

Sexuality Education in the WHO European Region

BELGIUM (Flanders Region)



BELGIUM



Status of sexuality education

Sexuality education in Belgium is supported by law, though the responsibility for its implementation lies with the regional governments. Sexuality education in the Flanders region is mandatory for all learners and is usually integrated into different school subjects. Schools develop the lesson plans and decide on which topics are covered. Sexuality education is rarely a controversial issue.





Laws and policies

Between 1997 and 2010, there were several Royal Decrees on goals in the school curriculum requiring results and/or a commitment to improving knowledge, skills and attitudes related to sexuality. Education is a regional responsibility, in this case that of the Flemish Government.

Implementation of sexuality education

Sexuality-education lessons are mandatory for all learners. They start before the age of 10 years and may continue until age 16 years or older. The subject 'Relational and Sexual Education' is generally part of the health policy of schools. Sexuality-education elements are also integrated into several other teaching subjects, including biology, religion, language and other activities like 'project weeks'. Schools develop the lesson plans and decide where to integrate the non-biological aspects of sexuality. Topics covered extensively in the curriculum are biological aspects and body awareness, pregnancy and birth, contraception, sexually transmitted infections and access to safe abortion.

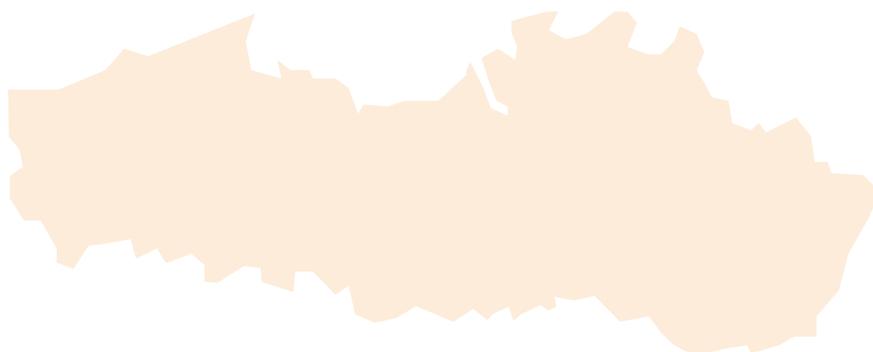
Various groups and organisations, such as educational professionals, young people, religious groups, health professionals, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and parents, all have an influence on sexuality-education teaching through public debates and discussions on the curriculum. Parents also have the opportunity to influence the teaching of sexuality education through the school council.

Training of teachers on sexuality education

Most teachers do not receive specific training for teaching sexuality education, and not all teachers feel competent to deliver it. Educational materials and teaching guidelines have been developed through initiatives of publishers, NGOs such as the Flemish Expertise Centre for Sexual Health – Sensoa (IPPF member association), and others. Materials and guidelines developed by NGOs reflect participatory approaches to sexuality education.

Sexuality education outside the formal school setting

Information and education concerning issues related to sexuality are also provided through numerous organisations and TV/radio/internet channels outside the school setting. Underserved and at-risk young people are reached through special educational activities conducted by NGOs.





Challenges

There is no significant opposition to sexuality education in Flanders. However, according to the field experts, there is a need to pay more attention to relational aspects in sexuality education and to the basic training of teachers. There is also a need for closely monitoring any taught content.

Good-practice example

There are several good practices and innovative activities available to promote youth sexual and reproductive health in Flanders:

- ‘Tussen De Lakens’ (Between the sheets): visual materials that discuss the body, contraception, sexually transmitted infections and sexual violence.¹
- ‘Het Vlaggensysteem’ (The Flag System): a guidance document facilitating discussions in school teams on sexual behaviour.²
- ‘Zanzu’: A multilingual website that aims to increase the knowledge of migrants on issues related to sexual health and rights. Zanzu was jointly developed by Sensoa and the German Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA).³



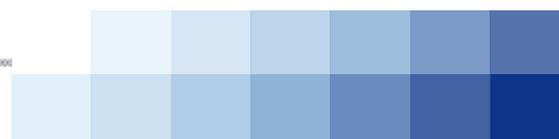
Country facts*

Belgium (Flanders Region)

Total population ⁴	11 204 000
Population aged 15–19 years (% of 15–19-year-olds in total population) ⁴	631 000 (5.6 %)
Government expenditure on education (% of GDP) ⁵	6.4
Youth unemployment rate (% of labour force aged 15–24 years) ⁶	21.8
Gender Inequality Index rating ⁷	0.073
Births per 1 000 women aged 15–19 years ⁸	8
% of 15-year-olds who have had sexual intercourse ⁹	boys: 20 % girls: 18 %
Average age of mother at birth of first child ¹⁰	28.5

For references go to last page

* The demographic data refer to the country of Belgium and not only to the Flanders region.



References / Definitions

1 Tussen de lakens [Between the sheets] [website]. Antwerp: Sensoa; 2017 (<http://www.seksuelevorming.be/materiaal/tussen-de-lakens>, accessed 25 March 2017).

2 Het Vlaggensysteem [Flag system] [website]. Antwerp: Sensoa; 2017 (<http://www.seksuelevorming.be/sensoa-vlaggensysteem>, accessed 25 March 2017).

3 Zanzu [website]. Antwerp: Sensoa/German Federal Centre for Health Education; 2017 (<http://www.zanzu.be/en>, accessed 25 March 2017).

4 Population by age, sex and urban/rural residence, 2016 [online database]. New York: United Nations Statistics Division; 2017 (<http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=POP&f=tableCode%3A22>, accessed 25 March 2017).

5 Human development report 2016: human development for everyone. New York: United Nations Development Programme; 2016 (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/2016-report>, accessed 25 March 2017).

Government expenditure on education: current, capital and transfer spending on education, expressed as a percentage of GDP. Range in the region is approx. 2.0–8.5.

6 Human development data, 2015 [online database]. New York: United Nations Development Programme; 2017 (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/data#>, accessed 25 March 2017).

Youth unemployment rate: percentage of the labour force population aged 15–24 years that is not in paid employment or self-employed, but is available for work and has taken steps to seek paid employment or self-employment.

7 Human development report 2016: human development for everyone. New York: United Nations Development Programme; 2016 (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/2016-report>, accessed 25 March 2017).

Gender Inequality Index: a composite measure reflecting inequality in achievement between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. It varies between zero (when women and men fare equally) and one (when men or women fare poorly compared with the other in all dimensions).

8 Adolescent fertility rate (births per 1 000 women ages 15–19). Washington (DC): World Bank; 2016 (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.ADO.TFRT>, accessed 25 March 2017).

9 Growing up unequal: gender and socioeconomic differences in young people's health and well-being. HBSC 2016 study report (2013/2014 survey). Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2016 (<http://www.euro.who.int/en/publications/abstracts/growing-up-unequal.-hbsc-2016-study-20132014-survey>, accessed 25 March 2017).

10 Women in the EU gave birth to their first child at almost 29 years of age on average. Luxembourg: Eurostat; 2015 [2013 data] (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/6829228/3-13052015-CP-EN.pdf/7e9007fb-3ca9-445f-96eb-fd75d6792965>, accessed 25 March 2017).

Learner: a child or young person who is enrolled or attends classes in school, including primary (basic/elementary), secondary (middle) and high school.