

# Sexuality Education in the WHO European Region

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## LATVIA



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## Status of sexuality education

In Latvia, there is no specific law or policy concerning sexuality education, though several governmental regulations and guidelines do provide the legal framework for sexuality education. Delivery of sexuality education varies in practice because of a fair degree of municipal and school autonomy in this respect. There is also considerable opposition to sexuality education in Latvia.





## Laws and policies

Seven different governmental regulations and guidelines provide the legal framework for sexuality education in Latvia, all of which are concerned with education in general and not specifically with sexuality education. Local governments can also develop their own health promotion strategies and decide on the inclusion of sexuality issues. This may be comprehensive, but it can also be more abstinence focused, albeit including prevention of pregnancy and STIs/HIV. Several municipalities provide sexuality education via peer-education classes.

The Ministry of Education and Science and the related National Centre for Education are responsible for curriculum development. Educational and health professionals are invited to participate in technical expert groups that review the curriculum. Religious groups and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are sometimes invited to participate in working groups for curriculum development at the municipal level. Parents can be members of advisory boards of schools, and in this role they can influence educational programmes.

## Implementation of sexuality education

Elements of sexuality education are included in various classroom subjects, such as social studies, biology, health studies, natural sciences and ethics. Thus, because of its integration into other subjects, sexuality education is effectively mandatory. The potential number of teaching hours, however, differs from school to school. Teachers choose the ideas for discussion and activities they feel are most suitable for each class, or they do so together with learners<sup>1</sup>. For 12–15-year-olds, the maximum number of hours is 27 for the entire sexuality-education programme, and for those aged 16 years or older it is approx. 5–6 hours. Topics relating to biological aspects are covered more extensively, while topics related to contraception, gender roles, sexually transmitted infections, relationships and violence are touched upon only briefly.

## Training of teachers on sexuality education

Only few teachers have been trained to provide sexuality education. The National Centre for Education, Centre for Disease Prevention and Control of Latvia and ‘Papardes ziedis’ (IPPF member association) have developed teaching materials and recommendations, including video films about sexuality education.





## Sexuality education outside the formal school setting

Papardes zieds organises special lessons and activities for teaching children about sexual (health) topics. It also provides information and an option to ask questions and obtain answers on its website. Papardes zieds has developed sexuality-education training for the teachers and people working with young people living with intellectual disabilities. It has also developed a sexuality-education programme for young people living in correctional institutions. However, it is unknown whether these programmes are still being implemented. Church organisations provide abstinence-only and family-values education in schools and in their own centres.

## Challenges

Conservative and nationalist political powers, the opposition party, parents' movements, the Russian-speaking media and conservative family-based NGOs oppose sexuality education. Their main arguments are that sexuality education will have an adverse effect on the demographic situation, and that it damages children's morality and threatens a 'right' and 'healthy' concept of the family.

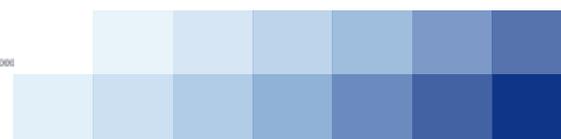


Latvia

# Country facts

Total population <sup>2</sup>	1 994 000
Population aged 15–19 years (% of 15–19-year-olds in total population) <sup>2</sup>	90 000 (4.5 %)
Government expenditure on education (% of GDP) <sup>3</sup>	4.9
Youth unemployment rate (% of labour force aged 15–24 years) <sup>4</sup>	14.8
Gender Inequality Index rating <sup>5</sup>	0.191
Births per 1 000 women aged 15–19 years <sup>6</sup>	13
% of 15-year-olds who have had sexual intercourse <sup>7</sup>	boys: 22 % girls: 14 %
Average age of mother at birth of first child <sup>8</sup>	26.1

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## References / Definitions

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

2 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).

3 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.

4 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.

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).

**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).

6 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).

7 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).

8 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/f7e9007fb-3ca9-445f-96eb-fd75d6792965>, accessed 25 March 2017).