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Recent developments and current status of sexuality education in Europe and Central Asia

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School sexuality education has a long history in Europe, starting in Sweden, where it became a mandatory teaching subject in 1954. Since then it was also adopted in most other European countries; first in Western and Northern Europe and later on also in several Southern and Eastern European countries. In 2008, the German Federal Health Education Centre (BZgA, a WHO collaborating centre), initiated closer international collaboration in the field of sexuality education at the European level. To this end, it organized a “European Expert Group on Sexuality Education”, which is still active in improving, promoting, and in exchanging information and experience in this field. Since 2010 this expert group has released various documents on the subject, in particular the influential “Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe (2010)”, that has been used in many European countries for the development of sexuality education curricula and for integrating the subject in school educational programmes. In 2016, in collaboration with the European Network of IPPF, BZgA initiated a study on the current status of sexuality education in Europe (including Central Asia), in which a representative selection of 25 European (and Central Asian) countries participated. Preliminary results of this unique study have first been presented at an international WHO conference on sexuality education in Europe, in Berlin in May 2017, and the full results became available in 2018 (full report publication in May 2018). The study provides a detailed assessment of the current status of sexuality education in Europe. It is now a mandatory teaching subject in schools in the vast majority of European countries. Unlike in other world regions, the teaching in about half of the European countries has a comprehensive (or holistic) character, is fully integrated and spread out throughout school curricula, starts at young ages and lasts for several years, is based on human rights, and starts from a positive approach to sexuality. Comprehensive sexuality education has a positive influence on the incidence of mostly unplanned adolescent pregnancy rates. In countries with mandatory comprehensive programmes these rates are much lower than in other countries.

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