



IRHEC Network Newsletter

Welcome to the second International Reproductive Health Education Collaboration Network Newsletter!

December 2023

Who we are

We are a multidisciplinary collective of people from many different countries with an interest in reproductive health promotion. We first came together in 2019 and have since 2022 been very generously supported by the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE). We are a part of an ESHRE Special Interest Group (SIG) called Global and Socio-cultural Aspects of Infertility and have our very own [webpage](#) on the ESHRE website!

The IRHEC committee meeting, Lyon 2023



How we operate

We operate as a committee with [11 members](#) from different countries. The committee is chaired by Professor Joyce Harper from the UK, one of the founders of IRHEC. The Chair Elect is Dr Maria Ekstrand-Ragnar from Sweden who will step up as Chair at the 2024 annual ESHRE meeting. At that time Professor Harper will become Past Chair and continue to contribute to the committee's work.

Other members of the committee have two-year terms after which there will be a call for nominations for new members to replace them. As the current committee is IRHEC's first, we plan to stagger the departure of members so that we retain experience that can be shared with new members. We plan to extend a call for nominations to the Network for committee membership early in 2024.

What we do

IRHEC committee members have formed three working groups. Network members who want to contribute to any of the working groups can contact Joyce at joyce.harper@ucl.ac.uk

Education

The education team works on the development of educational resources. Here are some examples:

Do you remember our famous [fertility educational poster](#)? After four studies with young people from different countries asking their views of the poster, we are redesigning it under the ESHRE branding. We look forward to launching the new format poster soon.

The team has developed an educational resource to help teachers provide students with comprehensive and evidence-based information about reproductive health. The resource has been through an extensive consultation process with experts and users and will be launched soon.

We are also developing fact sheets on a range of topics for the public. They are being co-designed through focus groups with members of the public and will soon be open for consultation.

And we now have six personal stories from people who share their fertility journeys on our [website](#).

Research

The research team has established a database of published papers on fertility education topics which can be found [here](#). We have also developed a page where you can read about fertility education [activities](#) in different countries and a page where you can view a broad range of fertility education [resources](#).

The research team also conducts studies with Network members who are interested in specific research topics. There are several research activities on fertility knowledge attitudes and behaviors, across different population groups, and on understanding research gaps from a global perspective. Other ongoing research includes mapping reproductive health education in schools, and understanding how reproductive health is portrayed across social media platforms.

Together with members of other working groups and Network members, IRHEC have published three papers.

Harper JC, Hammarberg K, Simopoulou M, Koert E, Pedro J, Massin N, Fincham A, Balen A; International Fertility Education Initiative. The International Fertility Education Initiative: research and action to improve fertility awareness. Human Reproduction Open. 2021 Aug 25: <http://doi.org/10.1093/hropen/hoab031>

Mertes H, Harper J, Boivin J, Ekstrand Ragnar M, Grace B, Moura-Ramos M, Rautakallio-Hokkanen S, Simopoulou M, Hammarberg K, on behalf of the International Reproductive Health Education Collaboration (IRHEC), Stimulating fertility awareness: the importance of getting the language right, Human Reproduction Open, Volume 2023, Issue 2: <https://doi.org/10.1093/hropen/hoad009>

Mariana V. Martins, Emily Koert, Randi Sylvest, Eri Maeda, Mariana Moura-Ramos, Karin Hammarberg, Joyce Harper, on behalf of The International Reproductive Health Education Collaboration (IRHEC), Operationalizing fertility education: recommendations for developing and implementing tools to improve fertility literacy, Human Reproduction, Accepted for publication

Communication

The communications team manages IRHEC's social media. IRHEC is currently on three platforms: Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram. Please follow us 😊

The team manages the IRHEC Network and makes sure people who want to join are welcomed and their details included in the Network database which is now available on the [website](#). People who want to join the Network are asked to send some information about themselves to Randi Sylvest randi.lykke-sylvest@regionh.dk who manages the database. We encourage Network members to contact us if they want to contribute to IRHEC's work or have ideas for collaborative projects.

We also publish a newsletter twice per year with updates of what is happening in IRHEC and add content to the IRHEC webpage.

Activities in 2023

The committee met several times over zoom and had three face-to-face meetings. We also had a very well-attended session dedicated to fertility health education at the ESHRE meeting in Copenhagen in June where Professor Lone Schmidt and Dr Mara Simopoulou gave excellent presentations.

In October we hosted an [ESHRE Campus Course](#) in Lyon titled 'Fertility education and reproductive decision-making: Why, who, when and how?' where several committee members presented. The course was a great opportunity for people with an interest in fertility health promotion to network and learn about the latest research in the field.

We were pleased to see new educational resources launched in Estonia and Belgium.

Estonia

Viljakusest.ee is an innovative digital textbook providing comprehensive information on human fertility, structured into three interactive modules. Each chapter concludes with a link to a learning platform, allowing users to test their knowledge on the topic. This successful initiative in Estonia has been recognized for its significant contribution to human health education, earning the "Yearly Contribution Award for Human Health Education" in 2022. Our mission aligns with the ESHRE's vision to elevate reproductive health awareness, offering educational support on fertility, family planning, and related medical procedures. We invite you to explore, learn, and engage through viljakusest.ee

Webpage: www.viljakusest.ee Contact: [Kerti Alev](#)

Belgium

Belgian fertility experts, in collaboration with VIVES University College, have developed an online learning platform to support teachers in addressing the theme of fertility. In the past, sexual education in schools focused on preventing unwanted pregnancies, which of course is an important and ongoing goal. Additionally, the new educational objectives in the Flemish

region provide space to address factors that may harm fertility. Next to the section for teachers, there is also a section for individuals seeking accurate information on fertility: [My fertility | Reproductive Health Education \(allesovervruchtbaarheid.be\)](#) and a section for healthcare providers.

In the section for teachers, learning materials are grouped according to the new educational objectives. This allows teachers to easily access presentations, course materials, videos, and more to use in their lessons. The development of the learning platform was done in collaboration with teachers and students from the 3rd grade of secondary education. French and English materials have also been included in the curriculum: <https://www.allesovervruchtbaarheid.be/en/i-am-teacher> .

Looking ahead

Please follow us on social media to keep up to date with our work @eshre_IRHEC and visit our web site www.eshre.eu/IRHEC.

We welcome people interested in reproductive health promotion to join the Network and get involved with our work. Contact Randi Sylvest randi.lykke-sylvest@regionh.dk for more information.

We look forward to meeting anyone interested in our work at an open meeting at the ESHRE annual conference in Amsterdam on Sunday July 7 before the opening ceremony. Contact Randi if you wish to attend. Also, every year there is a dedicated session during the ESHRE conference where we update everyone on IRHEC's work.

The IRHEC meeting at ESHRE 2023



The committee is trying to secure funding for a research fellow to conduct evaluation studies of the resources we have developed. If we are successful, Network members will be notified of the opportunity to apply for the position.

We hope to launch new fertility education resources and welcome Network members to tell us about papers they publish and resources they develop so they can be included in our databases.

