

Indlæg UNECE Regional conference on ICPD+30, second thematic session: Families, sexual and reproductive health over the life course

Thank you chair,

As Danish Youth Delegate, I am speaking on behalf of the Danish youth, focusing on the youth perspectives on the newly strengthened frameworks and challenges in Denmark.

I would like to start in 2022, where students of the upper secondary school of Denmark went on strike and demanded that comprehensive sexuality education was included in their curriculum. They stressed that CSE was fundamental to be able to take educated and informed choices and ensure bodily autonomy. Therefore, the protests focused on moving beyond just knowledge of biology, sexually transmitted diseases and contraception. Instead the students pushed for education about identity, consent, healthy relationships, personal boundaries, and how to respect them.

And already the following fall, CSE was a part of the curriculum. This showcases that youth are demanding more inclusion when it comes to the right of sexual and reproductive health and that the changes can and should be done with short timeframes. And that CSE stays relevant and important to work with systematically beyond in primary and lower secondary school. In this regard, it is key that young people are recognized as agents of change and that they play an active role development in interventions and development of initiatives, equally, that their parents are not the only source of advice and information.

The civil society is taking an active part in supplementing and supporting the CSE. One example is peer-to-peer education between medical and health professional students volunteering to conduct education in lower secondary school. Furthermore, yearly educational material is developed in collaboration with civil society, pushing for a full week where every grade focuses on CSE, nationally. Another example is a recently developed web application for youth with disabilities offering equitable and specialized information. All of the examples are enabling science-based information and destigmatising conversations.

But we still have challenges related to the quality of CSE. The professionals, such as teachers, are not always sufficiently trained. Furthermore, there are no requirements related to the amount of hours spent on teaching CSE, which can also result in varying quality as well as lack of prioritization.

I also want to touch upon an inevitable factor based on the modern and digitalised world, where children and adolescents are confronted with material around sexual and reproductive health from an early age. Unfortunately, much of it can be misleading and direct misinformation, so it is central that quality sexuality education starts timely. In Denmark, it starts at the first year of school.

We have made great progress but must continue to work to offer universal comprehensive sexuality education in a timely and systematic way.

Thank you for the word and your attention.