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Committee of experts on the Prevention of Violence (ENF-VAE)

ENF-VAE: Resources and excerpts of relevant international and European instruments on age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education

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Resources and compilation of excerpts on age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education

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Resources and compilation of excerpts on age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education

I. Council of Europe

A. *Caselaw*

a. *European Court of Human Rights*

[KJELDSEN, BUSK MADSEN AND PEDERSEN v. DENMARK, Application Nos. 5095/71, 5920/72, 5926/72, Judgment Date: 07/12/1976.](#)

[Folgerø and Others v. Norway, Application no. 15472/02, Judgment Date: 29/06/2007.](#)

[DOJAN AND OTHERS v. GERMANY, Application Nos. 319/08, 2455/08, 7908/10, 8152/10, 8155/10, Decision Date: 13/09/2011.](#)

[A.R. et L.R. c. SUISSE, Application No. 22338/15, Decision Date: 19/12/2017.](#)

[Macatė v. Lithuania \[GC\] – Application No. 61435/19, 23/1/2023.](#)

b. *European Committee of Social Rights*

Key words “sexuality education”, “health education” an “sex education” appear in the following decisions of the ESRC:

[Decisions on the merits: Federation of Catholic Families in Europe \(FAFCE\) v. Sweden, Complaint No. 99/2013, Decision on the merits 17 March 2015;](#)

[Decision on the merits: International Planned Parenthood Federation - European Network \(IPPF EN\) v. Italy, Complaint No. 87/2012, Decision on the merits 10 September 2013.](#)

However, these decisions are mainly about abortion services and doesn't provide substantive guidance relevant to sexuality education.

In the decision of [International Centre for the Legal Protection of Human Rights \(INTERIGHTS\) v. Croatia, Complaint No. 45/2007, Decision on the merits of 30 March 2009.](#)

Para. 46 “...Under Article 11 paragraph 2 of the European Social Charter, States must provide education and aim to raise public awareness in respect of health-related matters, including sexual and reproductive health. The European Committee of Social Rights understands sexual and reproductive health education as a process aimed at developing the capacity of children and young people to understand their sexuality in its biological, psychological, socio-cultural and reproductive dimensions, which will enable them to make responsible decisions about sexual and reproductive health behaviour.” According to the Committee, States must ensure that:

- sexual and reproductive health education forms part of the ordinary school curriculum,

- the education provided is adequate in quantitative terms, i.e. in respect of the time and other resources devoted to it (teachers, teacher training, teaching materials, etc.),
- the form and substance of the education, including curricula and teaching methods, are relevant, culturally appropriate and of sufficient quality, in particular that it is objective, based on contemporary scientific evidence and does not involve censoring, withholding or intentionally misrepresenting information, for example as regards contraception and different means of maintaining sexual and reproductive health,
- a procedure is in place for monitoring and evaluating the education with a view to effectively meeting the above requirements.

B. Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

[Rec. 1632 Teenagers in distress: a social and health-based approach to youth malaise, 25/11/2003.](#)

10. The Assembly therefore recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite the member states:

10.4. to devise or set up:

b. health education programmes, backed by better training for teaching and medical staff, to promote general health, mental health and sexual health;

[Rec. 1959 Preventive health care policies in the Council of Europe member states, 28/01/2011.](#)

9.5. promote a comprehensive sex and health education, including abstinence, to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases;

[Res. 2284 Addressing the health needs of adolescents in Europe, 24/05/2019.](#)

5. In the light of the above, the Parliamentary Assembly recommends that the Council of Europe member States:

5.5. with respect to schools and colleges:

5.5.2. ensure that the school and college curriculum includes mandatory personal, social and health education, including comprehensive sexuality education, so as to empower adolescents to make informed choices;

[Res. 2330 Addressing sexual violence against children: stepping up action and co-operation in Europe, 26/06/2020.](#)

6. To this end, the Assembly urges member States:

6.4. with respect to prevention, to:

6.4.2. support comprehensive and appropriate sexuality and relationship education in schools from an early age and as part of lifelong learning programmes, including respectful relationship building and practical guidance on how individuals may protect themselves against and report sexual violence;

[Res. 2331 Empowering women: promoting access to contraception in Europe, 26/06/2020.](#)

7. The Assembly is convinced that comprehensive sexuality education in schools at all levels is an indispensable part of the education of children and young people. It is an investment in a healthier society that improves the understanding of individual freedoms and boundaries in the area of sexuality. It contributes to avoiding early and unintended pregnancies; increasing the use of modern contraception; preventing sexually transmitted diseases; improving the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary for young people's well-being; promoting more equitable social and gender norms; preventing sexual, gender-based and intimate partner violence; promoting self-determination, empowerment, equality, non-discrimination and respect for diversity.

10. In the light of the above considerations, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member and observer States, as well as those enjoying observer or partner for democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly, to:

10.1. as regards sexuality education, information and awareness raising:

10.1.1. introduce comprehensive sexuality education as part of all school curricula and ensure that age-appropriate sexuality education is mandatory for all pupils, and that children cannot be withdrawn from it. This education should be evidence based and scientifically accurate, and address issues including the prevention of early pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases; the promotion of gender equality; relationships; consent; prevention of and protection from sexual, gender-based and intimate partner violence; gender norms; sexual orientation; gender identity and expression; and sex characteristics;

10.1.2. review textbooks used in sexuality education curricula and ensure that their contents and illustrations are scientifically accurate;

10.1.3. provide teachers, school doctors and school nurses with specific training and resources on comprehensive sexuality education;

10.1.4. conduct information and awareness-raising campaigns on sexual and reproductive health and rights, including comprehensive information on all modern contraceptive methods, and all other issues covered by comprehensive sexuality education in schools, targeting young people in and out of school, parents and the general public, through internet and social media as well as traditional media, such as the press, radio and television, including public television;

10.1.5. set up and advertise information websites providing comprehensive, fact-based information on contraception, including all types of modern contraceptive methods, their cost and where they can be obtained. Information should also be accessible for people living in rural and remote areas, those belonging to language minorities, persons with disabilities and migrants;

[Res. 2412 Gender aspects and human rights implications of pornography, 26/11/2021.](#)

2. Research shows that pornography contributes to shaping people's mindsets on sexuality and on their perceptions of gender roles, often engendering and perpetuating stereotypes and thereby undermining gender equality and women's self-determination by conveying an image of women as subordinate to men and as objects, and trivialising violence against women. Young people are particularly exposed to this risk, as they rely on pornography as a source of information about sexuality in the absence of unbiased, reliable information caused by insufficient comprehensive sexuality education in school curriculums.

8. The Assembly considers that comprehensive sexuality education is a crucial part of young people's preparation for adult life. It should be part of all school curriculums and be age-

appropriate, medically accurate and evidence-based. Sexuality education should cover issues such as contraception and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, gender equality, gender norms and stereotypes, prevention of and protection from sexual, gender-based and intimate partner violence, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, and self-determination and consent in relationships and personal interaction.

9. Comprehensive sexuality education should be the main source of information on sexuality for young people, which would prevent the spread of unreliable and potentially harmful information by other sources such as pornography. Education in media literacy, aimed at improving young people's interpretation skills and the understanding of written and audiovisual material, may also help to prevent the risk of harmful effects of pornography on the image of women.

10. In light of these considerations, the Assembly calls on member and observer States, as well as partners for democracy:

10.1. to fully enforce Committee of Ministers Recommendations CM/Rec(2019)1 on preventing and combating sexism and CM/Rec(2013)1 on gender equality and media;

10.2. as regards education, information and awareness raising, to:

10.2.1. ensure that age-appropriate, scientifically accurate, comprehensive sexuality education is part of all school curriculums and mandatory for all pupils, and that children cannot be exempted from it. Sexuality education programmes should define, identify and explain the nature of pornography and specify its health, ethical, legal and gender equality implications. They should also highlight that pornography cannot replace reliable sources of information on sexuality and that it may convey inaccurate messages on gender roles, thereby perpetuating gender stereotypes and leading to sexual violence and other forms of gender-based violence;

10.2.2. introduce out-of-school comprehensive sexuality education programmes, similar in content to in-school programmes but open to school-age children who do not attend school and young people above compulsory school age;

10.2.3. promote media literacy as part of school and out-of-school educational activities and ensure that it covers gender issues including gender stereotypes, sexism and the trivialisation of gender-based violence portrayed in pornography, advertising, entertainment and the media in general;

10.2.4. introduce warning label systems requiring pornographic websites to display a notice warning about the potential harm from pornography use, similar to the warning labels used for alcohol, smoking or online gambling;

10.2.5. consider introducing measures and tools to enhance the skills of parents to deal with cybersexism and internet pornography, as recommended in Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1;

[Res. 2417 Combating rising hate against LGBTI people in Europe, 25/01/2022.](#)

12. The Assembly calls on member States to refrain from enacting legislation or adopting constitutional amendments that are contrary to the rights of LGBTI people, and to repeal any such provisions already in force. It urges in particular:

12.1. the Hungarian authorities to repeal with immediate effect all the measures adopted in May 2020, December 2020 and June 2021 that prevent individuals who need it from obtaining the legal recognition of their gender identity, preclude children from obtaining recognition of their gender identity when it is different from the sex assigned to them at birth, bar adoption by anyone other than married heterosexual couples, block access to comprehensive sexuality

education and ban the portrayal of trans identities and homosexuality. As stated in Opinion No. 1059/2021 of the Venice Commission, these amendments “contribute to creating a threatening environment where LGBTQI children can be subject to health-related risks, bullying and harassment”;

[Res. 2418 Alleged violations of the rights of LGBTI people in the Southern Caucasus, 25/01/2022.](#)

9. In the light of the foregoing, the Assembly invites the authorities in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia to:

9.8. guarantee that comprehensive sexuality education is taught in schools and ensure that it addresses the issues of gender identity and sexual orientation, taking an inclusive approach;

[Rec. 2225 For an assessment of the means and provisions to combat children's exposure to pornographic content, 25/04/2022.](#)

3. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

3.1.3. providing advice on age-appropriate and comprehensive sexuality education, including pornography harm awareness, at all levels of education;

[Res. 2429 For an assessment of the means and provisions to combat children's exposure to pornographic content, 25/04/2022.](#)

4. The Assembly notes with concern that, in recent decades, the development of information and communication technologies has facilitated easy access to virtually unlimited amounts of pornographic content for all internet users, including children. Although very few people would argue that it is acceptable for children to have access to pornography, the existing means and provisions fail to protect children from harmful content. Furthermore, many children go looking for information about sexuality in the absence of age-appropriate and comprehensive sexuality education provided by parents or schools, and they arrive unwittingly on pornographic sites.

6.8. ensure that education programmes at all levels promote respect for human dignity, physical integrity and gender equality; increase parents' and families' awareness of the need to educate their children about sexuality in a comprehensive and age-appropriate manner; equip children with the skills required for navigating the digital space safely and responsibly; introduce or further strengthen age-appropriate and comprehensive sexuality and relationship education in schools; and ensure that such education programmes are delivered in an age-appropriate manner by duly trained professionals, are conducted separately with boys and girls when appropriate, meet children's needs and are developed with their participation;

[Res. 2439 Access to abortion in Europe: stopping anti-choice harassment, 31/05/2022.](#)

10.4. empower people to make informed choices by ensuring that evidence-based, medically accurate, non-judgmental information about abortion care is available online and offline, notably through information campaigns and comprehensive sexuality education; ensure that comprehensive sexuality education is provided in all schools; curriculums should cover sexual and reproductive health and rights, including contraception and abortion;

[Resolution 2480\(2023\) The role and responsibility of men and boys in stopping gender-based violence against women and girls , 25/01/2023.](#)

With regard to preventing and combating gender-based stereotypes, the Assembly calls on these States to:

9.3 ensure the provision of comprehensive sexuality education that includes discussions on gender-based stereotypes, the meaning of consent and respect in intimate relationships;

[Improving access to sexual and reproductive healthcare through innovative approaches Adopted report](#) in January 2023.

9. The Assembly reiterates that comprehensive sexuality education is crucial for preparing young people for adult life. Age-appropriate, medically accurate and evidence-based sexuality education should be a mandatory part of school curriculums at all levels and accessible to all young people, including outside of schools, also with the help of digital technologies. Comprehensive sexuality education should cover issues such as contraception and the prevention of sexually transmitted infections; gender equality, gender norms and stereotypes; prevention of and protection from sexual, gender-based and domestic violence; sexual orientation and gender identity and expression; self-determination and consent in relationships; and personal interaction. As a necessary tool for learning how to practise one's self-determination and bodily autonomy, and for making informed choices on one's sexuality, comprehensive sexuality education is a right that should be recognised for all.

10. In the light of these considerations, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member and observer States, as well as on States whose parliaments enjoy observer or partner for democracy status with the Assembly to:

10.11 ensure access to comprehensive sexuality education by making evidence-based, age-appropriate sexuality education mandatory and part of school curriculums at all levels and using digital technologies to provide such education;

10.12 conduct awareness-raising, information and education activities, including online, targeting the general public and covering the same areas as those addressed by comprehensive sexuality education in schools;

10.17 encourage media, both traditional and online, including social media, to convey accurate, evidence-based information on sexuality and gender issues, including contraception, abortion, consent, and sexual and gender-based violence.

C. The Council of Europe Commissioner of Human Rights

Blog: [Dunja Mijatović: The Commissioner's Human Rights Comments: Comprehensive sexuality education protects children and helps build a safer, inclusive society; 21/07/2020.](#)

D. Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (Lanzarote Convention)

[Article 6 of the Lanzarote Convention](#) Education for children

Each Party shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that children, during primary and secondary education, receive information on the risks of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, as well as on the means to protect themselves, adapted to their evolving capacity. This information, provided in collaboration with parents, where appropriate, shall be

given within a more general context of information on sexuality and shall pay special attention to situations of risk, especially those involving the use of new information and communication technologies.

[2nd Implementation Report on Protection of Children Against Sexual Abuse in The Circle of Trust; 31 January 2018.](#)

Para.5 - The Committee thus underlines that it is important to provide information on the risks of child sexual abuse, including within the circle of trust, within the context of general sexuality education at school. It also underlines that parents and adults assuming parental responsibilities should be further involved in awareness raising initiatives on the protection of children against sexual abuse.

See further **paragraphs 49-52** on several country practices.

Recommendation as to steps to be taken to improve the effective implementation of the Lanzarote Convention

The Lanzarote Committee considers that those Parties that are not doing so yet, should provide information on the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse within the general context of sexuality education. (R12)

[Implementation Report The Protection Of Children Against Sexual Exploitation And Sexual Abuse Facilitated By Information And Communication Technologies \(ICTs\) Addressing The Challenges Raised By Child Self-Generated Sexual Images and/or Videos; 10 March 2018.](#)

Recommendation as to steps to be taken to improve the effective implementation of the Lanzarote Convention

Recommendation IX-7

The Lanzarote Committee invites those Parties that are not already doing so, to provide information to children on the risks of child sexual exploitation and abuse facilitated by ICTs, including as regards child self-generated sexual images and/or videos, within a more general context of sexuality education.

E. Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)

[Article 14](#) of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)

1 Parties shall take, where appropriate, the necessary steps to include teaching material on issues such as equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect, non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships, gender-based violence against women and the right to personal integrity, adapted to the evolving capacity of learners, in formal curricula and at all levels of education.

2 Parties shall take the necessary steps to promote the principles referred to in paragraph 1 in informal educational facilities, as well as in sports, cultural and leisure facilities and the media.

[Explanatory Report to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#)

Member States are required to design teaching material for primary, secondary, and tertiary education to promote values such as gender equality, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect in interpersonal relationships and non-violence. Member States are under obligation to promote these values in formal and informal education facilities as well as any sports, cultural and leisure facilities as well as the media. To meet their obligations in formal education settings, Member States should introduce teaching materials in the formal curriculum that, where appropriate, all teachers have access to and required or requested to use in class.¹

[Midterm Horizontal Review of GREVIO baseline evaluation reports, Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, February 2022](#)

GREVIO states that sexuality education for all children in schools is an indispensable component of right to education and health, it can provide a means to address some of the values covered in Article 14 and is essential to guarantee women's sexual and reproductive rights. The values listed in Article 14 of the Istanbul Convention fall within the scope of age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education.² Therefore, it is not sufficient for Member States to provide a sex education with a limited scope to fulfil their international obligations, and age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education must be provided.

[GREVIO Report on Poland](#)

85. The importance of comprehensive sexuality education for girls and boys, including the teaching of notions such as consent and personal boundaries, has been expressed by different intergovernmental organisations and bodies, and the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 to member states on preventing and combating sexism calls for age-appropriate, evidence-based and scientifically accurate and comprehensive sex and sexuality education to be incorporated into school curricula.

Publications:

[Preventing Violence Against Women Through Formal and Informal Education: Article 14 of the Istanbul Convention; A collection of papers on the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence; Council of Europe; March 2022.](#)

F. Gender Equality Commission

[Recommendation CM/Rec\(2022\)17 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on protecting the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls](#)

14. To empower migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls and enable them to access their rights, they should be provided with relevant and accessible information and advice in a way and in a language that they can understand, covering, at least:

¹ [Explanatory Report to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#), para.95.

² [Midterm Horizontal Review of GREVIO baseline evaluation reports, Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, February 2022](#), para.164.

14.4. any available and accessible public services in the host country, notably healthcare including mental health, sexual and reproductive health and rights, age-appropriate and comprehensive sexuality education, psychosocial support, education, training in languages and digital technology, vocational training, integration programmes, housing and employment.

[Recommendation CM/Rec\(2019\)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on preventing and combating sexism](#), II.G.6.

With regards to teaching methodology, tools and curricula:

II.G.6. Produce guidelines to ensure the integration of gender equality, non-discrimination and human rights teaching methodologies and tools into curricula at all levels of education, both public and private, from early childhood. This includes education for private life, in order to encourage children to be self-reliant and enhance responsibility in their relationships and behaviour – including consent and personal boundaries. Curricula should contain age-appropriate, evidence-based and scientifically accurate and comprehensive sex and sexuality education for girls and boys. The curricula should also cover intersecting forms of sexism, based for example on migrant status or disability.

G. Education

Council of Europe training programme for education professionals, the Pestalozzi Programme

[Module A of “Sex/sexuality education – Personal development, prevention of discrimination and violence \(SEXEDU\)”](#)

II. United Nations Documents

A. *UN Committee on the Rights of the Child*

[General Comment No.4 \(2003\), CRC/C/GC/4, Adolescent health and development in the context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child underlines the importance of appropriate education for the current and future health and development of adolescents and urges States parties initiate and support measures, attitudes and activities that promote healthy behaviour by including relevant topics in school curricula.³ According to the Committee, it is the obligation of States parties to ensure that all adolescent girls and boys, both in and out of school, are provided with accurate and appropriate information on how to protect their health and development, including skills for dealing with particular social situations such as safe and respectful social and sexual behaviours, interpersonal communication, decision-making, and coping with stress and conflict.⁴

³ [General Comment No.4 \(2003\), CRC/C/GC/4, Adolescent health and development in the context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), para.17.

⁴ [General Comment No.4 \(2003\), CRC/C/GC/4, Adolescent health and development in the context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), para.26, 27.

[General comment No. 13 \(2011\), CRC/C/GC/13, The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence](#)

According to Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, States parties are under obligation to take all appropriate measures, including educational measures, to protect the child from all forms of violence. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child states that educational measures should address attitudes, traditions, customs and behavioural practices which condone and promote violence against children. States parties are therefore obligated to provide accurate, accessible and age-appropriate information and empowerment to children about life skills, self-protection and all relevant risks, including bullying and online risks, through school curriculum and in other ways to fulfil their obligations.⁵ (although not directly mentioning sexuality education, the referred content falls under the scope of the comprehensive sexuality education definition)

[General Comment No. 15 \(2013\), CRC/C/GC/15, on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health \(art. 24\)](#)

According to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, States parties should review and consider allowing children to consent to certain medical treatments and interventions without the permission of a parent, caregiver, or guardian in accordance with their evolving capacities; including education and guidance on sexual health, contraception and safe abortion.⁶ Sexual and reproductive health education should include self-awareness and knowledge about the body, including anatomical, physiological, and emotional aspects, and should be accessible to all children, girls and boys. It should include content related to sexual health and well-being, such as information about body changes and maturation processes, and designed in a manner through which children are able to gain knowledge regarding reproductive health and the prevention of gender-based violence, and adopt responsible sexual behaviour.⁷

[General comment No. 20 \(2016\), CRC/C/GC/20, on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence](#)

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child urges States to ensure access to free, confidential, adolescent-responsive and non-discriminatory sexual and reproductive health information and education for all adolescents, available both online and in person. The Committee underlines that lack of access to such services contributes to adolescent girls being the group most at risk of dying or suffering serious or lifelong injuries in pregnancy and childbirth.⁸ Additionally, the Committee highlights that adolescents with disabilities and adolescents who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex are commonly denied access to sexual and reproductive health information.⁹ Accordingly, age-appropriate, comprehensive and inclusive sexual and reproductive health education, based on scientific evidence and human rights standards and developed with adolescents, should be part of the mandatory school curriculum and reach out-of-school adolescents. Attention should be given to gender equality, sexual diversity, sexual and reproductive health rights, responsible

⁵ [General comment No. 13 \(2011\), CRC/C/GC/13, The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence](#), para.44.

⁶ [General Comment No. 15 \(2013\), CRC/C/GC/15, on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health \(art. 24\)](#), para.31.

⁷ [General Comment No. 15 \(2013\), CRC/C/GC/15, on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health \(art. 24\)](#), para.60.

⁸ [General comment No. 20 \(2016\), CRC/C/GC/20, on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence](#), para.59.

⁹ [General comment No. 20 \(2016\), CRC/C/GC/20, on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence](#), paras.31, 33.

parenthood and sexual behaviour and violence prevention, to preventing early pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV-related information.¹⁰

[General comment No. 25 \(2021\), CRC/C/GC/25, on children's rights in relation to the digital environment](#)

The Committee on the Rights of the Child states that children value searching online for information and support relating to sexual and reproductive health, puberty, sexuality and conception and that adolescents especially want to access to free, confidential, age-appropriate and non-discriminatory mental health and sexual and reproductive health services online.¹¹

States parties should ensure that digital literacy is taught in schools, as part of basic education curricula, from the preschool level and throughout all school years, and that the curricula includes critical understanding, guidance on how to find trusted sources of information and to identify misinformation and other forms of biased or false content, including on sexual and reproductive health issues. They should promote awareness among children of the possible adverse consequences of exposure to risks relating to content, contact, conduct and contract, including cyberaggression, trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse and other forms of violence, as well as coping strategies to reduce harm and strategies to protect their personal data and those of others and to build children's social and emotional skills and resilience.¹² Teachers, in particular those who undertake digital literacy education and sexual and reproductive health education, should be trained on safeguards relating to the digital environment.¹³

[Joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on harmful practices](#)

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) states that childhood and early adolescence at the latest, are entry points for assisting both girls and boys and supporting them to change gender-based attitudes and adopt more positive roles and forms of behaviour in the home, at school and in wider society.¹⁴

The Committees also underlines that age-appropriate education, which includes science-based information on sexual and reproductive health, contributes to empowering girls and women to make informed decisions and claim their rights.¹⁵

Therefore, the Committees recommend that the States parties to the Conventions include in the educational curriculum information on human rights, including those of women and children, gender equality and self-awareness and contribute to eliminating gender stereotypes and fostering an environment of non-discrimination.¹⁶

¹⁰ [General comment No. 20 \(2016\), CRC/C/GC/20, on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence](#), paras.61, 63.

¹¹ [General comment No. 25 \(2021\), CRC/C/GC/25, on children's rights in relation to the digital environment](#), para.94.

¹² [General comment No. 25 \(2021\), CRC/C/GC/25, on children's rights in relation to the digital environment](#), para.104.

¹³ [General comment No. 25 \(2021\), CRC/C/GC/25, on children's rights in relation to the digital environment](#), para.105.

¹⁴ [Joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on harmful practices](#), para.67.

¹⁵ [Joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on harmful practices](#), para.68.

¹⁶ [Joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on harmful practices](#), para.69.

B. UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

[General recommendation No. 36 \(2017\) on the right of girls and women to education](#)

[Joint general recommendation No. 31 \(2014\) of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on harmful practices](#)

[General recommendation No. 28 \(2010\) on the core obligations of States parties under article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#)

In its General Recommendation No.28, UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) underlines the importance of education to promote equal rights of girls. The Committee recommends State Parties to pay attention to the specific needs of adolescent girls by providing education on sexual and reproductive health and carrying out programmes that are aimed at the prevention of HIV/AIDS, sexual exploitation, and teenage pregnancy.¹⁷

C. UN Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Committee

[General comment no. 14 \(2000\), The right to the highest attainable standard of health \(article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights\)](#)

[General comment no. 22 \(2016\) on the Right to sexual and reproductive health \(article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights\)](#)

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) interprets Article 12 of the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESC) on right to the highest attainable standard of health in a way that encompass access to health-related education; including the promotion of social determinants of good health, such as sexual and reproductive health, sexually transmitted diseases, and gender equality.¹⁸ Providing comprehensive education on sexual and reproductive health for all that is non-discriminatory, non-biased, evidence-based, age-appropriate and that takes into account the evolving capacities of children and adolescents is among the core obligations of States parties to ensure minimum essential levels of satisfaction of the right to sexual and reproductive health.¹⁹ Accordingly, States parties should refrain from censoring withholding or intentionally misrepresenting health-related information, including sexual education and information.²⁰ In addition, States parties' obligation to fulfil the right to health requires the promotion of education on issues including sexual and reproductive health and the prevention of domestic

¹⁷ [General recommendation No. 28 on the core obligations of States parties under article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#), para.21.

¹⁸ [General comment no. 14 \(2000\), The right to the highest attainable standard of health \(article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights\)](#), paras.11, 16.

¹⁹ [General comment no. 22 \(2016\) on the Right to sexual and reproductive health \(article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights\)](#), para.49.

²⁰ [General comment no. 14 \(2000\), The right to the highest attainable standard of health \(article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights\)](#), para.34.

violence.²¹ Violation of the obligation to fulfil occur when States fail to take measures to ensure that all educational institutions incorporate unbiased, scientifically accurate, evidence-based, age-appropriate and comprehensive sexuality education into their required curricula.²²

General Comment No. 22 on the right to sexual and reproductive health deals with sexuality education in a number of ways. It draws a link with the right to sexual and reproductive health and its interdependence on other human rights, including the right to education on sexuality and reproduction. Noting that the realisation of the right to sexual and reproductive health requires states parties to meet their obligations under other provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), it notes that this right, in combination with the right to education and the right to non-discrimination, entails a right to education on sexuality and reproduction. On the other hand, a violation of the obligation to fulfil could also occur when States fail to take measures to ensure that up-to-date, accurate information on sexual and reproductive health is publicly available and accessible to all individuals, in appropriate languages and formats.

On terms of the normative content of the right to sexual and reproductive health, the general comment builds on from its elaboration on the four elements (availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality) stipulated in its previous [General Comment No. 14 on the right to the highest attainable standard of health](#). The elements also apply to the underlying determinants, or the preconditions of health, including to access sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health information.²³ Under the standard of accessibility, this includes the right to seek, receive and disseminate evidence-based information and ideas concerning sexual and reproductive health issues, provided in a manner consistent with the needs of the individual and the community, and taking into consideration factors such as age, gender, language ability, educational level, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status.²⁴

The Committee also adopts a gender perspective in relation to the removal of any barriers and discriminatory practices that prevent women from accessing comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education and information. These anti-discriminatory practices also extend to the context of preventing unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions through the adoption of legal and policy measures aimed at also including access to comprehensive sexuality education, including for adolescents.²⁵

The realization Article 12 requires that States parties meet their obligations under Articles 2(2) and 3 on equality and Articles 13 and 14 on education in a holistic manner.²⁶ The CESCR underlines the importance of eliminating discrimination against women by removing all barriers interfering with access to right to health including access to education and information on sexual and reproductive health.²⁷ It puts special emphasis on the importance of

²¹ [General comment no. 14 \(2000\), The right to the highest attainable standard of health \(article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights\)](#), para.36.

²² [General comment no. 22 \(2016\) on the Right to sexual and reproductive health \(article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights\)](#), para.63.

²³ Ibid. para 11.

²⁴ Ibid. paras 18-19.

²⁵ Ibid. para 28.

²⁶ [General comment no. 22 \(2016\) on the Right to sexual and reproductive health \(article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights\)](#), paras.9, 47.

²⁷ [General comment no. 14 \(2000\), The right to the highest attainable standard of health \(article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights\)](#), para.21; [General comment no. 22 \(2016\) on the Right to sexual and reproductive health \(article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights\)](#), para.28.

comprehensive sexuality education for adolescents in the prevention of unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions.²⁸

D. UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education

[UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education's Report on the cultural dimensions of the right to education, or the right to education as a cultural right \(2021\)](#)

The report by the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education on the cultural dimensions of the right to education in 2021, or the right to education as a cultural right, only briefly mentions sexuality education. In the context of some selected national experiences, the report indicates that arguments made in the context of education that are based on cultural background are not always compatible with international law, including if they are used to prevent access to specific classes such as to sex education classes.²⁹

E. Other UN Publications

[UN Compendium on Comprehensive Sexuality Education \(OHCHR\), 1 March 2023](#)

[UNESCO, UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women & WHO: International technical guidance on sexuality education, An evidence-informed approach; Revised version; 14 March 2018.](#)

III. Academic Publications (selected)

Bourket et al, [Realisation of Children's Rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to, in, and through Sexuality Education \(2022\)](#) in International Journal of Children's Rights (2022)

Aoife Daly & Catherine O' Sullivan, [Sexuality Education and International Standards: Insisting Upon Children's Rights](#), in Human Rights Quarterly (2020)

Leung H., Shek D., Leung E., Shek E.; [Development of Contextually-relevant Sexuality Education: Lessons from a Comprehensive Review of Adolescent Sexuality Education Across Cultures; International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health; February 2019; 20; 16\(4\):621; doi: 10.3390/ijerph16040621.](#)

Meghan Campbell (2016): [The challenges of girls' right to education: let's talk about human rights-based sex education](#), The International Journal of Human Rights; DOI: 10.1080/13642987.2016.1207627.

Simon Hackett, Study on Sexual violence and harmful sexual behaviour displayed by children: Nature, causes, consequences and responses, [CDENF-GT-VAE\(2020\)04](#)

²⁸ [General comment no. 22 \(2016\) on the Right to sexual and reproductive health \(article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights\)](#), para.28.

²⁹ United Nations Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Koumbou Boly Barry' (16 April 2021) UN Doc A/HRC/47/32 para 50.

[Bibliography](#) on best practice in consent education

[Link to a bibliography of sexuality education](#) (see also [Children, young people, adolescence and sexuality | www.xyonline.net](#))

IV. **Other leading publications**

European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs (at the request of the FEMM Committee), [Study on Comprehensive sexuality education: why is it important?](#), (2022).

[European Parliament Resolution of 24 June 2021 on the situation of sexual and reproductive health and rights in the EU, in the frame of women's health](#)

[European Parliament resolution of 14 November 2019 on the criminalisation of sexual education in Poland](#)

European Commission, [Sexuality education across the European Union: an overview](#) (2020)

[European Expert Group on Sexuality Education; Sexuality education – what is it?; Sex Education; 16:4; 427-431; 2016.](#)

World Health Organisation (WHO) - [Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe](#)

World Health Organisation (WHO) [Study on Sexuality Education in Europe and Central Asia](#)

World Health Organisation (WHO) Collaborating Center for Sexual and Reproductive Health – [list of publications](#)

World Health Organisation (WHO) and OHCHR – [Documentary on comprehensive sex education](#)

Oxford Human Rights Hub – [Documentary](#) on comprehensive sexuality education at schools, violence, private schools and children not in schools

[International Planned Parenthood Federation; What Is Sex Education? \(IPPF\)](#)