

COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF EDUCATION



IN ITS NEW INSTRUMENT FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION, THE NEIGHBOURHOOD, DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION INSTRUMENT (NDICI-GLOBAL EUROPE), THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU) HAS CHOSEN TO PRIORITISE EDUCATION AS A CRITICAL SECTOR TO ACHIEVE THE SDGs.

Commissioner for International Partnerships Urpilainen has committed to increasing the EU Official Development Assistance (ODA) to education in partner countries to 10% and EU Delegations have prioritised education in their programming. Recognising the impact education can have on promoting gender equality, supporting youth and achieving sustainable development, [Countdown 2030 Europe](#) can only support prioritising education in EU funding. However, to be effective, it should **include all aspects of education, including Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE).**



WHAT IS CSE?

“Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realize their health, well-being and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and, understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.”¹

CSE can be delivered both in formal and non-formal settings. Depending on the country or region, CSE may be framed in different ways (e.g. ‘HIV education’) or could be integrated into broader subjects such as ‘life skills education’, so to adapt to the local context. Irrespective of the terminology used to refer to CSE, it is important to safeguard against the dilution of the CSE content and the omission of key topics, that are an integral part of CSE but could be perceived as sensitive in some contexts. Avoiding to address key topics would lessen the effectiveness of CSE and would reinforce already existing harmful social and gender norms and stereotypes.

1. [International Technical Guidance on sexuality education](#). UNESCO, 2018

WHY INCLUDE CSE IN EDUCATION PROGRAMMES?

CSE is critical to give young people the knowledge and skills they need to manage their health and form equal, fulfilling, and safe relationships, free from discrimination, coercion and violence.

CSE HAS NUMEROUS PROVEN HEALTH BENEFITS: 2,3,4,5



INCREASES THE USE OF CONTRACEPTION INCLUDING CONDOMS



REDUCES TRANSMISSION OF STIs AND HIV



PROMOTES GENDER-EQUITABLE NORMS



PREVENTS AND REDUCES GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE



REDUCES TEENAGE PREGNANCIES HENCE IMPROVING GIRLS' EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENTS AND PREVENTING EARLY SCHOOL DROPOUTS

Equipped with essential life skills, young people, girls and boys, **young women and men alike**, can reach their full potential, improve their health and wellbeing and thus of their families, achieve higher levels of education and participate in the social, economic and political life of their communities and countries.

CSE is crucial to the achievement of **SDG 3 on health, SDG 4 on education and SDG 5 on gender equality**. Promoting CSE will help the European Commission achieve its objectives in education, in particular through decreasing teenage pregnancies and reducing school dropouts, hence ensuring girls can achieve higher education levels. It will also contribute to meeting the EU's commitments on human development and gender equality, as defined in the Gender Action Plan (GAP III), where CSE is included as a critical aspect of education and health.

IN WESTERN AND CENTRAL AFRICA,

41%
OF YOUNG WOMEN MARRY BEFORE AGE 18⁶, WITH MORE THAN 1 IN 4 GIRLS WHO ARE PREGNANT BEFORE THE SAME AGE⁷

IN LOW AND MIDDLE INCOME COUNTRIES (LMICs)

43%
OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS AGED 15–19 WHO WANT TO AVOID A PREGNANCY HAVE UNMET NEEDS FOR MODERN CONTRACEPTION⁹

7 IN 10
YOUNG WOMEN IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA DO NOT HAVE COMPREHENSIVE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT HIV⁸

46%
OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN AFRICA HAVE EXPERIENCED PHYSICAL OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE¹⁰

2. [Facing the facts: the case for comprehensive sexuality education](#), UNESCO, 2019

3. Studies: [Lundgren](#); [Stepping Stones](#); [Instituto Promundo](#)

4. [Factsheets on international evidence on the benefits of comprehensive sexuality education \(CSE\)](#), BZgA/UNFPA 2021

5. [Sexuality Education in Europe and Central Asia](#), IPPF EN/BZgA, 2018

6. [Child marriage. Latest trends and future prospects](#). UNICEF, 2018

7. <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-health/adolescent-health/>

8. [Women and HIV. A spotlight on adolescent girls and young women](#). UNAIDS, 2019

9. [From bad to worse: the COVID-19 pandemic risks further undermining adolescents' sexual and reproductive health and rights](#). New York: Guttmacher Institute; 2020

10. [African Union strategy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment \(GEWE\) 2018-2028](#), African Union, 2018

HOW CAN THE EU SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO CSE?

To achieve the EU objectives in education, gender equality and human development, EU Delegations should include CSE in their education programmes:

→ **INCLUDE CSE IN TRAINING FOR TEACHERS:** several EU Delegations have prioritised support for training teachers and building education systems. However, this training does not include important life skills. To address this shortcoming, funding and support for training of teachers should systematically include a module on CSE;

→ **FUND PROGRAMMES OF PEER EDUCATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE¹¹:** through a participatory process, peer education creates an environment where young people feel safe and able to share information, skills and values. Peers are a trusted source of information. They share similar experiences and social norms and are therefore better placed to provide relevant, meaningful, explicit, and honest information. Training peer educators, supporting their outreach to young people in all contexts – formal and informal education, schools but also youth clubs, work places, homes, etc. – is therefore critical to ensuring young people's access to CSE;

With the **"My Health - My School" project**, DSW set up contact points for young people at five secondary schools in Dodoma (Tanzania) with the goal of providing information on SRHR. Youth were also trained so they could pass on the knowledge to their peers. The project contributed to preventing teenage pregnancy, which not only poses a severe health risks for girls, but is also often linked to school drop-out.

With the **HAPA project** (Holistic Action Project for young Adolescents), DSW is supporting more than 7.000 young adolescents in the regions of Kilifi and West Pokot in Kenya, to increase access to adequate youth-friendly SRHR information. The project is implemented in 14 school clubs, where trained youth pass on their knowledge to their peers and trained staff from the health sector support the peer-to-peer education. The project clearly showed the importance of including CSE in school curricula: in the 14 project schools, school dropouts declined from 172 to 51 between 2018 and 2021, with a considerable reduction also in dropouts due to teenage pregnancy.



Young adolescents - HAPA project, Kenya © Brian Otieno / DSW

11. Peer education is a term widely used to describe a range of strategies where people from a similar age group, background, culture and/or social status educate and inform each other about a wide variety of issues – [IPPF framework for youth peer education programmes](#)

→ **WORK WITH PARTNER COUNTRIES TO ENSURE THE INCLUSION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF CSE IN NATIONAL CURRICULA**, and support this inclusion and implementation through funding and/or technical support as appropriate;

The **Planned Parenthood Federation of Zambia** has been advocating for many years for the **inclusion of quality CSE in national curriculum in Zambia**, with the objective of reaching all young people in schools with accurate information on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), GBV and other related issues. This work includes advocating towards the **Zambian government for changes in the national education curriculum**, but also training teachers so they are able to deliver quality CSE.

→ **SUPPORT, INCLUDING THROUGH FUNDING, THE DIGITALISATION OF CSE:** the COVID-19 pandemic has led to school closures and lockdown measures, affecting young people's access to CSE. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have adapted and started providing CSE through social media and digital tools to reach all young people, including those who have been marginalised by poverty or discrimination. Through their education and digitalisation programmes, EU Delegations should fund and support programmes aiming at delivering CSE through digital tools;

The **Palestinian Family Planning and Protection Association (PFPPA)** is providing **CSE through new digital tools**, to ensure outreach to all young people, including those from communities that often live in isolation and face exclusion from mainstream health systems. In 2021, over 13,000 people aged 15 to 25 were provided with CSE sessions, of which approximately a third were reached through social media channels. These online channels were further developed during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Michael, a student at Ghana Greentech Academy, educating his peers on the topics of sexual health. © IPPF / Natalija Gormalova / Ghana

→ **WITH A VIEW OF HAVING A HOLISTIC APPROACH**, scale up the support and funding for a comprehensive package of youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services, including CSE, to ensure health and education interventions strengthen each other;

→ **SUPPORT CSOs IN DELIVERING AND ADVOCATING FOR CSE.** CSOs have a critical role to play in providing CSE to all young people, including those who have been deprived of resources to unlock their potential. They sometimes operate in challenging contexts, with harmful social norms and a shrinking civic space. The EU should strengthen its support to CSOs, both financially and through capacity building programmes.



Walaa is the Youth Centre Coordinator at the Palestinian Family Planning and Protection Association © IPPF / Hannah Maule-ffinch / Palestine



Countdown 2030 Europe is a Consortium of 15 leading European non-governmental organizations working to ensure the advancement of sexual and reproductive health and rights. Established in 2004, our Consortium has become Europe's leading collective voice on the importance of addressing the global unmet need for family planning. Europe-wide and internationally, the Consortium is a vehicle for collective advocacy towards the EU institutions and EU policymakers, and represents European organisations in international fora.



JOIN THE CONVERSATION
@C2030Europe

For more information on Countdown 2030 Europe, please visit our website at www.countdown2030europe.org or contact us at countdown2030europe@ippfen.org.