

SEXUALITY EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:

Opportunities for EU development cooperation



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EUROPEAN WOMEN'S
LOBBY
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SEXUALITY EDUCATION:

WHAT MAKES FOR COMPREHENSIVE AND QUALITY EDUCATION PROGRAMMES?

Sexual and reproductive rights are human rights. Education empowers young people and enables them to make their own choices. Comprehensive Sexuality education (CSE) allows young people to make critical choices about their health and future. Sexuality education seeks to equip young people with the knowledge, life skills, attitudes and positive values they need to understand and enjoy their sexuality – physically and emotionally.

“TODAY THERE ARE 1.8 BILLION YOUNG PEOPLE BETWEEN THE AGES OF 10 AND 24 WORLDWIDE. THIS IS “PEAK YOUTH”, THE LARGEST YOUTH GENERATION EVER.

“Comprehensive” means that this is not just about biological functions and reproductive systems, but more broadly about sexuality, orientation, gender and gender identity, diversity, relationships, power, the meaning of consent, responsibilities towards oneself and others... encouraging critical-thinking, with scientifically accurate and age-appropriate content, and with a positive approach, rather than focusing on “risks”. It should be delivered both in schools and in non-formal settings to reach the maximum amount of young people, in various contexts. It should address both individual sexuality and also promote safe and fulfilling relationships.

CSE enables young people to take responsibility for other people’s sexual health and well-being, as well as their own. It must help young people to acquire accurate information on sexual and reproductive rights. A comprehensive sexuality education covers a broad range of issues relating to both the physical and biological aspects of sexuality and the emotional and social aspects. In this regard, sexuality education curriculum can be one concrete aspect of broader more comprehensive programmes on citizenship or human rights education, aimed at promoting critical thinking, developing equal and respectful attitudes, etc. From a feminist perspective, sexuality education is a key tool to promote empowerment and gender equality, and is a matter of women’s rights.

See UNESCO video on CSE: <http://bit.ly/2dFNMMc>

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF CSE?

Sexuality education shows results. UNFPA highlights the following proven impact of CSE:

- * REDUCTION IN TEENAGE PREGNANCIES AND ABORTIONS
- * DECREASE IN SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS (STIS) AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 15–24
- * DECREASE IN HIV INFECTIONS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 15–24
- * DECREASE IN SEXUAL ABUSE
- * DECREASE IN HOMOPHOBIA

Moreover, it recognises that CSE participates to better outcomes, for example on young people’s attitudes towards gender equality, awareness of human rights, empathy, self-esteem, skills in negotiation and assertiveness. It is also a channel to improve parent-child communication.

CSE has thus for example been linked to the prevention of different forms of violence against women and girls: domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual abuse and rape, prostitution and sexual exploitation, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), child marriage, amongst other forms of violence.



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Overall, CSE has positive outcomes for young people themselves, but also their families, communities and societies. See *Testimony from Kader, Benin, 24*: <http://bit.ly/2e9mL4h>

CSE is far from being available to all young people: untrained teachers, focus on negative health outcomes, non-participatory delivery, outdated information, non-factual information; or in many cases, a simple absence of any form of sexuality education.

Furthermore, in many countries in Europe, there has been a fierce reaction against gender equality and against any kind of sexuality education. Populist, conservative and religious forces in Europe are increasingly organising themselves to question the very principle of equality between women and men. This is the case of the growing voice of the so-called anti- “gender ideology”.

The lack of CSE education can be very damaging in a world where the culture of violence in the media and the sexualisation of women and girls are major factors contributing to the perpetration of violence against women and girls.

WHY CSE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT RESTS ON THREE PILLARS: ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL.

By empowering young people, particularly young girls, and allowing them to play the role they choose in society, CSE is a key enabler for both social and economic sustainable development.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was adopted by the United Nations in September 2015. It is a global (although non-binding) commitment of countries around the world to mobilise efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind. This Agenda is universal, meaning it applies to both internal and external policies.

In this context, CSE should not be considered a niche issue but a critical solution for change, which lies at the interconnection of many of the Sustainable Development Goals that are part of Agenda 2030. Some of the targets it addresses:

*** SDG 5 (GENDER EQUALITY), TARGET 5.6: ENSURE UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AS AGREED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT, THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION, AND THE OUTCOME DOCUMENTS OF THEIR REVIEW CONFERENCES.**

*** SDG 3 (HEALTH), TARGET 3.7: BY 2030 ENSURE UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE SERVICES, INCLUDING FAMILY PLANNING, INFORMATION AND EDUCATION, AND THE INTEGRATION OF REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH INTO NATIONAL STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMS.**

One of the key principles of Agenda 2030 is to “leave no one behind”. CSE is a way to ensure this: by reaching all young people and empowering them to choose.

EU DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION POLICY: WHAT OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUPPORTING CSE?

The EU has committed to several international frameworks around gender equality, education and health. These frameworks must inform the EU policy on these topics.

International agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) acknowledges the need to guarantee a sexuality education free from discrimination and stereotypes, conveying gender equality values. This right has been confirmed by the CEDAW Committee, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and also in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.



Photo: IPPF

Furthermore, sexuality education is advocated for in the 1994 Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, and its importance has been underscored by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education in a 2010 report to the UN General Assembly devoted exclusively to this topic and by the European Court of Human Rights in 2011.

In July 2016, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights stated that:

“ ADOLESCENTS SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO APPROPRIATE AND OBJECTIVE INFORMATION ON SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE ISSUES, INCLUDING FAMILY PLANNING, CONTRACEPTION AND THE PREVENTION OF SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES, AS PART OF THE ORDINARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND PROVIDED WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION ON ANY GROUND.

Within the EU, sexuality education remains the competence of Member States; however the EU has a binding obligation towards the right to education (Charter of Fundamental Rights) and public health (Treaty on the Functioning of the EU). Sexuality education is not explicitly mentioned but the EU can have an indirect influence via these channels or policies on specific issues, such as HIV/AIDS prevention.

However, externally, the EU has a specific, explicit mandate for SRHR within its external action, including development cooperation policy. The Development Cooperation Instrument, one of the largest instruments providing the legal basis for the implementation of EU programmes, covers health, education, gender and youth under its programme “Global Public Goods and Challenges”. One of the objectives under this programme, for example, addresses family planning. It thus seems that CSE would be the perfect intersection for this programme.

The Cotonou agreement, which frames the partnership between the EU and African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, has gender, health and youth as specific areas of focus. Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and Family Planning have been identified as objectives of cooperation under social and human development, in relation to gender equality.



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The Council Conclusions on Gender in Development, adopted in May 2015, have been pivotal. This is the first time that the Council has agreed on positive language regarding sexuality education and its link with sustainable development: “The Council further stresses the need for universal access to quality and affordable comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information, education, including comprehensive sexuality education, and health-care services”.

Finally, the EU and its Member States have committed to the implementation of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, which link to CSE as previously presented.

In a context where the EU wants “budget for results”, supporting CSE through development cooperation makes sense. Implementing an effective, scientifically-sound CSE programme does not need to be costly for governments and education systems. A study conducted by UNESCO in 2011 in various countries shows that CSE programmes are “potentially highly effective, cost-effective and even cost-saving”. Integrating CSE into regular school programmes can reach more people. Adapting existing materials from other countries, instead of developing them from scratch, is also an effective strategy to cut costs, while providing quality CSE to children and adolescents. Furthermore, CSE is an effective way of reaching young people and working on the long-term dissemination.

RESOURCES

- **IPPF Framework for Comprehensive Sexuality Education:** <http://www.ippf.org/resource/ippf-framework-comprehensive-sexuality-education/>
- “Everyone’s right to know: delivering comprehensive sexuality education for all young people”, IPPF Vision 2020 report
- <http://www.ippf.org/youthhub/index.html>
- **UNESCO Global CSE review:** <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002357/235707e.pdf>
- **WHO 2010: Standards for sexuality Education in Europe: a framework for policy makers, education and health authorities’ specialists.**
- “We want to learn about good love” PLAN UK 2016 <http://www.plan-uk.org/assets/Documents/pdf/we-want-to-learn-about-good-love>
- **UNFPA page on sexuality education** <http://eeca.unfpa.org/topics/comprehensive-sexuality-education>
- **European Women’s Lobby, “1995-2015: From Words to Action 20 years of the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action”**

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