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HOLDING THE SPACE FOR CHANGE

Summary Report on Mapping Gender Transformative Practices through the CERV Framework Partnership Programme



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Executive Summary

This summary report presents the key findings and insights from the Mapping Gender Transformative Practices in Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) exercise, conducted as part of the wider evaluation of the EU-funded CERV Framework Partnership Project. The project brought together sexuality educators, organisations, and partners from across Europe to explore, document, and strengthen approaches in gender-transformative relationship and sexuality education (GTRSE).

Over the last four years, the project has created spaces for collaboration, reflection, and innovation among educators and organisations working in diverse social and political contexts. Through online questionnaires, participatory workshops, in-depth interviews, storytelling and cross-country exchanges, the mapping exercise captured both promising practices and the challenges that shape the implementation of gender-transformative (GT) work in different countries in Europe.

Across all participating countries, the CERV project contributed to meaningful progress at three levels:

Organisational level:

The project supported the development of new partnerships, tools, and internal policies embedding gender-transformative principles into institutional practices. Many organisations reported strengthened advocacy, improved gender policies, and a closer alignment between gender equality objectives with their mission and everyday work.

Educator level:

The project enhanced educators' confidence, introduced innovative pedagogical tools, and deepened their capacity to address complex topics such as masculinities, consent, and contested gender narratives, especially as those are shaped by digital spaces. Participants highlighted the value of belonging to a shared European community of practice, where they could exchange experiences, learn from peers, and gain renewed motivation.

Youth level:

The project enriched learning environments, making them safer, more inclusive, and more responsive to young people's realities. By addressing issues such as power, privilege, vulnerability, and mutual respect, educators facilitated meaningful conversations that helped young people navigate relationships and identity in an increasingly digital and polarised world.

Introduction

My dream of a better world sparked my journey as an educator in gender and sexuality education. It keeps me going—opening new ways for people to be themselves, whether as a man, woman, queer, or simply human. I want to challenge old norms rooted in hatred and fear. To invite people to rethink what they see as normal—traditional gender roles, violence, control—and foster respect, curiosity, openness. I believe in creating spaces where questions are welcomed without judgment and diversity is truly appreciated.

Excerpt from Jazz's story

Gender-transformative approaches in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) are vital to addressing deep-rooted inequalities and challenging harmful gender norms. Across Europe and globally, women, girls, and people with diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Expressions, and Sexual Characteristics (SOGIESC) continue to experience systemic and institutional discrimination. These realities highlight the need to move beyond the depoliticisation of gender and to adopt strategies that go beyond raising awareness about gender inequalities and work toward dismantling unequal power structures, challenging discrimination, and creating conditions for more equitable, rights-based and inclusive societies.

At a time when gender issues and SRHR face growing resistance, documenting and amplifying gender-transformative practices is more important than ever. This summary report serves as both a record of documentation and a learning tool, highlighting effective approaches and practical insights for practitioners, educators, and organisations advancing GTRSE. Drawing on the Mapping Gender Transformative Practices Exercise which was conducted as part of the wider CERV Project evaluation and fully aligned with the project's Objective 3¹, the report focuses on initiatives that promote equality, strengthen access to GTRSE, challenge harmful stereotypes, and address intersectional discrimination and gender-based violence. It distils key findings and lessons learned, demonstrating the collective value of EU-funded collaboration and its tangible contribution to promoting equality, freedom, respect for diversity and social justice.

The mapping exercise also contributes to IPPF's broader objectives of a theory of change by documenting actions that (i) expand access to gender-transformative education; (ii) strengthen youth engagement and educator capacity; (iii) encourage collaboration across sectors and countries; and (iv) capture both institutional and individual examples of change.

Aim of this report

This report focuses on five key countries—Austria, Cyprus, Latvia, Portugal, and Spain—which showed the highest engagement in the CERV programme and produced the most significant outputs. It explores how Member Associations (MAs) and their partners are advancing gender-transformative work through education, advocacy, and community-based initiatives, and how they have integrated the IPPF/YSAFE "[Safe from SGBV Toolkit](#)" and other gender-transformative resources into CSE.

The mapping exercise reviews key activities from the past four years, including Training of Trainers (ToTs), small grants for gender-transformative educational projects, independent GT initiatives, a Mutual Learning Meeting to exchange tools and best practices, and a Closing Meeting to reflect on progress and future engagement. Drawing on data from reports and questionnaires, feedback, and narratives collected through these activities, the report assesses reach, impact, and transformative potential of the work undertaken.

It also explores how technical capacity within organisations has been strengthened, how educators and young people have been mobilised in processes of change, and which strategies proved most effective in addressing contested narratives around gender and intersectional discrimination. Finally, it highlights successful practices, ongoing challenges and corresponding solutions, and outlines next steps to further strengthen GTRSE. To this end, it incorporates personal insights from seven sexuality educators across the five countries, offering valuable, lived perspectives on the impact and everyday realities of this work.

¹Objective 3 of the CERV Project: Increase access to Gender Transformative Sex and Relationship Education (GTSRE), that advances gender equality, eliminates harmful gender stereotypes and intersectional discrimination, and prevents sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) to ensure long term societal change



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Methodology

The mapping exercise used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative tools to build a comprehensive picture of gender-transformative initiatives. Quantitative data was gathered through a semi-structured questionnaire distributed to MAs and partners involved in the CERV programme. Qualitative insights were drawn from multiple sources, including one-on-one interviews with seven sexuality educators across the five focus countries; story creation reflecting these educators' journeys in GT work; and narratives produced during participatory workshops at the Closing Meeting.

A diverse group of sexuality educators participated in the qualitative component of the mapping exercise, including MA staff, volunteers, teachers, freelancers, youth educators, programme coordinators, and directors. Specifically, the core group for narrative production (through in-depth interviews and story-making) included Tom and Jazz from Austria, Celia from Cyprus, Raquel and Roma from Spain, Nuno from Portugal, and Linda from Latvia.

Key results and outputs of GT practices under the CERV Project

Over the course of the project, the CERV programme engaged over 5,500 individuals in the five key countries in addition to France, Lithuania and Slovakia. Out of these, approximately 4,800 were young people, 135 were educators or professionals, and around 600 were teachers. While not fully disaggregated by gender, data for participation among young people show a split of 51.5% girls, 48.2% boys, and 0.3% gender nonconforming, while approximately 90% of educators and teachers were female.

The Training the Trainer Workshops (in 2022 and 2023) and the small grants programme appeared to have instigated a successful integration of the Safe from SGBV Toolkit in CSE programmes, supporting a wide range of interventions. These centred around workshops with young people, teacher trainings, capacity building of MA staff, educators and volunteers, awareness-raising activities, community education, and youth empowerment.

Across the five focus countries, plus Lithuania and Slovakia, more than 210 workshops were conducted with young people aged 12–18. In some countries these workshops were standalone

sessions; in others (notably Cyprus, Spain and Portugal) they formed part of continuing interventions. Feedback from the workshops was very positive, suggesting both relativity and impact of GT approaches: in 2022, 70% of participants reported improved understanding of the topics and 85%+ expressed willingness to recommend the workshop to friends. In 2023, impact scores increased significantly, with 83% of participants mentioning improved understanding.

Innovative methodologies and emerging topics

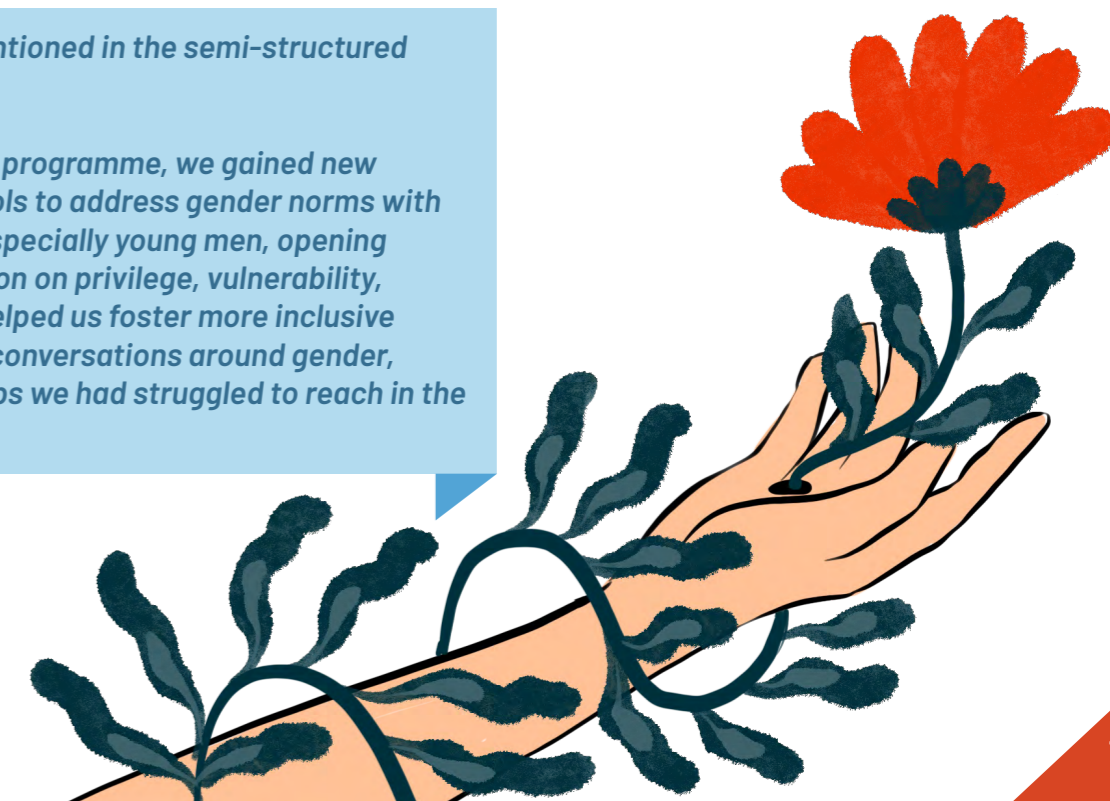
A key achievement of the project was the implementation and testing of innovative and adaptable educational tools and methodologies ([drawn either from the Safe from SGBV Toolkit or other gender-transformative resources](#)). Peer exchange and collaboration during the Mutual Learning Meeting played a crucial role in this process, enabling educators to share, refine, and tailor these resources to their specific contexts. This collaborative approach strengthened the quality and consistency of implementation, both at the local level and across countries.

The methodologies used addressed contemporary themes such as consent, communication, identity and expression; topics that strongly resonate with young people's lived experiences. Implementation varied across countries and contexts. In some countries, GT methodologies were fully embedded within existing programmes; in others, they were applied in a more ad hoc or exploratory way. Activities ranged from introductory sessions (i.e. challenging gender stereotypes, building healthy relationships, recognising gender-based violence, and dismantling common myths) to deeper explorations of consent, intimate partner violence, gender and sexual identity, privilege, structural inequalities, and the influence of the manosphere on gender narratives. Regardless, consent remained a central focus across all countries, with discussions focusing on strengthening sexual agency, and creating awareness about safety and rights.

Educators valued the toolkit's creative, interactive, and participatory methods, which helped build trust, positive group dynamics, and safe spaces. These elements are essential when working on sensitive or contested topics.

As one educator mentioned in the semi-structured questionnaire:

"Thanks to the CERV programme, we gained new perspectives and tools to address gender norms with young people, and especially young men, opening up space for reflection on privilege, vulnerability, and care. This has helped us foster more inclusive and transformative conversations around gender, especially with groups we had struggled to reach in the past"



New Gender Transformative Practices

Through the funding, training and support provided through the CERV programme all participating MAs reported significant advances in incorporating GT practices not only within their CSE workshops but across broader programmes or activities. More specifically, some examples reflecting the breadth of activities undertaken include the following:

In Latvia,

MA Papardes Zieds partnered with the disability-led social enterprise Cerību Spārni to adapt IPV tools for young people with disabilities. It also integrated consent education (based on the FRIES model) across all their school-based CSE programmes. Notably, the MA's work was recognised and awarded by the Latvian Ministry of Welfare as a good practice in advancing gender equality.

In Portugal,

MA APF worked with Roma women activists to deliver a gender-transformative curriculum grounded in intersectionality and gender equality. The MA also held public meetings with decisionmakers to present the results of the research on the implementation of GTRSE in schools in Porto and to advocate for integrating GT approaches into the Citizenship and Health Education curriculum in schools.

In Spain,

MA SEDRA adapted the Toolkit into Spanish and launched a SOGIESC diversity campaign, inspired by the video ["Yo me meto en este jardín. Porque la diversidad sexual es natural"](#). In collaboration with the organisations Mujeres Jóvenes and Apoyo Positivo, the MA also delivered a 10-hour training for staff and board members on GT practices. Moreover, SEDRA also strengthened their alliance-building to respond to the growing resistance to CSE.

In Cyprus,

the MA CFPA updated training workshops with more inclusive language, imagery and examples, added dedicated SGBV sessions for health/med students, and reached 1,125 students (ages 15–17) with an SRHR methodology inspired by the peer exchange during the Mutual Learning Meeting of the CERV Programme.



In Austria,

the team published an article in the Austrian Social Work Journal on violence prevention through sexual education, emphasising the toolkit's role in youth empowerment.

The people and organisations in this project

The impact of the project extended well beyond the completion of its activities. Across all five countries, educators and organisations described the experience with the CERV project as a turning point in how they understand, practice, and advocate for gender-transformative education. Their reflections highlight the human side of systemic change, i.e. the need to build resilience, empowerment, care, and solidarity while reconnecting with the overall vision and purpose of GT work. As the sexuality educators' stories show, gender-transformative work is not a destination but a continuous process of learning, unlearning, and collective growth.

Capacity building and empowerment of sexuality educators

Ultimately, the CERV project became a space for both professional and personal transformation for the sexuality educators involved. Many had entered the programme feeling stuck or uncertain how to respond to growing opposition or the evolving complexities surrounding gender, particularly as these are now shaped by digital spaces. Through trainings, peer exchanges, and collaborative learning, educators gained new knowledge, practical tools, fresh perspectives, and renewed confidence to navigate sensitive and challenging topics such as gender norms, masculinities, and resistance in classrooms. The project offered a much-needed opportunity to reconnect with knowledge, with peers, and with a renewed sense of purpose.

*As one participant described,
"My participation in the project was like water in the desert."*

Through this process, educators expanded not only their professional horizons but also their understanding of themselves as sexuality educators. Their reflections illustrate not only what they learned, but ultimately who they became through their journey in GT work: more confident, more skilful, more inclusive, more empowered and more resilient to respond to the (often challenging) needs of contemporary times.

The project also encouraged educators to move beyond traditional, information-based CSE and toward more gender-transformative approaches that integrate dialogue on power, inequality, identity, vulnerability, and care.

As Celia explained in her story, she now introduces “sensitive topics with care—not in a harsh or rigid manner,” to ensure students “feel safe expressing themselves and can share without fear of judgment.”

This shift prompted more thoughtful communication and renewed ways of framing narratives, allowing facilitators to “hold the space” of learning with greater confidence, empathy, and openness, accompanying the process without dictating it. In doing so, they became better equipped to navigate resistance and promote meaningful engagement in the classroom. At the same time, this approach kept the political core intact, retaining focus on naming imbalances and challenging structural inequalities.

As Raquel reflects: “I understood that part of the work is holding the space without trying to control it, accompanying, not imposing. [...] Accompanying a process doesn’t mean softening it, but setting boundaries, naming imbalances, and holding discomfort without rushing to fix it.”

Notably, the programme’s pan-European dimension extended this transformative change beyond individual classrooms, creating spaces for shared learning and collective growth. By bringing together participants from diverse cultural and social contexts, it fostered a dynamic community of practice grounded in solidarity and shared purpose. Cross-country exchanges enabled educators to learn from one another, exchange strategies, and draw inspiration.

As one participant noted, “Seeing how others are doing things, seeing their practices and new approaches was very powerful”

Most of the sexuality educators reiterate that connecting with peers from across Europe who shared the same passion and challenges, rekindled their energy, strengthened their sense of belonging, and provided much-needed support, especially when local institutional and peer support is often lacking.

As Celia reflected in her story: “That sense of community gave me strength. It reminded me that I wasn’t alone, knowing that so many others are fighting for essentially the same purpose”.

Organisational Impact

At the organisational level, the CERV project prompted tangible shifts in policy, culture, and collaboration. Several participating associations (particularly those in Portugal, Spain, and Latvia) used this opportunity to initiate internal reforms such as developing more comprehensive gender strategies, revising existing gender policies and equality plans, and embedding gender objectives into daily operations.

Another huge added value of our involvement in this project was the Gender Assessment. This process enabled a participatory diagnosis to be carried out by the entire APF, which resulted in an Action Plan for the implementation of measures to improve and adjust our gender-related policies. This improvement has been fundamental at a time when sexuality rights are being called into question.

-Excerpt from Nuno’s story



For many organisations, the project also strengthened advocacy capacity at a time when sexual and reproductive rights are increasingly contested. It provided a structure through which gender equality could move from being a peripheral concern to a central part of the organisation's mission and identity. Indeed, the project encouraged organisations to think more systemically about gender-transformative work, linking education, advocacy, and institutional practices under one coherent vision.

"Probably this is the only project (CERV) that has permeated the whole structure of the organisation. It's like the project brings together a lot of things that are really connected: masculinity, opposition, narratives, and CSE. This project brought us some integrated view of these issues...it gave us that vision, integrated and systemic. For us it's something structural".

-Excerpt from the interactive workshop session during the Closing Meeting

For smaller organisations, however, limited capacity and resources made it challenging to fully institutionalise gender-transformative work.

As one participant reflected,

"Because our organisation is very small, I don't feel like there was the possibility or opportunity to stand up for the gender-transformative work [...] Everybody knew it was important, but we just didn't have the structures or the resources to act on it."

Another significant outcome at the organisational level was the strengthening of collaboration and partnerships. Across all five countries, the CERV project instigated stronger connections among a diverse range of stakeholders, including feminist and LGBTQIA+ organisations, parent and teacher unions, equality bodies, youth groups, and community actors. These alliances broadened the reach of gender-transformative sexuality education, especially among vulnerable groups, while building shared foundations for advocacy, knowledge exchange, and coordinated action. By cultivating solidarity and collective

purpose, these partnerships strengthened grassroots impact and helped organisations overcome the isolation and fatigue often experienced in increasingly challenging contexts.

Educational outcomes and deepening an understanding of change.

The CERV project enriched learning environments across schools and community settings, creating safer, more inclusive, and more responsive spaces for young people to explore gender issues in ways that reflect their lived realities. It introduced new approaches to engage young people in conversations about consent, power, identity, care, and vulnerability, helping them navigate relationships and enhance self-understanding in an increasingly polarised world.

At the same time, all sexuality educators deeply acknowledged that this type of transformation takes time. True gender-transformative change is not immediate or isolated, it must be collective, systemic, and structural.

In this regard, as Tom reflects in his story, the impact sexuality educators can have may seem like "a little dot or pixel in the bigger picture".

Yet, every effort contributes to a larger process of change: even small disruptions of ingrained norms can open cracks where seeds of growth (and change) can be planted.

As Roma reiterates: "We're not going to change the world in a 50-minute session with teenagers. But even if it doesn't seem like much, it can be a crack. And in that crack, a seed is planted. If that seed later finds care—a teacher, a friend, a conversation, a good experience—maybe it will grow. It's not magic. It's sowing."

These reflections highlight that gender-transformative work is less about achieving quick results and more about creating conducive spaces for personal growth. To this end, all sexuality educators shifted from being mere transmitters of information to becoming facilitators of dialogue, critical inquiry, and self-reflection. They evolved their practice toward "holding the space" of learning with more empathy and openness, supporting young people to explore sensitive topics critically, safely and meaningfully.

Educators also shared powerful examples of how learning translated into real-life changes for young people. Insights gained through workshops often inspired actions that promoted safety, self-awareness, and well-



being—whether by leaving an abusive relationship, asserting healthy boundaries, or embracing a more authentic sense of self. As a teacher from Portugal reflected, even if the GT interventions do not impact everyone equally, their impact can be profound for those they do touch:

“After a session on dating violence, a young woman realised her relationship was toxic and decided to leave it. This moment allowed me to see that awareness-raising actions may not reach everyone, but there is always something positive left behind.”

Breakthroughs in working on masculinities.

In an era shaped by polarisation, misinformation, and the rise of the manosphere, one of the most pressing and complex challenges sexuality educators faced was working with masculinities. Boys are increasingly forming their sense of identity through online spaces that promote rigid, anti-rights, and misogynistic narratives, causing them to respond to conversations about gender equality with defensiveness or even hostility.

As Roma observes in her story, these boys “don’t feel called in—they feel attacked. They’re not just moved by anger: they’re mobilised by a political identity.”

Educators shared how traditional approaches focused on presenting gender inequality statistics, challenging traditional gender roles or framed gender in binary terms—girls as victims, boys as the main perpetrators of violence—often failed to resonate with young people. Such frameworks left many boys feeling accused or excluded, while girls grew weary of being positioned as those who had to “explain” inequality. Raquel’s story highlighted how classrooms sometimes became “battlefields,” where messages about equality felt imposed rather than co-created.

These reactions prompted the sexuality educators to engage in a collective rethinking of how to more meaningfully engage boys in discussions about gender and equality. And a key insight emerged: transformation begins when educators shift from the use of abstract language to approaches grounded in lived experience. Instead of “teaching about” gender, they invited

reflection through personal questions—about care, communication, pleasure, and consent—that opened dialogue without defensiveness. Using elements of popular youth culture, music, cultural references, familiar youth symbols, and humour helped make these discussions feel relevant and safe, planting seeds of reflection rather than enforcing conclusions.

During the closing meeting in Brussels, the group deepened this exploration of what it truly means to “work with masculinities.” While interpretations varied, there was consensus that the goal is not to “fix” boys, but to help them see the possibilities of more caring, inclusive forms of masculinity. The idea of caring masculinities (centred on empathy, care, sensitivity, responsibility, and self-awareness) emerged as a promising entry point. By connecting care to self, others, and the community, educators can address inequality without alienation, inviting boys to see themselves as part of the solution rather than the problem.

Significantly, educators stressed that showing empathy must not slip into false equivalence. Recognising that boys experience emotional and relational costs under patriarchy is important, but it must not obscure the structural inequalities that privilege them over girls and gender-diverse peers. True gender-transformative work, they agreed, remains political—it is about holding complexity, discomfort, and difference.

A gender-transformative approach is not redemptive, nor paternalistic; it is not about making people feel good. It is political, and it demands situated responsibility—not only naming what hurts, but asking who benefits, who pays the price, and what we do with that knowledge. I don’t yet know how to hold all of that at once, but I know I have to learn.

– Excerpt from Raquel’s story.



Challenges and Barriers

Emotional toll and professional fatigue

Engaging in gender-transformative education can be emotionally demanding. Many educators spoke of moments of fatigue and self-doubt, particularly when facing hostility or opposition, which traps them into an exhausting cycle of constantly having to defend and reaffirm the value of their work.

As Jazz mentions in their story: "Sometimes I get tired—tired of the old norms that still show up as queerphobia, sexism, rigidity in students and parents. Tired of repeating why gender topics empower us all. Tired of suspicion from those who see our work as dangerous or threatening".

Moreover, lack of support structures, whether in the form of absence of systemic support, overwhelming criticism, personal attacks, charged educational spaces and the vulnerability of not knowing how to navigate these hostile environments, contribute to loss of grounding, weakened resilience and feelings of isolation.

At the same time, even amid exhaustion, educators found renewal in small moments: a student's question, a colleague's support, a glimpse of impact in their community. These connections "rekindled their spirit," reminding them that resilience in gender-transformative work is not about fearlessness or invulnerability but about staying present and remaining engaged with honesty, compassion, and persistence.

True resilience, however, cannot rest on individuals alone; institutions must provide the guidance, safety, support and collective care needed to sustain educators' motivation and well-being, ensuring that gender-transformative education continues to flourish even in challenging environments.

Structural and institutional obstacles

Despite evident progress, educators still encounter deep-rooted structural barriers to implementing gender-transformative education. Across Europe (and in the countries that participated in the CERV programme), CSE still remains unevenly integrated into curricula and offered primarily through brief, ad hoc sessions. Furthermore, in some countries, key topics such as sexual orientation and gender identity are often omitted, reflecting broader social resistance, growing pressure from parent groups, or restrictive institutional guidelines and policy gaps.

These institutional and policy gaps often leave teachers without the time, resources, or systemic and organisational backing needed to sustain their work. As Celia reflects in her story: "I tried to defend the need for CSE, but fear and denial prevailed. I felt alone in this struggle. Although colleagues agreed with me, they chose silence." The result is a precarious landscape where progress depends more on individual motivation than on coordinated, institutional action. Implementing gender-transformative approaches is therefore a delicate and uneven journey—one that must unfold within systems still marked by caution, policy gaps, and fear of backlash.

Without sufficient structure or freedom to address all dimensions of sexuality, many educators find themselves treading a fine line: striving to hold open honest, meaningful, and inclusive conversations while navigating opposition, hesitation, or even self-censorship. This lack of an enabling environment not only limits what students can learn but also takes an emotional toll on the educators leading the work. These experiences emphasise the urgent need for stronger institutional commitment, supportive frameworks, and continued advocacy to ensure that gender-transformative education can be effectively sustained.

Rising opposition and backlash

Across all participating countries, educators reported a growing wave of opposition to CSE, often fuelled by misinformation and moral panic. Conservative, religious, and far-right groups have increasingly framed sexuality education as harmful or immoral, accusing educators of "sexualising youth," "pushing pornography," or "traumatising children." This backlash has manifested through personal and institutional attacks on educators and NGOs, legal threats, and attempts to censor programme content. In several contexts, schools and teachers have faced direct pressure to avoid topics such as gender identity or sexual orientation: "We are asked not to talk about homosexuality; otherwise, it will be hard for parents," explained one participant.

These dynamics have created an atmosphere of fear and self-restraint, as moral panic and misinformation continue to overshadow dialogue. This is clearly reflected in Celia's question: "In what democratic society do we let threats and intimidation prevail, silencing us? What human rights are we referring to when words themselves are silenced?" Clearly, the resistance faced by sexuality educators is not only ideological, but also deeply personal, often affecting their confidence, motivation, and even safety. Yet, this very resistance accentuates the importance of gender-transformative education. The fact that discussions on gender, equality, consent, power, and care provoke such strong reactions demonstrates the relevance, critical importance and urgent necessity of GT work to promoting European democratic and human rights values.



Ways Forward and Recommendations

Use of strategic communication and positive narratives to navigate opposition

Navigating increasingly polarised environments, where terms like *gender, violence, or patriarchy* can be misunderstood or perceived as “triggering”, requires adaptability, creativity, and strategic communication. To this end, educators described using subtle, context-sensitive approaches that invite reflection without provoking defensiveness or backlash. They adapted language, used humour and storytelling, and drew on familiar cultural references to make discussions about power and equality more approachable and resonant with young people’s lived realities.

*As Roma observes:
And so, without naming everything directly, we talked about power, desire, consent, violence. There was still swagger, sure, but from a less defensive, more authentic place. And I relaxed, too. I stopped expecting epiphanies. I became more strategic, and also more nurturing.*

These insights reaffirm that change is rarely achieved through confrontation or bold declarations, but through sensitivity to context, patience, and the courage to adapt; nurturing understanding one conversation at a time.

This is vividly encapsulated in Linda’s reflection: “During this journey I have learned to wait, to understand that everything needs its time. It helps to stay strong and in the middle—to continue the CSE work not by waving flags of revolution, but through slow, consistent effort focused on our core target groups”.

Strategic and positive communication also emerged as one of the most powerful tools for advancing gender-transformative work. Educators emphasised the importance of using protective narratives (messages grounded in care, safety, and wellbeing) to make GTRSE more relatable, reduce defensiveness, and counter misinformation. Through pan-European collaboration and drawing on IPPF expertise, the project strengthened the exchange of communication strategies and deepened understanding of how to craft winning narratives that resonate

with the movable middle—parents, teachers, and community members who may be hesitant but open to dialogue.

Maintaining perspective amidst the growing opposition is equally important. While opposition can often appear louder, it is progressive values and human rights that enjoy broader, albeit quieter, support.

As one educator aptly mentioned: “We are much more than them. We just hear them louder.”

At the same time, educators warned that inertia, silence, or self-censorship within organisations only reinforces opposition. “I don’t believe that being afraid and staying in our shelter will change anything,” stated one of the educators. Advancing gender-transformative education therefore requires a shift from caution to action, using strategic, coordinated communication that engages key audiences and strengthens stakeholder involvement.

As one participant noted, “Aligning with other initiatives that defend human rights, education, and health creates a larger movement”, presents a united front, amplifies voices, helps establish protective structures and reinforces the legitimacy of this work.

Ultimately, responding to resistance is not only about defending existing spaces for GT work but also about expanding them. Real progress grows through strategic, sustained commitment, nurturing networks of support, and strengthening partnerships grounded in shared values and common purpose.



Strengthening support structures

Sustaining GT work also requires strong institutional support. Educators pinpointed that lasting change cannot rely on individual commitment alone but needs clear policies protecting young people's right to CSE and closer collaboration between ministries, schools, and NGOs.

Organisations advancing CSE play a key role in making the vision of GT work possible by advocating for GT approaches to be integrated in curricula, ensuring educators have quality training and resources, and securing long-term funding. Ultimately, lasting transformation takes root only in systems that nurture both people and practice—systemically, collectively, and individually.

Building alliances and engaging communities

Working collaboratively with parents, teachers, and community groups is essential to demystify and advance GT work and build trust. Educators observed that opposition often stems from fear or misunderstanding rather than genuine disagreement. By grounding conversations in shared values (such as children's safety, respect, and wellbeing), conversations can be reframed to foster empathy and constructive dialogue.

As one participant reflected, "The parents want the maximum well-being for their kids. We forget to actually see their motives. While masked by a lot of fear, their motives are good."

Equally important is supporting communities of practice for sexuality educators. Participants highlighted the need for collective spaces and networks where educators can share insights, exchange strategies, and restore motivation. These communities of practice, which were also actively nurtured through the CERV project, not only strengthen professional resilience but also rekindle hope and a shared sense of purpose.

Conclusion

I'm writing this right now at a European gathering with other professionals from organisations who are also trying to figure out how to move forward, how to adapt, how to resist. Thinking together, sharing doubts, exchanging strategies: this gives us strength and perspective again. It's helping me feel less alone, to recognise myself in others. To step out of that sense of individual burnout. To remember this isn't just a job: It's a collective practice, a political commitment, a way to fight for ourselves and care for the world. And from there, we carry on.
-Excerpt from Roma's story

The CERV programme has illustrated that gender-transformative sexuality education is not only possible but profoundly impactful, even in challenging contexts. Across five European countries, educators, organisations, and young people have demonstrated that change grows through consistent, human-centred engagement: through dialogue, empathic listening, critical questioning, and creating safe spaces for reflection, growth, and care.

As reaffirmed by the findings of this report, gender-transformative approaches are fundamental to addressing entrenched inequalities and power imbalances. This work is an ongoing journey, one that requires drawing courage from solidarity, care, and shared purpose. As many of the sexuality educators reflected, gender-transformative work flourishes in community, not isolation. It is sustained by collaboration, mutual learning, peer support and collective resilience.

The CERV programme's pan-European dimension has been vital in advancing this vision. By connecting educators and organisations across borders, it strengthened professional capacity, fostered shared learning, and built a collective sense of purpose grounded in European values of equality, democracy, freedom, and human rights. In an increasingly hostile climate toward GTRSE, sustaining this work means not only protecting existing spaces but also expanding them – through stronger alliances, "winning narratives," adequate policy, institutional support, solidarity and hope.





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