

The Youth Support the Implementation of Sexual Education in Schools

The **National Council of High School Students (CNE)**, the **National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania (ANOSR)** and the **National Council of Youth (CTR)** express their **dissatisfaction towards the way in which decision-makers appreciate the importance of sexual education in schools, blocking students' access to information** necessary for their **personal development**.

The lack of access to sexual education has been promoted by religious organizations, together with the Romanian Orthodox Church (BOR), and now **parliamentarians support their requests by introducing a mandatory parental agreement**. Given that **in all other subjects no parental agreement is required to legitimize the importance of delivered information**, we should not condition young people's access to sexual education by a subjectively given parental agreement. An efficient education system has the capacity to establish which subjects and topics should be studied by students in order to acquire the key outcomes specific to graduate's profile.

Sex education¹ was first introduced in schools in **1955 in Sweden**, the followed in the 1970s and 1980s by several Western European countries. In the 1990s and 2000s, other countries such as France, the United Kingdom, and then Portugal or, closer to us, Ukraine and Estonia joined.

Currently, in most European Union's countries, **sexual education is compulsory in schools**², although it differs in terms of quality and content. Countries with extensive experience in teaching sex education include the Nordic ones, France and Germany. On the other hand, **the Romanian education system continues to treat sex education as a taboo**, being at the same time the central element of several ideological debates. In this sense, **we believe that students' health must be a priority, and decision-makers must promote educational policies in relation to the reality of our country, a country that ranks first in the European Union in the number of teenage mothers**³.

According to INS Tempo data⁴, in 2018, **727 teenagers under the age of 15 and 18,753 teenagers between the ages of 15-19 have become mothers in Romania**. Of teenage

¹ https://www.bzga-whocc.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente/Sexuality_education_Policy_brief_No_1.pdf;

² [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/462515/IPOL-FEMM_NT\(2013\)462515_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/462515/IPOL-FEMM_NT(2013)462515_EN.pdf);

³ Eurostat, [demo_fordager];

⁴ INS Tempo Online, Table POP201C - *Live births by rank and mother's age groups*;

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mothers under the age of 15, **19 are at the second and one at the third birth**. As for teenage mothers aged 15-19, **3,929 are in the second, 731 in the third, 72 in the fourth, 8 in the fifth and one in the sixth birth**. At the same time, **7.5% of the total cases of diagnosed cervical cancer annually in Europe come from Romania**, the incidence being **3 times higher than the EU average**. Also, Romania ranks first of the EU countries in terms of cervical cancer mortality (14.2 deaths per 100,000 women)⁵.

Why sexual education in the Romanian education system?

- Because not all the young people have access to correct information on contraceptive methods, together with prevention to stop spreading sexually transmitted diseases. According to the *Save the Children's* study conducted in Romania, **6 out of 10 underage mothers have never had access to reproductive health or sex education**, and 12% of underage mothers have only received this kind of information from neighbors, friends, relatives or from the Internet. At the same time, 40% of underage mothers consider that their income is not enough for their basic needs, a significantly higher percentage compared to other people in the community⁶;
- Because in very many Romanian families, reproductive health is not a topic of free discussion, and many students do not have parents who can respond to this information that should be provided by specialists in the field;
- Because teenagers **do not receive support and counseling** in the context of underfunding family planning offices;
- Because, although some information on sex education can be found on the Internet, not all students have access (approximately **900,000 Romanian pre-university students do not have access to educational resources in digital format**) and not all available resources are verified information.

Authorities must join their efforts on correctly informing young people about reproductive health, and this information must be delivered by professionals in pre-university education, as an effective method of preventing unwanted pregnancies and receiving sexually transmitted diseases. We are at a turning point in society, which exacerbates the existing problems in the education system and requires a **change of mentality, so that young people have direct and unconstrained access to quality sexual education**.

⁵ National Institute of Public Health, Romania.

⁶ <https://www.salvaticopiii.ro/sci-ro/files/2d/2de11e1f-1d13-469b-909d-d9eb35962229.pdf>

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