful behaviours, is the first objective of the current [Strategy for the Rights of the Child \(2022-2027\)](#).<sup>1</sup> Stirred by existing norms and tools, Council of Europe member states have underlined the importance of age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education as a tool to prevent and protect children from violence.

Work is underway to identify the essential elements of an education curriculum which would provide children with age-appropriate information about the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse. Such education aims to empower children, enhance their awareness and promote their ability to protect themselves, hence fulfilling the obligation of article 6 of the [Lanzarote Convention](#).<sup>2</sup> European-wide standards calling states to integrate comprehensive sexuality education into schools and community programmes would be a step towards protecting children more effectively from risks of abuse and harmful online content and ensuring that they can navigate their own experiences safely.

A [feasibility study on age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education to strengthen responses for – inter alia – preventing and combating violence, including risky or harmful sexual behaviour by children](#)<sup>3</sup> paved the way for the future adoption of this Recommendation. It underlined how comprehensive sexuality education can prevent gender-based and sexual violence and other forms of harmful behaviour against children. It highlights the importance of building healthy and respectful future relationships between children, their peers, parents, communities and broader society.

The [updated study on sexual violence and harmful sexual behaviour displayed by children: Nature, causes, consequences and responses](#)<sup>4</sup> also underlines “The need for education for both children and parents on these issues” and mainly recommends “primary, secondary and tertiary prevention approaches with wide awareness-raising and educational programmes”.

A comprehensive sexuality education fosters inclusivity and acceptance, including against children with specific vulnerabilities and prevents discrimination based on sexual orientation,

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<sup>1</sup> Council of Europe's Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027)

<sup>2</sup> Article 6 of the Lanzarote Convention requires Parties to provide children with age-appropriate information about the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse and the means to protect themselves.

<sup>3</sup> Campbell M, Daly A, O'Sullivan C, *Feasibility study on age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education*, Council of Europe, ENF-VAE, 5 July 2024

<sup>4</sup> Hackett S, *Sexual violence and harmful sexual behaviour displayed by children: Nature, causes, consequences and responses*, Council of Europe, ENF-VAE, 23 October 2024

gender identity and expression and sex characteristics. In a constantly evolving society, particularly in terms of technology, comprehensive sexuality education also helps children in countering misinformation, including those initiated from online sources and pornography.

## Aim of the Session

This session aims at contributing to shaping a [Draft Recommendation on age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education to strengthen responses for inter-alia preventing and combating violence against children](#) by consulting key stakeholders, including children, on the essential elements of an age-appropriate comprehensive education.

The primary goal is to gather a variety of perspectives, experiences, and expertise to contribute to and enrich the decision-making process. While looking at the current state of play, key speakers and participants will be invited to exchange practices, successes, existing and emerging challenges and share their views on what an inclusive and effective sexuality education curriculum, adapted to the maturity of the children, should contain.

## Practical information

<b>Session</b>	<b>Protecting children from violence through comprehensive sexuality education</b>
<b>Strategic objective</b>	Objective 1 - Freedom from violence for all children
<b>Day &amp; time</b>	Thursday 3 April, 14:30 - 17:00
<b>Venue</b>	Agora Building, Council of Europe
<b>Room</b>	G03 – in presence only
<b>Languages</b>	English, French, Italian

## Programme

14:30	<b>Moderation:</b> <i>Agnes Von Maravić, Head of the Children's Rights division</i>
14:40	<p><b>I. Setting the scene</b></p> <p><i>Mária Vargová, Chair of the Council of Europe Committee on prevention of violence, CDENF representative of Slovakia</i></p>
15:00	<p><b>II. Experiences, best practices and challenges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>How</b> can comprehensive sexuality education protect children from violence and sexual abuse? <i>Sara Alaoui, Founder and Director of The Safe Space Club, Co-founder and President of The Global Collaborative</i></li> <li>• <b>Why and when</b> is comprehensive sexuality education appropriate? Sharing the classroom experience of a primary-school teacher? <i>Lolita Rive, Teacher and journalist</i></li> <li>• <b>What</b> do young people think? <i>Listening to the views of the young delegates, assisted by Elina Stenvall, coordinator of children's consultations</i></li> </ul>
16:00	<b>Coffee break</b>
16:15	<p><b>III. Stakeholders' perspectives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Moderation</b> by young delegates and <i>Meghan Campbell, Independent Consultant to the Council of Europe on comprehensive sexuality education</i></li> <li>• <b>Exchange with stakeholders:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe:</b> <i>Elena Bonetti (Italy), Joseph O'Reilly (Ireland), Georgios Stamatidis (Greece), Yuliia Ovchynnykova (Ukraine).</i></li> <li>- <b>Government representatives:</b> <i>Marjo Malja (member of the Committee on prevention of violence and Finnish CDENF representative), Lorna Muscat (Maltese representative on the Lanzarote Committee)</i></li> <li>- <b>Scholars and researchers:</b> <i>Helen Beckett (Professor of Social Policy and Social Work, University of Central Lancashire, UK, co-author of "<a href="#">they believe this</a>"), Simon Hackett (Professor, Durham University, UK, author of the <a href="#">study on sexual violence and harmful sexual behaviour displayed by children</a>)</i></li> <li>- <b>Council of Europe bodies and projects:</b> <a href="#">Gender equality</a>, <a href="#">Violence against women</a>, <a href="#">Protecting children in sport</a>, <a href="#">SOGIESC</a></li> <li>- <b>Ombudspersons for children:</b> <i>Charles Schmit (Okaju Luxembourg)</i></li> <li>- <b>Civil society representatives:</b> <i>Lauren Holdup (Planning familial, France) .../...</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
17:00	<b>End of the session</b>