SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN SPAIN AND LATVIA: ASSESSING STRENGTHS AND GAPS WITH A FOCUS ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION

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Abstract. Child sexual abuse (CSA) remains a major concern across Europe, with lasting psychological and social consequences for victims. Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) has been identified as a key preventive strategy, equipping children with the knowledge and skills to recognise and report abuse. This study provides a comparative analysis of the sexuality education curricula in Spain and Latvia, assessing their effectiveness in preventing CSA. While Spain has made strides toward integrating CSE into its curriculum, gaps remain in early childhood education and teacher training. Latvia, on the other hand, continues to rely on a primarily biological approach to sexuality education, with limited compulsory content about the prevention of CSA. The study highlights the need for a more structured, compulsory and holistic approach to CSE in both countries. It emphasises the importance of early intervention, teacher preparedness and the inclusion of key concepts such as consent, personal boundaries and online safety to enhance CSA prevention efforts.

Keywords: Child sexual abuse, sex education, comprehensive sexual education, prevention, Spain, Latvia, child protection.

Introduction

Despite international recommendations advocating for comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), its implementation across European countries remains inconsistent. There is a lack of comparative research examining how different countries adopt and change CSE in their own contexts. This study involved a comparative analysis of sexuality education curricula in Spain and Latvia, with a particular emphasis on the integration of child sexual abuse (CSA) prevention.

The objective of this research was to analyse how sexuality education is structured and delivered within the educational systems of both countries, identifying key enablers and barriers to effective and comprehensive implementation. The underlying research questions addresses the different interpretations and applications of international CSE guidelines across Europe, which result in disparities in educational outcomes, societal acceptance and youth preparedness. Spain and Latvia represent useful case studies for comparison due to their different historical, political and educational contexts following democratisation and European Union (EU) membership.

This study pursued four interrelated objectives. These were (a) to evaluate the effectiveness of existing sexuality education programmes in Spain and Latvia, using CSE as a standard; (b) to examine the extent to which CSA prevention is incorporated into sexuality education curricula; (c) compare the similarities and differences in the implementation of sexuality education in the two countries, considering their sociopolitical, legal and educational contexts; and (d) propose recommendations to improve the effectiveness of sexuality education, with a particular focus on strengthening CSA prevention through education.

Accordingly, this research sought to answer the following questions:

- How is sexuality education structured and implemented in Spain and Latvia?

- To what extent do national curricula in Spain and Latvia align with international standards for CSE?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses in each country's approach to CSA prevention within the context of sexuality education?
- What factors are constraining the implementation of CSE focused on CSA prevention in each country?

This study employed a qualitative comparative analysis to assess the implementation of CSE and the prevention of CSA in Spain and Latvia. It examined national education policies, legislative frameworks and curriculum guidelines from both countries. To establish evaluation criteria for CSE, a thematic analysis of UNESCO's *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education* was conducted, with particular attention paid to indicators related to CSA prevention, including early education around consent, boundaries and body autonomy. Additionally, secondary data from government reports, EU policy documents and peer-reviewed studies were analysed to contextualise the findings.

1. Essential Curriculum Components For Effective Sexuality Education and its Role in CSA Prevention

The *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: an Evidence-Informed Approach* developed by UNESCO, the United Nations and the World Health Organization (WHO) provides a global standard for teaching CSE at every stage of a child's development. This guidance is crucial because it not only outlines the important topics that sexuality education should cover but also offers clear, age-appropriate recommendations for when and how to introduce concepts such as gender, sexuality, consent and personal safety. It is organised in eight core themes: Relationships; Values, Rights, Culture, and Sexuality; Understanding Gender; Violence and Staying Safe; Skills for Health and Well-being; The Human Body and Development; Sexuality and Sexual Behaviour; and Sexual and

Reproductive Health. Together, these themes offer a well-rounded and interconnected approach, including several aspects and elements to help prevent CSA[1].

However, as this paper specifically focused on addressing CSA through education, the core concepts of CSE were refined and reorganised to prioritise key concepts around CSA. This more focused approach was achieved by creating five learning domains, while still including all of the original concepts, as outlined below.

- Biological and psychological development, focused on learning about anatomy, puberty, reproduction and body image.
- Sexuality and reproductive health, which consists of learning about sexual behaviour, reproductive health and disease prevention.
- Personal and social relationships, to learn about relationships, values, culture, sexual orientation and gender.
- Health skills and personal development: learning how peers can influence sexual behaviour; about decision-making skills to empower students to make informed decisions; about communication and refusal skills, to communicate and understand boundaries; about media literacy and sexuality, to analyse media portrayals of sexuality and develop critical thinking skills; and learning how to access
- help and support for any concerns about sexual health and well-being.
- Safety, consent and personal integrity: recognising different types of violence and their impact; consent, privacy and body integrity, learning the importance of personal boundaries and consent; and safe use of information and communication technology, with education about online safety and digital boundaries.

1 UNESCO, *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An Evidence-Informed Approach* (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2018), https://www.unesco.org.

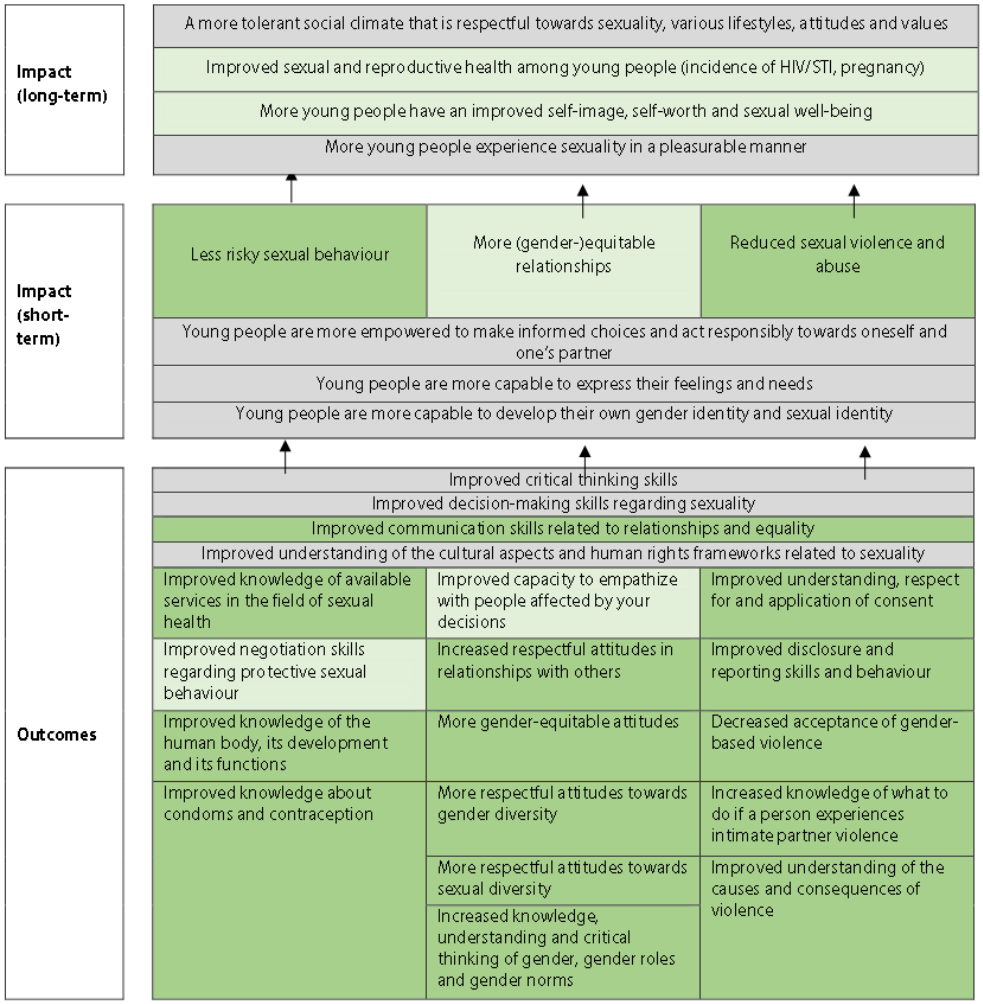


Figure 1: Overview of the evidence regarding the effectiveness of sexuality education[2]

Countries that have successfully integrated CSE into their educational systems have observed considerable benefits. These programmes often focus not only on educating children about their rights but also on training teachers to recognise the signs of abuse and respond appropriately. This dual approach ensures that both children and educators are equipped to prevent and address CSA, and

2 European Parliament, Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, *Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Why Is It Important?,* Study commissioned by the FEMM Committee, 2022, Figure 1, https://www.europarl.europa.eu.

research has shown that this can have a direct and powerful impact on reducing sexual violence and abuse[3, 4] as summarized in Figure 1.

However, in some countries, including Spain and Latvia, the integration of CSE into the school curriculum remains inconsistent and has a very narrow approach. As a result, many children are not receiving the tools and knowledge they need to protect themselves from abuse. This gap in education perpetuates a cycle in which children remain uninformed and vulnerable, unable to navigate situations involving exploitation or abuse.

2. The Importance of Child Sexual Abuse Prevention in Sexuality Education

CSA is currently a critical problem in Europe, with profound implications for individual well-being. Although definitions of CSA vary across countries and organisations, the most recent official definition is 'any contact or non-contact actions that involve sexual organs or references to sexual organs or other body parts used for sexual activities'[5]. CSA remains an urgent concern due to its high prevalence and long-lasting consequences. Around one in five children in Europe experiences some form of sexual abuse during their childhood[6]. The European Commission further emphasises that millions of cases go unreported, underlining the widespread nature of the problem and the major gaps in both prevention and response systems[7].

3 European Parliament, *Comprehensive Sexuality Education*, 2022, https://www.europarl.europa.eu.

4 UNFPA, *The Evaluation of Comprehensive Sexuality Education Programmes: A Focus on the Gender and Empowerment Outcomes* (UNFPA, 2015).

5 United Nations Children's Fund, *International Classification of Violence Against Children* (New York, UNICEF, 2023).

6 Council of Europe. n.d., "Stop Child Sexual Abuse in Sport", *Human Rights Channel.* Accessed on 10/01/2025. https://human-rights-channel.coe.int/stop-child-sexual-abuse-in-sport-en.html.

7 European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, and N. Picken, *Sexuality Education across the European Union – An Overview* (Publications Office, 2020), https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/869234.

The short-term consequences of CSA can include anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder, this last consequence being the most common[8, 9]. Long-term effects can include substance abuse, chronic mental health issues and difficulties in forming healthy relationships. Survivors are also at increased risk for re-victimisation and often face challenges in their academic and professional lives due to the trauma they have experienced[10].

One of the most effective strategies for preventing CSA is the implementation of CSE. CSE provides children with accurate, age-appropriate information about sexuality and their sexual and reproductive health[11]. This empowers them to recognise, resist and report inappropriate behaviour. According to UNESCO and the European Parliament, CSE not only enhances children's understanding of their rights but also facilitates more open discussions of sensitive issues such as CSA, making it easier for children to seek help when needed [12, 13].

To effectively combat CSA, prevention efforts must include legal measures. However, it is also crucial to implement educational strategies that both empower children to safeguard their own rights and empower educators to detect early signs of abuse and intervene in a timely manner.

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8 Jelena Gerke, Thomas Gfrörer, Frederike-Kristina Mattstedt, Ulrike Hoffmann, Jörg M. Fegert, and Miriam Rassenhofer, "Long-Term Mental Health Consequences of Female- Versus Male-Perpetrated Child Sexual Abuse", *Child Abuse & Neglect* 143, no. 1 (2023): Article 106240, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106240.

9 Fiona Vera-Gray, *Key Messages from Research on the Impacts of Child Sexual Abus* (Barkingside: Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse, 2023). https://doi.org/10.47117/XHQX7049.

10 *Ibid.*, 9.

11 "Comprehensive Sexuality Education", *World Health Organization*, accessed on 18 May 2023, https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/comprehensive-sexuality-education.

12 European Parliament, Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, *Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Why Is It Important?* Study commissioned by the FEMM Committee, 2022, https://www.europarl.europa.eu.

13 UNESCO, *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An Evidence-Informed Approach* (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2018), https://www.unesco.org.

3. Evolution of Sexuality Education and Child Protection Measures Against Sexual Abuse

3.1. Evolution of Sexuality Education in Spain

The evolution of sexuality education in Spain has progressed considerably in recent decades, shaped by societal, political and legal changes. From the limited or non-existent sexuality education during the conservative Franco and post-Franco eras, Spain has moved towards a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to sexuality education[14].

During Franco's dictatorship (1939–1975), education was characterised by conservative roots and non-existent sexuality education. Spain was heavily influenced by the regime's conservative and Catholic values, and the education curriculum emphasised strict moral principles, traditional gender roles and the importance of the family[15]. As a result, sexuality education as we understand it today was non-existent and severely restricted.

While Spain has made progress in incorporating sexuality education into its curriculum over the years, the quality and comprehensiveness of this education have fluctuated due to political changes and societal attitudes. Early laws focused primarily on biological aspects of reproduction, while later laws introduced more comprehensive topics such as gender equality, consent, and sexual orientation[16, 17, 18, 19]. However, conservative influences and regional disparities have hindered

14 María Toledano-Sierra, et. al., "Female Sexuality During an Era of Political Repression in Spain: A Qualitative Study on the Survivors of Francoism", *Women's Studies International Forum* 79 (2020): 102343, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2020.102343.

15 Ibid.

16 Spain, Organic Law 8/1985, of July 3, on the Right to Education, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, no. 159 (July 4, 1985): 20632–20641, https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-1985-12978.

17 Spain, Organic Law 1/1990, of October 3, on the General Organization of the Education System, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, no. 238 (October 4, 1990): 28927–28942, https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-1990-24172.

18 Spain, Organic Law 2/2006, of May 3, on Education, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, no. 106 (May 4, 2006): 17158–17207, https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-2006-7899.

19 Spain, Organic Law 3/2020, of December 29, amending Organic Law 2/2006, of May 3, on Education, *Boletín Oficial del Estado* (May 3, 2020), 122868-122953, https://www.boe.es/eli/es/lo/2020/12/29/3.

the consistent implementation of CSE throughout the country. Recent legislation has again emphasised the need for sexuality education to be taught in a way that is age-appropriate and integrated across multiple subjects, ensuring that students receive well-rounded, continuous education on the topic throughout their schooling[20, 21, 22, 23].

3.2. The Current Sexuality Education Curriculum in Spain and its Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Measures

The current Spanish educational curriculum introduces affective-sexual education from the infant education stage up to vocational training (from 0 to 18 years of age). However, for pupils aged from 0 to 5 years, the curriculum only mentions the need to promote respect for affective-sexual diversity and to eradicate all forms of discrimination and sexist stereotypes[24, 25].

In elementary school, the focus is on educating children to have respect for sexual diversity and gender equality, and providing a basic understanding of sexual reproduction and the use of contraceptives. Essential aspects such as the prevention of CSA are not specifically addressed in the curriculum until the age of 10 years. At that point, and within the area of physical education, the curriculum states that students should develop the ability to 'identify, address and reject violent behaviour, including sexual abuse'. However, the depth to which this topic is addressed is left to the discretion of individual teachers, who may choose to simply mention it or go into more depth around issues such as consent, privacy

20 Spain, Royal Decree 95/2022, of February 1, establishing the structure and minimum teachings of Early Childhood Education, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, https://www.boe.es/eli/es/rd/2022/02/01/95/con.

21 Spain, Royal Decree 157/2022, of March 1, establishing the structure and minimum teachings of Primary Education, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, https://www.boe.es/eli/es/rd/2022/03/01/157/con.

22 Spain, Royal Decree 217/2022, of March 29, establishing the structure and minimum teachings of Compulsory Secondary Education, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, https://www.boe.es/eli/es/rd/2022/03/29/217/con.

23 Spain, Organic Law 3/2020, of December 29, amending Organic Law 2/2006, of May 3, on Education, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, https://www.boe.es/eli/es/lo/2020/12/29/3.

24 Spain, Organic Law 3/2020, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*.

25 Spain, *R*oyal Decree 95/2022, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*.

and the risks associated with the use of social media[26, 27].

In secondary education, with pupils aged from 12 to 16 years, topics related to the prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unwanted pregnancies, the use of contraception and other preventive practices are introduced. Issues of personal well-being in the face of external threats, such as 'sextortion' and exposure to inappropriate content, including pornography, are also addressed[28, 29].

At the vocational education stage, affective-sexual education is oriented towards equality and respect for sexual diversity and stresses the importance of responsible sexual practices, assertiveness, self-care and the prevention of STIs and unwanted pregnancies, along with the appropriate use of protective methods[30, 31].

Regarding teacher training, several organisations have developed various programmes to train teachers in the prevention and detection of CSA. However, these training programmes are not compulsory and, depending on the organisation, they can last for 2 to 8 hours and they may be delivered via an online platform or through in-person sessions, so there is considerable variation in the quality and depth of the training programmes[32, 33, 34]. In a recent study involving Spanish teachers, they frequently expressed a shared concern around the lack of sexuality education training. In addition, two participants emphasised the fact that in schools, sex education topics are transversal themes, meaning that they are taught as part of wider topics, such as healthy eating, digitalisation and

26 Spain, Organic Law 3/2020, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*.

27 Spain, Royal Decree 157/2022, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*.

28 Spain, Royal Decree 217/2022, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*.

29 Spain, Organic Law 3/2020, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*

30 Spain, Royal Decree 217/2022, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*.

31 Spain, Organic Law 3/2020, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*.

32 Save the Children, *Docentes de toda la Comunitat Valenciana se forman para proteger a más de 35,000 niños y niñas* (Save the Children, 2024), accessed October 15, 2024, https://www.savethechildren.es/notasprensa/docentes-de-toda-la-comunitat-valenciana-se-forman-para-proteger-mas-de-35000-ninos-y.

33 Fundación RANA, "Formación Dirigida a Profesionales Que Trabajan Con Infancia y Adolescencia", *Fundación RANA*, October 17, 2023. Retrieved from https://www.fundacionrana.org/es/evento/formacion-2023.

34 Aminogal, "Comenzamos el curso 2023-2024", *Aminogal*, September 1., 2023. Retrieved from https://www.aminogal.es/comenzamos-el-curso-2023-2024/.

environmental education, which makes teaching CSE even more challenging[35].

In summary, although the Spanish educational curriculum recognises the need for sexuality education and approaches it from a compulsory and holistic perspective, it is not comprehensive for all stages of the curriculum[36, 37, 38, 39, 40]. For children up to the age of 10 years, the curriculum only focuses on aspects related to reproductive health, equality and sexual diversity, without delving into crucial issues such as consent, grooming or respect for body boundaries[41, 42, 43, 44]. It is crucial to introduce these key concepts early, as evidence from various studies suggests that CSA in Europe begin between the ages of 2 and 7[45, 46].

3.3. The Evolution of Sexuality Education in Latvia

Latvia has also developed and changed its approach to sexuality education, although progress has been more gradual and limited compared with that of Spain. Sexuality education in Latvia has undergone a complex evolution since 1990, due to the transition following its independence from the Soviet Union, its integration into European and global systems, and the development in sociocultural beliefs. Before Latvia regained its independence in 1991, the country's sexuality

35 Fernando Jesús Plaza-del-Pino et al., "Primary School Teachers' Perspective of Sexual Education in Spain: A Qualitative Study", *Healthcare* 9, no. 3 (2021): 287, https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare9030287.

36 Spain, Royal Decree 217/2022, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*.

37 Spain, Royal Decree 157/2022, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*.

38 Spain, Royal Decree 95/2022, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*.

39 European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, and N. Picken, *Sexuality Education across the European Union – An Overview* (Publications Office, 2020), https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/869234.

40 Spain, Organic Law 3/2020, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*.

41 Spain, Royal Decree 217/2022, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*.

42 Spain, Royal Decree 157/2022, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*.

43 European Parliament, *Comprehensive Sexuality Education*, 2022, https://www.europarl.europa.eu.

44 Spain, Organic Law 3/2020, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*.

45 Ateret Gewirtz-Meydan, Yael Lahav, Wendy Walsh, and David Finkelhor, "Psychopathology among Adult Survivors of Child Pornography", *Child Abuse & Neglect* 98 (2019): 104189, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104189.

46 Erin K. Martin and Peter H. Silverstone, "How Much Child Sexual Abuse Is "Below the Surface," and Can We Help Adults Identify It Early?", *Frontiers in Psychiatry Sec. Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* Volume 4 (July 15, 2013). https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2013.00058.

education policies were shaped by Soviet ideology. Sexuality education was non-existent during the Soviet period. Education related to human reproduction was limited to biological aspects, with little focus on the emotional, social or ethical dimensions. Gender roles were rigidly defined, and topics such as contraception, sexual orientation and consent were rarely addressed. After Latvia regained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, sexuality education was addressed, and the country started to align its educational curriculum with international standards[47, 48].

Early reforms in sexuality education in Latvia focused on basic reproductive health, anatomy and hygiene. However, due to the cultural and political conservatism that prevailed during this period, there was considerable resistance to introducing comprehensive CSE, especially when it came to addressing topics such as sexual rights, contraception and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning and other diverse sexual orientations (LGBTQ+). Despite these obstacles, the Latvian government, alongside various non-governmental organisations, laid the groundwork for more progressive sexuality education by introducing programmes that were initially focused on HIV/AIDS prevention, as the global AIDS crisis became a pressing issue. Latvia subsequently adopted various human rights frameworks and aligned its public health policies with broader European standards[49].

3.4. The Current Sexuality Educational Curriculum in Latvia and its Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Measures

The current education curriculum in Latvia includes sexuality education that

47 Irena Zogla, "Leading Educators' Relearning in a Post-Soviet Country", *Theory Into Practice* 45, no. 2 (2006): 133–42, https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4502_5.

48 Aims C. McGuinness, "Reforms in the Baltics", *International Higher Education* no. 25 (March 2001). https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2001.25.6951.

49 Latvian Parliament, *Sexual and Reproductive Health Law* (1999), https://likumi.lv/ta/id/58982-seksualas-un-reproduktivas-veselibas-likums.

is mainly taught from a biological perspective and the prevention of STIs. There have been attempts by the government to change this and approach sexuality education via a more holistic and comprehensive approach, with attempts to include topics such as sexual orientation and gender. In the National Development Plan of Latvia for 2021–2027, which was approved by the EU in 2020, it stated that to improve the psychological and emotional well-being of the population, efforts would be made to improve sexual and reproductive health and decrease related infectious diseases. Also, since 2005, the sexual and reproductive health law (1999) has had as one of its principles the implementation of '*sexual and reproductive health care by providing free-of-charge birth assistance and the possibility to obtain basic knowledge on sexual and reproductive health promotion and care at medical treatment and educational institutions*'[50].

However, the most recent national survey on sexual and reproductive health revealed that contraceptive use remains low among the general population. Only half of Latvians use some type of contraceptive (with 14.5% using interrupted intercourse, which has limited effectiveness), 33.9% of which are not effective against STIs, meaning just 16.1% of the population use effective contraceptive methods that also prevent STIs[51, 52, 53]. This explains why Latvia has one of the highest rates of new HIV diagnoses in the EU.

On 1 May 2024, Latvia finally ratified the Istanbul Convention, an international treaty that obliges countries to combat violence against women and children. The ratification process had been delayed for years because of concerns

50 Latvian Parliament, Sexual and Reproductive Health Law.

51 A. Ķīvīte-Urtāne, et al., *Pētījums Par Latvijas Iedzīvotāju Seksuālās un Reproduktīvās Veselības Ietekmējošiem Faktoriem un Paradumiem: Pētījuma Ziņojums* (Riga: LR Veselības ministrija, 2023), https://www.esparveselibu.lv/petijums/petijums-par-latvijas-iedzivotaju-seksualas-un-reproduktivas-veselibas-ietekmejosiem.

52 Violeta Bule, Ieva Pitkevica, and Gunta Lazdane, "Contraception among HIV-Positive Women in Latvia: Knowledge, Experience and Factors Influencing the Choice", *The European Journal of Contraception & Reproductive Health Care* 27, no. 5 (2022): 390–96, https://doi.org/10.1080/13625187.2022.2088730.

53 Lisea Marty, et al., "Revealing HIV Epidemic Dynamics and Contrasting Responses in Two WHO Eastern European Countries: Insights from Modeling and Data Triangulation", *AIDS* 35, no. 4 (March 15, 2021): 675–80, https://doi.org/10.1097/QAD.0000000000002778.

that the treaty might introduce ideas related to gender identity. In response to the controversy and public debate, Latvia's Minister for Welfare at the time, Uldis Augulis, clarified that: '*the term "social gender" enshrined in the Convention and used in controversial discussions does not bear any relation to the obligation to introduce any other gender awareness in the legal and educational system of Latvia*'[54].

However, all of these approaches have been suggestions, meaning that those teachers who wanted to teach these topics or to use the tools provided by the government could do so, but this was not mandatory. Despite it not being mandatory, there was still opposition from other political parties to remove this content from the curriculum[55, 56].

The Latvian government has also developed various projects related to teaching sexuality education in primary schools through the EU's European Social Fund project. The Latvian government has developed several initiatives to support sexuality education in primary schools, primarily through the EU's European Social Fund. One notable initiative was organized by the Latvian Center for Disease Prevention and Control, which worked in collaboration with the social centre *Papardes zieds* to deliver age-appropriate events in schools under the theme of sexual and reproductive health.These lessons included, among other important topics, the physiological and emotional changes that occur during puberty; the healthy development of self-confidence; developing responsible relationships; decision-making skills; sexting; and contraception. However, it was not mandatory to provide these lessons and therefore many schools decided not to

54 Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia, "Valdība izskata likumprojektu par konvencijas ratificēšanu [The Government Considers the Bill on the Ratification of the Convention]", 2024, https://www.mk.gov.lv/en/jaunums/valdiba-izskata-likumprojektu-par-konvencijas-ratificesanu.

55 Ibis BNN News, "AS Puts Latvian Minister on Blast'.

56 Juriskaa, "Latvia's Education Content Head Suspended", *Substack*, October 25, 2024, https://juriskaa.substack.com/p/latvias-education-content-head-suspended.

include them, leaving their pupils lacking this important information and education[57, 58]. In addition, the Dardedze social centre developed a programme to teach children about personal safety and relationships; since 2004, it has been implemented for children aged between 5 and 10 years. It also has a training programme designed for teachers. This enables them to learn and be updated about various tools and materials to use when working with these topics themselves, reaching even more children this way. It should be noted that in 2025, the Ministry of Education and Science stated that all teachers will be required to take a sexuality education course[59].

4. Findings

This analysis has revealed several weaknesses and some strengths in the sexuality education programmes of both Spain and Latvia. The Figure 2 following chart provides a comparative overview of how the Latvian and Spanish educational curricula address the five learning domains of sex education. It offers a clear visual representation of their similarities and differences, as well as the grade of accomplishment of each domain; green indicates the domain fully aligns with established standards, orange indicates the domains that are included but require improvements, and red indicates the ones that do not meet the criteria for CSE and need major changes.

57 Latvian Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, *Educational Activities for Students on Sexual and Reproductive Health Issues* (Riga: Latvian Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2019a), accessed November 10, 2024, https://www.spkc.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/izglitojoso-nodarbibu-pasakumu-kopumi-skoleniem-par-seksualas-un-reproduktivas-veselibas-jautajumiem-0.

58 Ibis Latvian Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, *Educational Activities*, 2019b.

59 "AS Puts Latvian Minister on Blast about Sexual Education Study Materials for Nine-Year-Olds", *BNN News*, October 24, 2024a, https://bnn-news.com/as-puts-latvian-minister-on-blast-about-sexual-education-study-materials-for-nine-year-olds-249470.

	SPAIN	LATVIA
BIOLOGICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT	Yes, it is compulsory. The curriculum includes education on anatomy, puberty, and reproduction starting from primary school. However, the focus is primarily on biological reproduction, with insufficient depth in addressing psychological aspects of development especially in the first courses of primary education	Yes, it is compulsory but the curriculum focuses almost exclusively on the biological aspects, such as reproduction and hygiene, with limited attention to psychological development
SEXUALITY & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH	Yes, it is included and compulsory. Starting in elementary school, the curriculum addresses reproductive health and contraception. By secondary education, topics such as STI prevention and safe practices are included. However, societal and political influences sometimes limit the consistency of implementation	Yes, it is included and compulsory, but it is limited in scope. The curriculum addresses reproductive health and STI prevention but does not comprehensively teach safe practices, which contributes to low contraceptive use and high rates of STI diagnoses
PERSONAL & SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS	Yes, it is included in the curriculum and compulsory. Topics such as respect for sexual diversity and gender equality are integrated into broader subjects. However, the lack of a standalone focus on these topics leads to variability in how deeply they are covered	No, it is not comprehensively included in the curriculum. While some voluntary initiatives address these topics, they are not part of the compulsory curriculum, leaving significant gaps in education on personal and social relationships
HEALTH SKILLS & PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT	Yes, it is included in the curriculum and compulsory, but it lacks comprehensive implementation. Decision-making, communication skills, and media literacy are indirectly taught through related subjects but are not explicitly emphasized as key components	No, it is not comprehensively included in the curriculum. These skills are addressed in some optional programs, but they are not part of the compulsory education system, leaving many students without this essential knowledge
SAFETY, CONSENT & PERSONAL INTEGRITY	Yes, it is included in the curriculum and compulsory, but it is insufficiently addressed in early childhood. Topics like consent and personal boundaries are introduced only around the age of 10, which may be too late given that CSA often begins at younger ages	No, it is not included in the curriculum except for limited voluntary programs. Although these programs cover safety and consent, their non-compulsory nature means that many children do not receive education on these critical topics

Figure 2: Chart that summarises the inclusion and implementation of key components of sexuality education in Spain and Latvia). Created by the author, based on an analysis of educational policies).

In addition, both countries currently face two major challenges that significantly constrain the effective implementation of CSE, particularly in relation to CSA prevention:

- A lack of formal teacher training: during their bachelor's studies, future educators in Spain and Latvia do not receive specialised instruction in sexuality education and much less in CSA prevention. This gap greatly weakens school-based prevention efforts, leaving teachers unprepared to address sensitive but essential topics that directly impact students' well-being. Without the proper training, educators may struggle with their confidence and the necessary skills to effectively deliver these lessons.
- Limitations of transversal learning: while transversal education is beneficial for many subjects, topics such as sexual education and bullying require structured, explicit instruction to ensure consistency and depth. Relying solely on transversal education can lead to fragmented coverage, with critical issues such as consent and abuse prevention inconsistently addressed.

Given the high prevalence of bullying and the lack of CSE, a more systematic approach is needed to provide students with consistent, high-quality instruction and support.

Conclusions

This study explored how Spain and Latvia include sexuality education in their school systems, focusing on how well they address the prevention of CSA. While both countries have made efforts to improve sexuality education, their approaches differ in structure and depth.

Spain currently offers a more comprehensive and structured approach than Latvia to sexuality education. Its curriculum covers a wider range of important topics, such as health, identity and relationships. However, because education is managed at the regional level, there are inconsistencies in how this content is delivered across the country. Despite recent improvements, important gaps remain. These include the absence of mandatory, high-quality teacher training, especially at the university level, and the lack of early-years education around key issues such as consent, grooming, and exposure to pornography. In addition, topics related to CSA prevention should be introduced early in a child's education using age-appropriate materials.

Latvia's approach is more limited than Spain's. Sexuality education in Latvia is mainly focused on biological aspects and lacks a broader, more inclusive framework. Key topics such as CSA prevention, sexual orientation, gender identity and emotional development are not consistently included. Although Latvia has made some progress through voluntary government initiatives and EU-funded programmes, these efforts are not mandatory, meaning many students still miss out on essential information. Political and social resistance has made it more difficult to move forwards. A positive development is the planned introduction, starting in 2025, of mandatory sexuality education training for teachers. This could be

a turning point, but for real progress to happen, the Latvian government must make sexuality education a national priority, one that is compulsory, consistent and comprehensive in all schools. Doing so could help reduce issues such as the high rates of HIV infection, low use of contraceptives, and CSA, while also preparing young people to develop healthy and respectful relationships.

Both Spain and Latvia face similar challenges: neither has sufficient numbers of trained teachers, and both fall short of offering truly comprehensive sexuality education that meets international guidelines.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are made:

- CSA prevention should be clearly and consistently included in both countries' sexuality education frameworks. This content should be age-appropriate, evidence-based and introduced from the early years of schooling.
- Compulsory teacher training programmes should be created, and attendance should be enforced. Starting at the university level, these programmes should cover how to teach sexuality education effectively, including the emotional and social aspects of sexuality and the prevention of CSA.
- National curricula should be aligned with international standards, such as those from UNESCO and WHO, to ensure that sexuality education is holistic, inclusive and based on human rights and health promotion.

This comparison shows that it is not enough to just teach the biological aspects of sexuality. Countries must adopt more well-rounded and emotionally informed approaches. When CSA prevention is built into sexuality education from the start, schools become safer, and children are better prepared to understand their rights, protect themselves and develop healthy relationships.

SEKSUALINIS ŠVIETIMAS ISPANIJOJE IR LATVIJOJE: STIPRIŲJŲ PUSIŲ IR TRŪKUMŲ VERTINIMAS VAIKŲ SEKSUALINĖS PATIRTIES PREVENCIJOS KONTEKSTE

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Santrauka. Vaikų seksualinė prievarta (VPP) išlieka rimtu rūpesčiu visoje Europoje ir turi ilgalaikių psichologinių bei socialinių pasekmių aukoms. Visapusiškas lytinis švietimas (VPP) buvo įvardytas kaip pagrindinė prevencinė strategija, suteikianti vaikams žinių ir įgūdžių atpažinti ir pranešti apie prievartą. Šiame tyrime pateikiama lyginamoji Ispanijos ir Latvijos lytinio švietimo programų analizė, įvertinant jų veiksmingumą užkertant kelią VPP. Nors Ispanija padarė pažangą integruodama VPP į savo mokymo programas, ikimokyklinio ugdymo ir mokytojų rengimo srityse vis dar yra spragų. Kita vertus, Latvija ir toliau remiasi daugiausia biologiniu požiūriu į lytinį švietimą, o privalomas turinys apie prievartos prevenciją yra ribotas. Tyrime pabrėžiamas labiau struktūrizuoto, privalomo ir holistinio požiūrio į VPP poreikis abiejose šalyse.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: vaikų seksualinė prievarta, lytinis švietimas, visapusiškas lytinis švietimas, prevencija, Ispanija, Latvija, vaikų apsauga.