

# POSITION PAPER

## ON SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE EDUCATION

### IN YOUTH CLUBS

Adopted on the 17th of December 2020 at the General Assembly of the European  
Confederation of Youth Clubs

***Note this is designed to be a living document which will be amended as necessary by the membership of ECYC at General Assemblies. It will inform ECYC's policy and advocacy platform for work on supporting sexual and reproductive education in youth clubs and other forms of neighbourhood work.***

#### **Introduction**

The European Confederation of Youth Clubs (ECYC) is made up of National Youth Work Organisations from 23 European organisations, from 19 different European countries. Its aim for almost 40 years has been to develop, support and promote non-formal education programs in youth clubs on national and international platforms, and envisions empowering the millions of young people it works with to develop personally and socially through engagement in youth clubs. It is the experience of ECYC members that comprehensive sexuality and reproductive education (abbreviated in this document as SRE) is an essential part of good quality youth work, that prepares young people for a fulfilling life in a changing world. Despite data and first hand experiences showing that non-formal SRE programs improve sexual and reproductive health outcomes and promote safe and gender equitable learning environments, a lot is still to overcome as SRE is a subject likely to be politicised, and youth workers need to overcome social resistance and operational constraints.

#### **Sexual and reproductive education in youth clubs**

SRE is non formal-education, curriculum-based, teaching-learning process, about the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality and personal development. ECYC believes that the purpose of Sexual and reproductive education in youth clubs is to offer young people, on the basis of their voluntary participation, developmental and educational experiences which will equip them to play an active part in our democratic society, as well as meet their own developmental needs. Sexual and reproductive education in youth work takes place in youth clubs, youth projects, youth centres, youth houses, as well as in other forms of neighbourhood work, or on the street through detached youth work. Sexual and reproductive education in youth clubs offers to those who participate

important lifelong learning experiences within the transitional period between childhood and adulthood, this being one of core missions for youth clubs in Europe.

### **Core values of Sexual and reproductive education in youth clubs**

- SRE improves sexual and reproductive health related outcomes in young people's lives, such as HIV infections and pregnancy rates, disrupts harmful gender norms, promotes gender equality, prevents gender-based violence
- Young people have the right to identify options for their own development, and choose the most appropriate one for them in any given situation, and in this sense, SRE develops critical thinking, communication and decision making, that empower youth to take responsibility and control for their actions.
- Each young person should be given the support to achieve their full potential in a manner that has regard for the dignity and autonomy of the individual, and SRE should not make an exception.
- SRE goes beyond the focus on biology, reproduction and prevention of risk and disease.

### **Characteristics of Sexual and reproductive education in youth clubs**

- Sexual and reproductive education in youth clubs is a planned systematic educational experience implemented outside of the formal school curriculum usually by voluntary groups and organisations.
- Sexual and reproductive education in youth clubs promotes an evidence informed learning model, where young people can also decide on the content of the curricula and reflect in a structured manner upon the situations encountered by them.
- Sexual and reproductive education in youth clubs recognises that inequalities of SRE education opportunities exist, and seeks to raise the level of awareness of young people about the topic and its impact on their lives, and how to act upon this learning opportunity.
- Sexual and reproductive education programs in youth clubs are delivered to young people on a voluntary basis, and begin, also, from issues and areas that are of interest and concern to them.
- Sexual and reproductive education in youth clubs is accessible to all young people irrespective of their race, culture, religion or belief, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, or disability.

***As well as the direct outcomes to the wellbeing and safety of young people, "Sexual and reproductive education in youth clubs" provides many unrecognised and invaluable social, health and economic benefits.***

### **SRE in European youth and youth work policy**

ECYC notes that SRE is vital to the achievement of the framework for European Youth Strategy, as the EU youth policy cooperation for 2019-2027, based on the Council Resolution of 26 November 2018 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C:2018:456:FULL>). SRE represents the joined-up implementation, through youth and youth work participation, of 5 of the 11 European Youth Goals, in particular goals no: 2. Equality of All Genders, 3. Inclusive Societies, 5. Mental Health & Wellbeing, 8. Quality Learning and 9. Space and Participation for All.

Likewise, in the case of the "Youth sector strategy 2030" adopted by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on 22 January 2020 ([https://search.coe.int/cm/pages/result\\_details.aspx?objectid=09000016809950cf](https://search.coe.int/cm/pages/result_details.aspx?objectid=09000016809950cf)) , SRE plays a

major role in “strengthening young people’s access to rights, so that these young people and all forms of youth civil society can rely on an enabling environment for the full exercise of all their human rights and freedoms, including concrete policies, mechanisms and resources”.

Lastly, SRE is captured in the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) of the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, a goal which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030.

However, it is also noted that there is a lack of SRE in many European states, and that not all states where SRE programs are in place, adequately implement or resource it. ECYC is also concerned that in some countries the governments have taken a top down approach to SRE programs development not involving youth organisations in consultation. Of greatest impact and utmost urgency are the cases where national policies go against personal freedoms and rights to self-determination of young people. These are countries where the dominant political views are said to be pro-natalist, and the perception that sexuality education teaches “indecent” lifestyles or ideas dominates public discourse, as well as countries where religious and cultural pressures make the implementation of sexuality education very difficult or impossible in youth clubs, especially in rural or remote areas.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

ECYC notes the many evolving challenges facing youth organisations and the provision of sexual and reproductive education in youth clubs today. There is an ever growing demand for provision of youth work both in its traditional form, but also a demand to expand our work into more intervention based work targeting particular categories of young people, and on topics adapted to their interest and understanding, including SRE.

A growing emphasis on producing measurable outcomes for SRE education programs, along with a decline in structural and up front funding for youth organisations, especially in parts where this topic is being politicised, instrumentalised or moralised in public discourse, is creating an increasingly difficult environment for the development of young people and for youth workers to work in.

*To protect, support and to develop SRE programs and initiatives into the future, ECYC makes the following recommendations:*

### **POLICY**

- ECYC recommends that each state foresee comprehensive SRE as a component in their youth dedicated strategies, or links the youth strategies on this matter, with health or education strategies, recognising the importance of SRE, also through youth clubs.
- ECYC recommends that non-governmental youth work sector is actively involved in the formulation of any local, national or international policies or strategies related to SRE at the appropriate level (local government involve local project, national government involve national organisation, EU involve ECYC etc).
- ECYC recommends that states foresee data reporting mechanism for the implementation of SRE programs, including progress made on SRE provision and SRE programs delivered through youth clubs or other forms of neighbourhood work.

## **YOUTH WORK**

- ECYC recommends that the youth work sector is considered by all as a core partner in the development of SRE curriculum development, and especially in the case for SRE programs delivered in youth clubs.
- ECYC recommends that the youth work sector strive for developing evidence based SRE programs, and that the most effective way of quality assessment and development of these programs include the consideration of the feedback of young people and youth organisations.
- to invest in the development of youth workers' capacities to develop and implement SRE program in youth clubs
- ECYC recommends that youth clubs and youth work organisations try to engage in cross-sectoral partnerships, particularly with formal education and the health sector, to leverage funding and to create a community for youth work SRE support.
- ECYC acknowledges the role of community and parent organisations and recommends that youth clubs include SRE in their facilitation work in communicates and in their conversations between youth and their parents.
- ECYC recommends that youth workers and youth clubs have also a responsibility to the youth work sector at large, to communicate and share their experiences and advocate for SRE programs.

## **FUNDING**

- ECYC recommends that adequate funding for SRE be developed by statutory and governmental agencies in cases where it is missing or insufficient for the effectiveness of sexuality education to be ensured, and reminds that a favourable climate and support through public discourse is necessary, but not sufficient.
- ECYC also recommends the provision of operational funding for the infrastructure (office, core staff, training) for the creation of safe SRE spaces, within youth clubs and youth work locations.
- ECYC recommends that SRE be introduced as an explicit topic in European level youth programmes, and that further European programmes become more accessible for youth organisations.
- ECYC contends that volunteer led youth work is 'low cost not no cost'. ECYC recommends that volunteers are supported in terms of administrative support and training as well as professional development support and that volunteer led projects are supported to access programme funding.