

UNESCO'S SERAT METHODOLOGY

COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN KYRGYZSTAN SUMMARY



Cover photo: UNFPA Kyrgyzstan



Sexuality education status

During Kyrgyzstan's 30 years of independence, several attempts have been made to introduce a sexuality education programme into the secondary school system. However, a wave of opposition from some parents and parts of the public influenced the decision of the Ministry of Education to exclude comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) from the compulsory curriculum. Thus, the public education system does not have a compulsory school curriculum on CSE; instead, elements of CSE are integrated into extracurricular activities as part of a course on healthy lifestyles for students in grades 6–11. To assess the quality of the current school-based sexuality education in the country, an analysis was conducted using UNESCO's Sexuality Education Review and Assessment Tool (SERAT).¹

Legal and policy context

The analysis of Kyrgyz legislation revealed no rigid or discriminatory barriers to the provision of information and education in the field of adolescent sexual and reproductive health (SRH). The right of young people to access SRH-related information and education is enshrined in a number of international agreements ratified by Kyrgyzstan, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and others. These rights are also reflected in a number of national laws, primarily in the Law on the Reproductive Rights of Citizens and Guarantees for Their Implementation. However, this law does not mention concepts such as “sexual rights”, “sexuality”, “sexual orientation”, “sexual life”, “adolescent”, “gender-based violence” or “discrimination”. In this section of SERAT, the link to SRH services was also assessed, which showed that it is weak, as most public schools do not have a school doctor or nurse, and health services do not have up-to-date guidelines and regulations for working with adolescents.

Integration into the official curriculum

A teacher's manual that provides guidelines for extracurricular lessons on healthy lifestyles is included in part of the school curriculum. The manual covers only secondary and high school students, and extracurricular lessons are not taught systematically.

Sexuality education content (ages 5–18+)

For eight years now, Kyrgyzstan has been developing and implementing an extracurricular programme on healthy lifestyles that covers a wide range of adolescent health issues. Teachers have developed the practice of using the above-mentioned teacher's manual, but new approaches to addressing CSE issues are needed. Large gaps remain in the broad range of topics covered by the programme. The curriculum pays little attention to students' acquisition of responsible sexual behaviours, where the ability to critically analyse

1. The SERAT tool and reporting template are available at <https://healtheducationresources.unesco.org/library/documents/sexuality-education-review-and-assessment-tool-serat> (accessed on 13 June 2023).

social and gender norms and power imbalances between sexual partners is formed, and where skills are acquired to prevent gender inequality and unprotected and unwanted sexual contact. The overall score for the content section for all age groups is 11.8 per cent.

The extracurricular lessons on healthy lifestyles are conducted starting in the sixth grade, which covers adolescents 11–12 years old. In the manual, the sixth-grade lessons focus on healthy nutrition, hygiene and smoking prevention. The manual suggests that teachers discuss with students the concepts of “health”, “a healthy lifestyle”, “a daily regimen” and “positive self-perception”. In general, the assessment showed that the topics for this age group demonstrated the least alignment with international CSE standards and did not reflect gender issues at all.

For grades 7–9, the programme provides a lot of useful and important information about hygiene, relationships with peers and people of different genders, reproductive health and prevention of substance abuse. A wide range of topics correspond in many ways to the needs of young people. The social aspects and causes of certain social phenomena in Kyrgyz society are considered, including bride kidnapping, early marriage and suicide. At the same time, very little attention is paid to the development of skills needed to search for evidence-based information and to consult with medical specialists and psychologists. Almost no information is provided about opportunities for students to protect themselves against violence or to prevent violence among their peers or within their families. There is very limited information about resources to protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or unwanted pregnancies.

Students aged 15–18+ receive information about the impact of psychoactive substances on the human body and on life in general; they also discuss issues of risky behaviour and safety. In this age category, the issues of personality development, interpersonal relationships, and tolerant and respectful attitudes to diversity are also considered. But all these topics are covered only partially, without in-depth discussion or shaping of attitudes. In addition, during consultations with practising teachers, it was noted that these topics are often not discussed with students because of the personal attitude of the teachers delivering the extracurricular classes. Teachers may decide not to discuss these topics because of their personal views and values, embarrassment or lack of proper experience in teaching topics that are considered taboo in society.

Teaching methods and teacher training

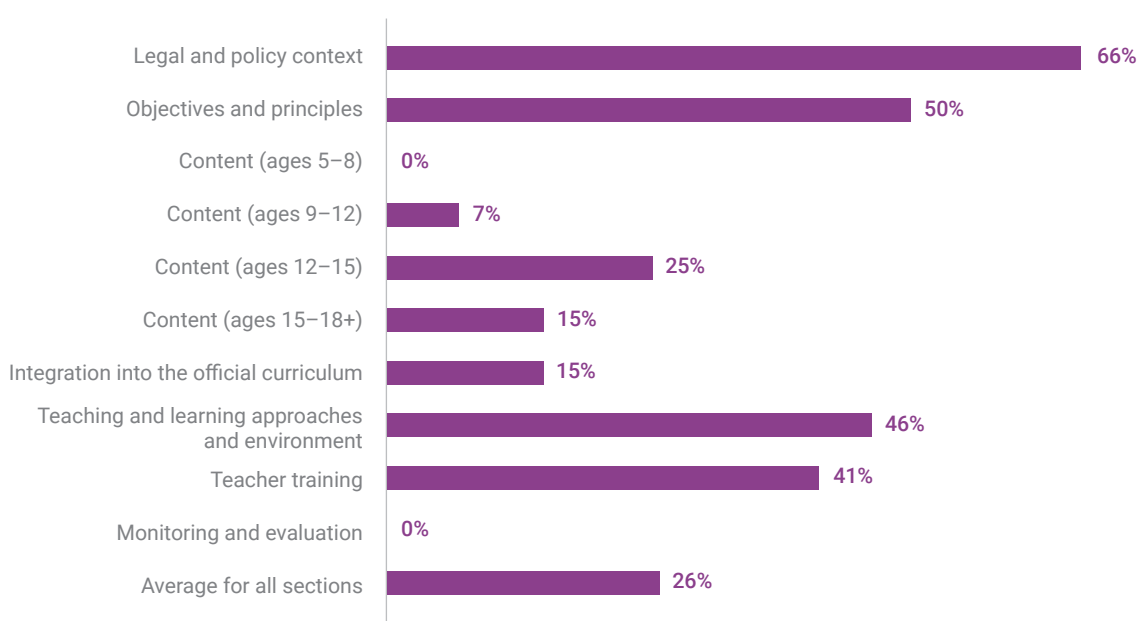
Since the introduction of the manual, little attention has been paid to the professional training of teachers (the SERAT score on teacher training is 40.5 per cent). Staff training is not systematic; instead, it is carried out selectively as part of various training courses conducted under different initiatives. In 2017–2021, in accordance with orders of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic, in cooperation with UNESCO, a training programme for teachers on the methodology for conducting extracurricular lessons was introduced at the I. Arabaev Kyrgyz State University. Teachers in schools, vocational schools and higher education institutions were trained through this initiative. However, it covered only a portion of teachers and future specialists. Moreover, the programme did not reflect some categories covered by the SERAT tool. The programme did not provide the knowledge and skills teachers need to respond to parental or public attitudes and concerns about sexuality education or violence against students, including violence at school and gender-based violence, which are only partially introduced. There is also a need to develop student materials and textbooks, as teachers currently make their own teaching aids based on the manual’s recommendations.

Monitoring and evaluation

Currently, no data are collected within the programme; moreover, the impact of training on the behaviour of adolescents and their acquisition of useful skills are not assessed. This is clearly seen in the figure below. Since the programme has no unified basic regulatory documentation, there are no tools for monitoring and evaluation. The quality of the knowledge and skills that students learn cannot be assessed; also, the effectiveness of these courses is not reflected in the education system or in the health system data collected.

Summary of SERAT findings

The figure below summarizes the scores* for each SERAT section, in percentages, and demonstrates the sexuality education programme's strengths and areas for improvement.



Source: Data collected through the SERAT tool.

* The formula for determining the weighted score ("present" x 1 [100%] + "present to some extent" x 0.5 [50%]) is outlined in a 2021 global status report on comprehensive sexuality education produced by several UN agencies, including UNFPA.² The percentages for "present" and "present to some extent" are derived from the graphs automatically generated by SERAT.

2. UNESCO and others, *The Journey towards Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Global Status Report* (Paris, UNESCO, 2021).

Recommendations and the way forward

The healthy lifestyle programme is considered an independent curriculum that is an important component of broader initiatives aimed at improving the health and well-being of young people. It should be adapted to meet the needs of a modern society, including the needs of adolescents and young people. It would need to provide age-appropriate skills to promote health and safe behaviour. The publication *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An Evidence-Informed Approach*³ could be a support tool for the inclusion of new topics and indicators with respect to learning outcomes within such a programme. The Republican Centre for Health Promotion plans to make additions and changes to the existing manual in 2022; thus, the findings of this report should be discussed with the technical working group, and the additions should be made according to international standards and the criteria covered by the SERAT tool. Doing this would greatly enrich the existing manual for the healthy lifestyle course and would make it possible to expand and incorporate the most relevant CSE-related topics into the existing curriculum, as well as to consider making the course part of the compulsory school curriculum. Additionally, some other recommendations should be considered:

- Experts who can provide evidence for subsequent advocacy should accelerate their work so that CSE becomes mandatory in schools, with a clear indication of minimum standards and goals for teaching and providing young people with the necessary resources.
- Textbooks and learning materials that include the full range of CSE topics and that take into account cultural and social diversity should be developed and incorporated.
- Young people must be able to participate in developing and influencing programmes that respond to their real needs and aspirations. Mechanisms that ensure the active participation of young people in the development of all policies and programmes at the national and school levels should be developed and introduced.
- Methodological materials and incentives should be provided to support teachers.
- The revised programme could also include issues concerning sexuality education for parents and encourage dialogue between parents and teachers.

3. UNESCO and others, *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An Evidence-Informed Approach*, 2nd rev. ed. (Paris, UNESCO, 2018).

