

Pren-los! **Young people stand up for Sexual and Reproductive Rights.**

A set of demands and recommendations for duty and responsibility bearers.



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Who are we?

We are a group of young people who are actively participating in Pren-los! (Use Them!), a project developed by L'Associació de Drets Sexuals i Reproductius (Association for Sexual and Reproductive Rights) a grassroots Catalan organisation that works in an interdisciplinary manner to promote and defend sexual and reproductive rights.

Pren-los is a youth-led platform born with the aim of creating meaningful youth engagement in advocacy for sexual and reproductive rights, as we are the essential stakeholders when it comes to our own rights. After a solid training programme and the creation of debating and decision-making spaces, we are ready to take our knowledge and demands to decision-making spaces, building our advocacy efforts around our political and social context.

What brings us here?

As the global COVID-19 pandemic spreads and intensifies, we get to witness the impact such a crisis is having on the sexual and reproductive rights of young people, particularly young women and LGBTQI+ youth. With availability and access to services and information being compromised all around the globe, the barriers they usually face to access sexual and reproductive health services magnify. Moreover, the current context is being instrumentalised by rising fundamentalist groups (which include religious entities, extreme right-wing parties and populists) to further undermine sexual and reproductive rights. Doing so under the common narrative of the so called “gender ideology” and upholding the “protection of life”, traditional family and religious freedom

We, as young activists fighting to uphold and guarantee Sexual and Reproductive Rights for young people in all their diversity feel appalled at the most recent attacks they have suffered, which threaten all the advancements achieved by grassroots activists and LGBTQI+ and feminist organisations over the past decades.

Throughout this brief document, we want to denounce the barriers and the stigma young people are suffering when it comes to guaranteeing their sexual and reproductive rights as well as provide sound recommendations.

Not only by contextualising it in the current epidemiological situation, but also by digging deeper into two fundamental Sexual and Reproductive Rights that are being negatively affected and targeted.

Those rights are “the right to abortion” and “the right to information and education”, which have clearly been impacted by the coronavirus crisis and the fundamentalist narrative.

Who is this document aimed at?

With the content of this document and its corresponding stance and recommendations, we aim at reaching any individual or group of people (whether they are officially constituted as an organisation or not) that has a duty and responsibility towards their communities.

In particular, of course, we target legislators and people working for the public institutions, who have an enhanced capacity to change the public agenda and work towards the creation of programmes and policies that uphold and guarantee the Sexual and Reproductive Rights of young people in all their diversity.

***Upholding and
guaranteeing
the Sexual and
Reproductive
Rights of young
people in times
of COVID-19.***

Context

Access and use of Sexual and Reproductive healthcare

Lockdown measures over the world have disrupted access to sexual and reproductive healthcare (SRH) services like contraception or abortion, as specialised services have stopped or reduced their activity during the health crisis.

As healthcare workers are being diverted to handle the COVID-19 crisis, many SRH centres lack staff for their optimal functionality. As a result, testing for sexually transmitted infections (STI) has been suspended in many places.

The health crisis affected sexual and reproductive products' supply chain. On one hand contraceptives manufacturers have had to halt production or operate at a reduced capacity. On the other hand, there exists a possibility of a complete stockout of contraception and abortion materials due to the lockdowns in China and India.

Young people have suffered the financial burdens that COVID-19 has imposed, affecting access to contraception, abortion and other sexual and reproductive health services.

Mobility restrictions during lockdown have affected young people's access to confidential care, especially those living with parents. Therefore, young people have been at an even higher risk of



pregnancy, unsafe abortion, STIs and complications arising from pregnancy.

COVID-19 has affected LGBTQI+ young community, which already experiences disparities in access to healthcare in regular times. Essential care, such as hormonal treatment and gender-affirming care for transgender people, as well as HIV treatment and testing has taken a backseat due to overloaded health systems.

Mental health

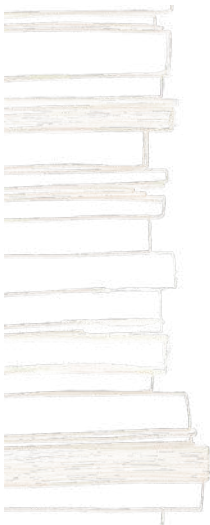
Additionally, LGBTQI+ young people might be quarantined with unsupportive or abusive families, where they are more likely to experience domestic abuse and violence.

Without access to private and confidential support services, young LGBTQI+ people's mental health is at an increased risk of suffering depression, anxiety, substance use and suicidal thoughts.



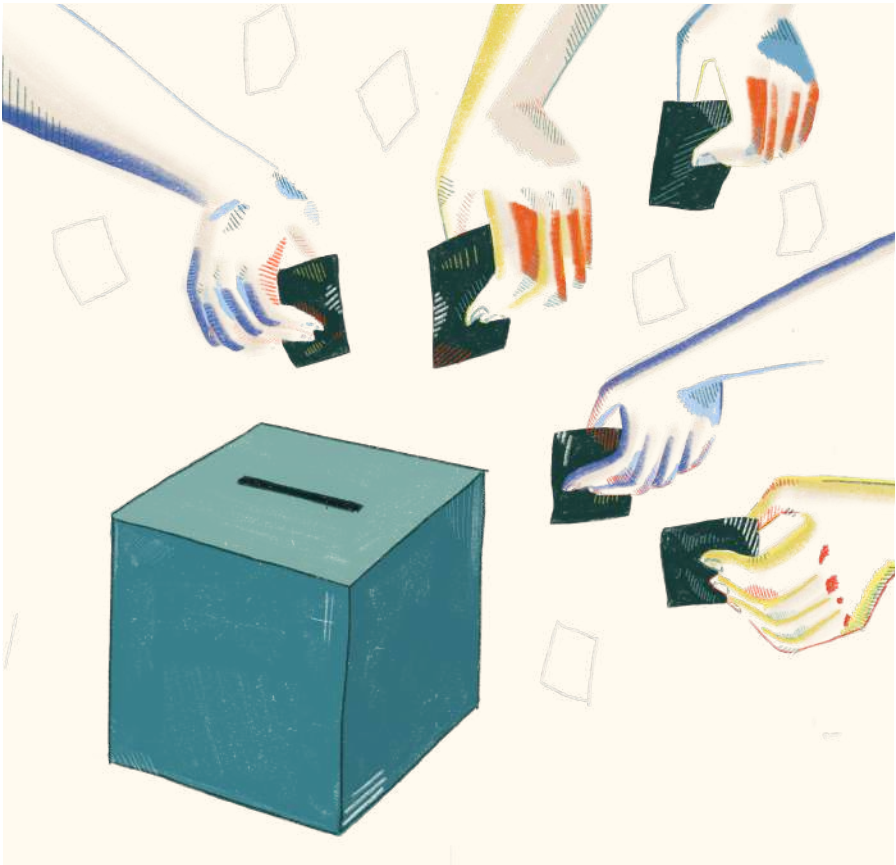
Comprehensive Sexuality Education

When shifting from offline to online learning, comprehensive sexuality education falls by the wayside and isn't included in learning packages. Given that an estimated total of 1.54 billion young people have been out of school due to lockdowns, even fewer young people are now receiving CSE.



New policy implications

Besides that, some governments are using the crisis as a pretext to grab unlimited and indefinite power to attack on vulnerable minority groups. For example, in Poland, a draft bill was raised to further limit abortion within the country unstable situation to apply restrictions on abortion services by considering them “non-essential”. Meanwhile, Hungarian government submitted a bill to parliament would make it impossible for transgender people to legally change their gender.



Blaming the youth

There is an increasing number of news headlines alluding to the lack of responsibility of the youth, stating that “young people are not following the recommendations by the government to calm their sexual desires” thus contributing to the spread of the virus.[19] Actions to offer support for young people such as the implementation of an online service in Parla (Madrid) to answer questions concerning body awareness, sexuality and more have been condemned by certain sectors defending that resources should go to other areas and not to “resolve doubts about porn”.



Social stigma has multiplied on young people, as the youth is frequently seen by the public eye as the group which fails the most to comply with the confinement measures, although there is no evidence or data supporting this statement. Far from that, the reality is quite different. A study done by Universidad Complutense de Madrid warns that a psychological risk factor in this health crisis is being young (widening the age range between 18 and 39 years) and points out that the constant stigmatization of this group does not contribute to improving the situation.

Having said that, it is obvious that the media has the need of finding someone who's responsible for the spread of the virus now that we are able to leave our homes and try to keep a "normal life". But why young people? It's clear that youth culture has always been based on peer interaction, and that adolescents have a higher need than average to relate to each other. However, according to experts the situation they live in is not being taken into account, such as their work characteristics that tend to be precarious which increase the risk of infection. As well as the fact of sharing a flat, this precariousness in the home has been forgotten during the quarantine.

Instead of giving so many restrictions on how to protect from COVID in sexual health, if not an STI, public administrations should reflect more on how structural inequalities affect adolescents' health and how social factors affect their sexual health and make it difficult for them to exercise their rights.

Our stance

In light of the above, we applaud and support:

- 01 /** Actions by initiatives and organisations aimed at meeting the uncovered needs of young people in the sexual and reproductive rights arena, including the provision of aid and services to overcome the above-mentioned barriers.
- 02 /** ICT-enabled solutions such as telemedicine and online contraceptive provision to expand access to SRH care to young people.
- 03 /** The inclusion of capacity-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education in the online learning packages of young people.
- 04 /** Correcting negative language that can cause stigma or blame the youth by sharing accurate information about how the virus spreads.
- 05 /** Virtual resources for mental health or other social support services and platforms to clarify doubts and answer questions for young people.

We denounce and reject:

- 01 /** The approval of any law, policy or measure, that limits SRHR of young people, such as adding limitations to abortion or banning Legal Gender Recognition for Transgender People.
- 02 /** Messages from traditional family and religious freedom, fundamentalist groups (which include religious entities, extreme right-wing parties and populists) criminalising young people's sexual and reproductive lives.
- 03 /** People avoiding or rejecting the youth, and denying access to some services like housing, based on the stereotypes that young people tend to go out more to have sex and drinks thus spreading the virus.

Recommendations

We believe it's essential that bearers of duties and responsibilities:

- 01 /** Always stand up for and uphold Sexual and Reproductive Rights as well as Reproductive Justice. Young people can only do so much without the support of policy-makers.
- 02 /** Acknowledge and prioritize the provision of SRHR-related materials, services and aid for young people.
- 03 /** Eliminate restrictions on young people's SRH unmet needs that can be provided via ICT-enabled solutions such as telemedicine, including abortion medication and contraceptive provision.
- 04 /** In collaboration with youth organisations, develop comprehensive sexuality education materials to be disseminated online.
- 05 /** Fund ongoing surveillance of young people's SRH in light of the widespread COVID-19 disruptions, including methodologies that allow for robust analyses of vulnerable subpopulations.
- 06 /** Maintain the privacy of those seeking healthcare or who may be part of a contact investigation. Make sure that images used in the media show diverse people and not only young people to avoid stereotypes.

01 / **Young people and the right to abortion**

Guaranteeing access to safe abortion in times of COVID-19

Context

The lockdown measures put in place to avoid the spread of COVID-19 has had an impact on abortion services, which have arised challenges for young people who need them.

Prioritisation of COVID-19 on healthcare has led to a shortage on abortion services personnel and resources. Additionally, there exists a possibility of a complete stockout of contraception and abortion materials due to the lockdowns in China and India, adding a barrier for the young women and adolescents that want to use these services.

Even though abortion has been recognised by leading nongovernmental organisations as an essential service that needs to be maintained during the pandemic, some lawmakers have used the situation as an opportunity to limit the abortion legislation.

For example, Malta is having an outright ban on abortion in all circumstances, access to the non-surgical medical method (abortion pill) is also prohibited. In Russia, more than 100,000 women and pregnant people are at risk of unwanted pregnancies or botched abortions. In Slovakia, many hospitals have also stopped performing abortions following a government decision to postpone all planned surgeries except life-saving ones. The Polish national parliament recently held two debates on regressive bills that would have banned abortion for foetal abnormalities as well as penalise sexuality education. Civil society organisations in Poland and

beyond mobilised online with the #ProtestAtHome movement, open letters and collecting proofs of international solidarity. In addition, far right nongovernmental organisations such as “Derecho a Vivir” in Spain have been pushing to use abortion clinics for COVID-19 related purposes, with the aim of stopping their activities and adding difficulties towards abortion.

Nevertheless, the opposite has also happened in territories such as Catalonia, where the abortion process was speeded up while maintaining the alarm situation for COVID-19. This was done by reducing it to just one face-to-face visit to specialized health centers and combining it with other telematic tracking methods.

In Spain since 2015, the Organic Law regulating SRH and interruption of pregnancy states the need of parental consent for adolescent girls aged 16-17 to access an abortion procedure.

Before that reform, in 2010, the same organic law, stated that 16-17 year-old adolescents had the right to decide whether getting or not an abortion procedure on their own, autonomously, without needing to present a formal authorisation from their parents. This clearly means a setback when it comes to bodily autonomy of adolescent girls and has several repercussions on their physical, mental and emotional health.

Young women (defined as 25 years old or younger) and adolescent girls (defined as between 15-19 years old), are less likely to use contraception, with worse health outcomes during pregnancy than women that are older than this category.

The global shortage on the contraceptive supply chain and the higher likelihood of poor health outcomes of young women and adolescents, means that this collective is now at a greater risk of poor health than before. The high chance of the negative impact of pregnancy on young women and adolescent health is clear evidence that safe, accessible abortion is fundamental to young people fully enjoying their sexual and reproductive rights.

Our stance

In light of the above, we applaud and support:

- 01 /** Governments and institutions that guarantee access to timely abortion services provided in a way that suits young people, especially those who are living in unsupportive, restrictive, abusive, and/or anti-choice environments. Regardless of them being underage.
- 02 /** ICT-enabled supports to keep abortion services running through adapting them to adhere to social distancing guidance, including access to telemedical abortions.
- 03 /** Civil Society organisations attempting to fill the gaps in SRH services.

We denounce and reject:

- 01 /** The approval of any law, policy or measure, that limits abortion services.
- 02 /** Actions undertaken by far right nongovernmental organisations to eliminate the availability of abortion services and information.

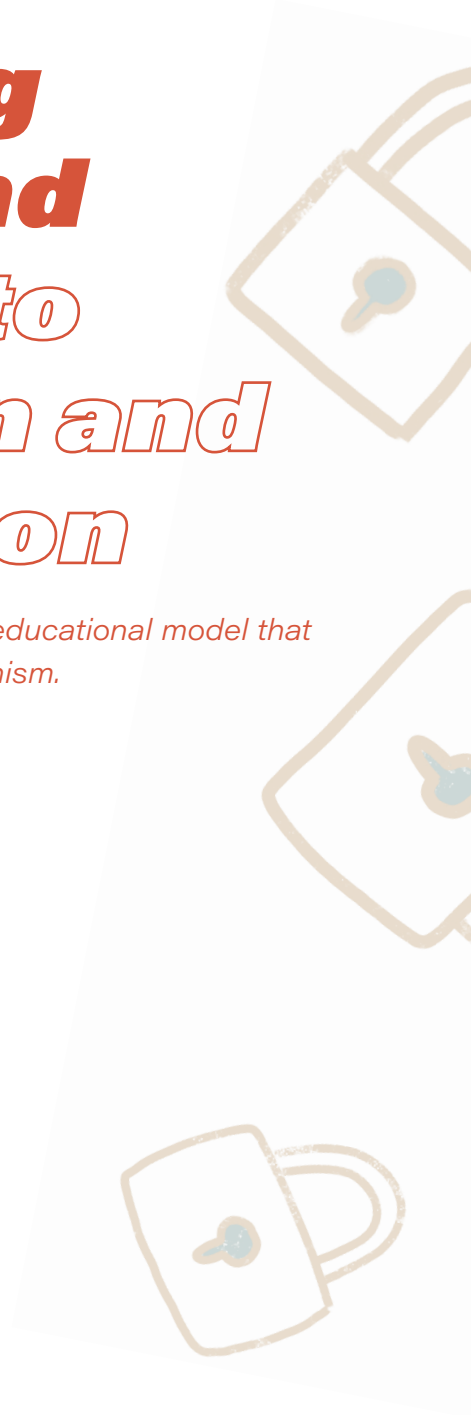
Recommendations

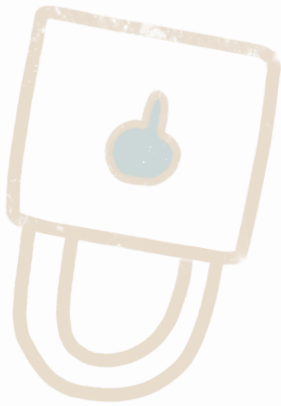
Based on our aforementioned stance:

- 01 / We urge Regional and National Governments to follow the example of Catalonia in speeding up the abortion process to facilitate and guarantee the right to abortion with the greatest possible
- 02 / We urge governments and institutions to develop and implement creative, resource-based, people-centered measures built together with professionals and advocates for sexual and reproductive rights to ensure these rights to the young people and the entire population.

02 / **Young people and the right to education and information**

Fighting back the attacks against an educational model that embraces diversity, respect and feminism.





Context

The arrival of VOX, an extreme right-wing party, in the public institutions is threatening the rights, dignity and livelihood of underserved and underrepresented groups. One of their most recent measures, already approved in the region of Murcia, is the Parental PIN.

The Parental PIN is a policy that would make it mandatory for schools and other educational centres to ask for individual parental authorisation so students can participate in complementary activities.

Such activities include workshops against gender-based violence and homophobia or sessions on comprehensive sexuality education.

The rights, dignity and livelihood of underserved and underrepresented groups are at stake, and the Parental PIN is just the tip of the iceberg and one of the measures they are going to push for so they can keep tearing down any resistance to the hegemony of the capitalist and heteropatriarchal system.

Our stance

In light of the above, we applaud and support:

- 01 /** Educational activities against LGBTQI+ phobia, sexism, racism, capacitism and any other form of discrimination. Classrooms often reflect the inherent violences present in our societies and such issues need to be approached through interventions based on rights and justice.
- 02 /** Educational activities, such as capacity-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education, that through critical thinking and the provision of sound information enable students to take autonomous and informed decisions about their bodies and the relationships they establish with others.

We denounce and reject:

- 01 /** Educational activities that promote the provision of sexist, exclusively biologist and strictly heteronormative information, reproducing gender stereotypes against women and excluding as well as stigmatising the LGBTQI+ communities.
- 02 /** The approval of any law, policy or measure, such as the Parental PIN, that limits the capacity of children to receive the aforementioned education and information. Such measures collide with the need to create safe classrooms and schools for all those dissident with the norm.
- 03 /** The approval of any law, policy or measure, such as the Parental PIN, that enables discriminatory attitudes and perpetuates adultism (the prejudice and accompanying systematic

discrimination against young people).

These measures go directly against the transformative potential of education, which should promote critical thinking, respect and the celebration of diversity.

Recommendations

As a bearer of duties and responsibilities, we ask you to:

- 01 / Always stand up for and uphold Sexual and Reproductive Rights as well as Reproductive Justice, both through your daily actions as well as the work you do.
- 02 / Push for educational models with activities that fight against discriminatory attitudes towards women, heterodissident individuals, migrants and racialised people among others.
- 03 / Position yourself and push for a clear position of your parliamentary group against measures that attack the right to education and information, such as the Parental PIN.
- 04 / Be proactive in the fight against fundamentalist groups and extreme right-wing parties.
- 05 / Meaningfully engage children, adolescents and young people in all those decisions that can affect their education and their future.

Closure

It is undeniable that the current pandemic happened to threaten SRHR from multiple set points and through different means such as passing laws, limiting access to services or promoting structural inequalities that represented a clear set back when it comes to advancing SRHR. This has been just the tip of the iceberg.

We aim to throw light on those matters and encourage active engagement of all stakeholders to take action and not only revert those situations but protect and promote SRHR through their actions in an intersectional manner. For that, we made our clear demands and recommendations through this comprehensive document that will be followed by an advocacy campaign aimed at increasing their outreach.

All in all, as youth, we are determined to ensure our voices are heard and will continue being at the forefront when it comes to claiming the full achievement of SRHR at a global level. We know we cannot do it alone and thus, we call upon you to take a step forward and walk with us towards a change that also takes place in decision-making spaces.

Relevant and interesting resources:

Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights: <https://youthcoalition.org>

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: <https://www.ohchr.org>

Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,

Transgender, Queer and Intersex Rights: <https://www.rfsl.se>

The Trevor Project: <https://www.thetrevorproject.org>

Plan International: <https://plan-international.org>

Human Rights Watch: <https://www.hrw.org>

Young Feminist Europe: <https://www.youngfeminist.eu>

United Nations Population Fund: <https://www.unfpa.org>

Centre Jove d'Atenció a les Sexualitats: <https://centrejove.org>

L'Associació de Drets Sexuals i Reproductius: <https://lassociacio.org>

