



SMARTS

Supporting Me About Rights To Sexuality

SMARTS PROJECT - SUPPORTING ME ABOUT RIGHTS TO SEXUALITY

Policy Recommendations

Towards the full realisation of the sexual rights of persons with disabilities through supported decision making (SDM)

Right to Sexuality as a basic human need

- **Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life.** Sexual and reproductive health, wellbeing and rights are closely linked with sexuality.
- The right to sexuality is a fundamental right recognised at European and international level, including in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), in particular Articles 8, 9, 22 and 23. Article 23 calls for effective and appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against persons with disabilities (PwD) in all matters relating to marriage, family, parenthood and relationships. This includes the right to have sexual relations, to retain fertility, to marry and to choose if and when to have children.

Challenges faced by persons with disabilities

- **PwD have sexual desires, need affective relationships & freedom to express their sexuality, like any other human being.** Yet, they still face a lack to access to sexual and reproductive health services and rights, violence, abuse and discrimination based on social stereotypes.
- In the Smarts project, we focus specifically on supporting affectivity and sexuality of persons with intellectual disabilities (PwID) and persons with mental health conditions (PwMHC).
- While there are multiple causal factors, one of the barriers is the lack of formal and informal accessible education and information on sexuality for these groups.



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SDM as an effective tool towards achieving this right

- Article 12 of the UNCRPD, which calls for the right of PwD to legal capacity in all areas of life, including on sexuality.
- To better support the rights to sexuality of PwD, **efforts should focus on supporting their legal capacity to make informed choices.**

➔ This can be achieved through the use of **Supported Decision Making (SDM)**.

- SDM is a methodology that allows PwD to retain their own decision-making capacity by accessing personalised support.
- It creates the rights conditions for PwD to make informed decisions on their own,
- SDM ensures respect for the inherent dignity, individual autonomy and full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in society on an equal basis with others.
- Overall, it participats in supporting PwD to have their own autonomy and personal independence regarding their sexuality.

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With the SMARTS project, we aim to provide guidance on how to better support PwD to make their own decisions related to sexuality, using the Supported Decision Making (SDM) approach.



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Policy Recommendations supporting the adoption of Supported Decision Making

For Authorities

- Develop guidelines to ensure that local services are supporting and empowering PwD to access their sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- Consult and involve disabled people organisations (DPOs) in removing barriers to the rights of PwD to express their own sexuality.
- Improve research and data to monitor, evaluate and strengthen sexual and reproductive health and services for PwD.
- Improve methodologies and establish a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to track the implementation of policies and programmes on access to sexual and reproductive health for PwD.

For Social Care Facilities

Social care facilities need appropriate support and funding from the authorities to be able to implement these recommendations effectively.

- Require that staff team includes carers specifically trained in sexuality and sexual and reproductive rights. This means every service can provide personalised support to every PwD wanting to make their own decisions regarding their sexuality.
- Ensure that PwD have access to accessible and appropriate information on their sexual and reproductive rights, and that they are effectively supported, including through the SDM approach.
- Equip social workers with effective materials and guidance to work alongside a SDM process, supported by the service's management and staff team. Also, require that staff are trained in disability inclusion, in combating discriminatory practices, sexual exploitation and abuse, and in improving service provision for PwD.

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