



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



Sustainable
Development
Goals

Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Education for a healthy future

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What is comprehensive sexuality education?

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.

CSE should be **culturally relevant and adapted to the national context, scientifically accurate, non-judgmental, age- and developmentally-appropriate, and complete**, and should be provided in a carefully **phased process** from an early age. In addition, research has shown that CSE is most effective when it is **based on gender equality and a human rights approach**; and if it is able to **develop skills for healthy living**.¹

"Young people are receiving confusing and conflicting messages about relationships, about sex, and about gender. It's critical that schools deliver scientifically accurate education that develops the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and competencies needed to navigate a healthy transition to adulthood. Government and the education sector in sub-Saharan Africa have both an opportunity and an urgent responsibility to scale up sexuality education programmes."

**(Former) Minister of General Education, Dr Dennis Wanchinga
– Zambia, January 2018**

What does 'comprehensive' mean?

"Comprehensive" refers to the **breadth and depth of topics** related to sexuality, including sexual and reproductive anatomy and physiology, puberty and menstruation, reproduction, modern contraception, pregnancy and childbirth, and HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). **This content is consistently delivered** to learners over time, throughout their education, rather than a one-off lesson or intervention.



What CSE content is recommended?

CSE provides children and young people with an age-appropriate and phased education on **eight key concepts and essential topics**.² It emphasizes values such as **respect, inclusion, non-discrimination, equality, empathy, responsibility and reciprocity**.

Key concept 1: Relationships	Key concept 2: Values, rights, culture and sexuality	Key concept 3: Understanding gender	Key concept 4: Violence and staying safe
Topics: 1.1 Families 1.2 Friendship, love and romantic relationships 1.3 Tolerance, inclusion and respect 1.4 Long-term commitments, and parenting	Topics: 2.1 Values and sexuality 2.2 Human rights and sexuality 2.3 Culture, society and sexuality	Topics: 3.1 The social construction of gender and gender norms 3.2 Gender equality, stereotypes and bias 3.3 Gender-based violence	Topics: 4.1 Violence 4.2 Consent, privacy and bodily integrity 4.3 Safe use of information and communication technologies (ICT's)
Key concept 5: Skills for health and well-being	Key concept 6: The human body and development	Key concept 7: Sex, sexuality and the sexual life cycle	Key concept 8: Sexual and reproductive health
Topics: 5.1 Norms and peer influence on sexual behaviour 5.2 Decision-making 5.3 Communication, refusal and negotiation skills 5.4 Media literacy and sexuality 5.5 Finding help and support	Topics: 6.1 Sexual and reproductive anatomy and physiology 6.2 Reproduction 6.3 Puberty 6.4 Body image	Topics: 7.1 Sex, sexuality and the sexual life cycle 7.2 Sexual behaviour and sexual response	Topics: 8.1 Pregnancy and pregnancy prevention 8.2 HIV and AIDS stigma, care, treatment and support 8.3 Understanding, recognizing and reducing the risk of STIs, including HIV

"I saw the need to get more involved in teaching comprehensive sexuality education because of the way our society hides information on sexuality. I remember growing up and being told that if you sit next to a boy at school you would conceive. I don't want the current generation to go through what we went through."

- Agather Shindende, a teacher at Kabulonga Primary School

What is CSE called in the different African countries?

While research has identified CSE's essential content, **it is up to each country to adapt it to the local context, in line with national laws and policies. Different components of CSE have been taught in nearly all sub-Saharan countries for decades** through various programmes often referred to as Life Skills Education (LSE) or prevention education. CSE builds on these existing programmes, increasing their effectiveness and relevance. While CSE is now a globally recognized term used for ease of reference, **the terminology or name used by each country varies** for example:

Guidance and Counselling LSE Curriculum
Swaziland

Educação Sexual Compreensiva
Mozambique

L'éducation à la vie familiale
Democratic Republic of the Congo

Family Life and HIV Education
Nigeria

Education à la santé de la reproduction
Senegal

Life Skills, Sexuality, HIV and AIDS Education
Zimbabwe

Comprehensive sexuality education
Zambia

Education sexuelle complète
Ivory Coast/Togo

Education sexuelle intégrée
Cameroon

"It used to hurt me whenever a girl passed better than me in any subject. Now, after learning some topics in CSE on gender, I have come to appreciate that we are actually the same and now I do get help from girls in some subjects and they too get help from me and it doesn't hurt me anymore."

- Remmy Kasangili Grade 9,
Jacaranda Primary School

Myths and misconceptions

CSE hastens sexual behaviour
CSE increases sexual behaviour
CSE increases sexual risk-taking behaviour
CSE increases STI/HIV infection rates



NO

International research has shown CSE:

- delays initiation of sexual activity
- increases use of condoms and other contraceptives
- increases knowledge
- decreases number of sexual partners
- decreases frequency of sexual intercourse
- decreases risk taking
- decreases frequency of unprotected sex

CSE teaches homosexuality



NO

CSE does not promote homosexuality or endorse or campaign for any particular lifestyle, other than promoting quality education, health, and well-being for all. CSE is in line with agreements signed by UN member states which reiterate that all people, regardless of age, sexual orientation, or gender identity, should have equal access to the highest attainable standard of health, including education, health services, and accurate SRH information – without discrimination.

CSE covers content that is not age-appropriate



NO

CSE content is always adapted to the age and developmental stage of the learner.

CSE goes against a countries' laws and policies



NO

CSE is adapted to national contexts by curriculum developers and national stakeholders, in line with national laws and policies.

CSE destroys family values



NO

CSE does not destroy family values, it develops values such as respect, responsibility, and reciprocity, and emphasizes the importance of healthy relationships and family.

CSE teaches that traditional masculine and feminine natures are harmful



NO

CSE does not state that traditional masculine and feminine natures are harmful. CSE does promote reflection and understanding of gender norms and stereotypes and critical thinking skills on how these shape our attitudes and behaviours, some of which are harmful to ourselves and others.

CSE teaches how to masturbate or other sexual practices



NO

CSE does not teach how to masturbate or other sexual practices. CSE does help young people to *understand and manage their risk* in relation to sex, including non-penetrative sex.

CSE promotes abortion



NO

Technical guidance on CSE only notes that young people should have access to full information about comprehensive SRH services. In countries where abortion is legal this should include information on abortion and post-abortion care. The inclusion of information on abortion is therefore dependent on national contexts.

SRH and rights (SRHR) give children the right to do as they please with regard to sex



NO

SRHR cover the rights to health, education, to be protected from violence and abuse, to access information, to bodily integrity, and the need for consent.

Abstinence-only programmes are sufficient

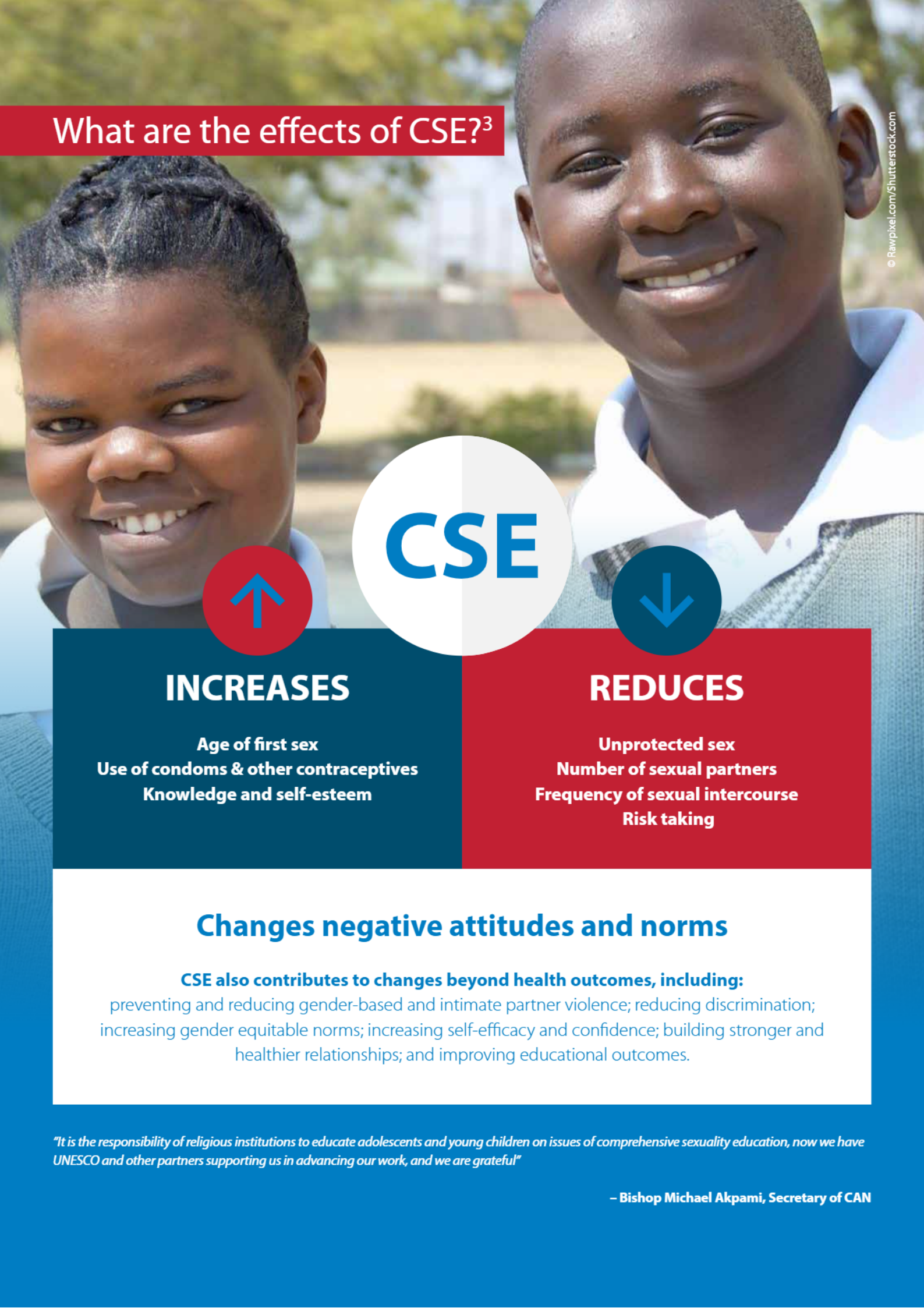


NO

Research has shown that abstinence-only programmes are insufficient. However, abstinence is a key element of CSE which needs to be combined with a focus on delaying sexual activity, and with content about condoms and other forms of contraception.

What are the effects of CSE?³

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CSE



INCREASES

Age of first sex
Use of condoms & other contraceptives
Knowledge and self-esteem



REDUCES

Unprotected sex
Number of sexual partners
Frequency of sexual intercourse
Risk taking

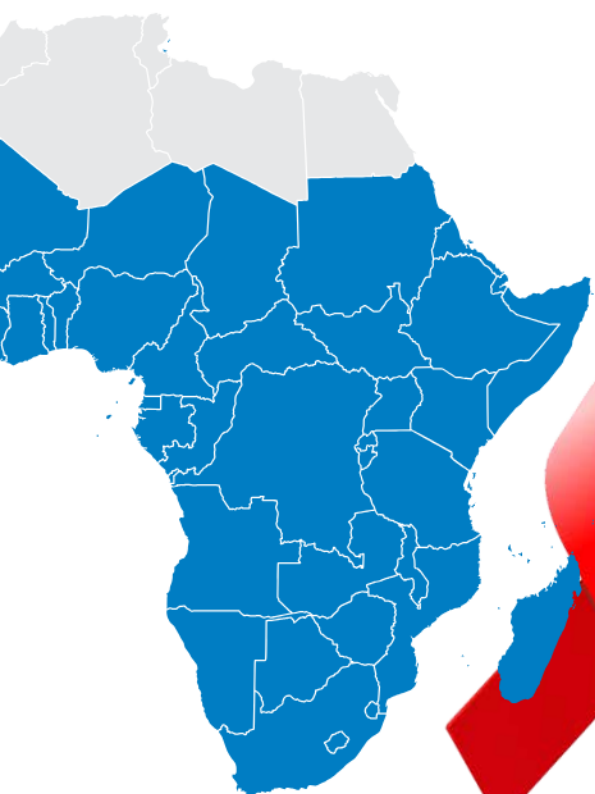
Changes negative attitudes and norms

CSE also contributes to changes beyond health outcomes, including:
preventing and reducing gender-based and intimate partner violence; reducing discrimination;
increasing gender equitable norms; increasing self-efficacy and confidence; building stronger and
healthier relationships; and improving educational outcomes.

"It is the responsibility of religious institutions to educate adolescents and young children on issues of comprehensive sexuality education, now we have UNESCO and other partners supporting us in advancing our work, and we are grateful"

– Bishop Michael Akpami, Secretary of CAN

Why do young people need CSE?



158 million young people aged 15-24 in sub-Saharan Africa (expected to rise to 281 million by 2050⁴)

New HIV infections⁵ among young people in 2016

Eastern and Southern Africa: 210,000 female and 94,000 male

West and Central Africa: 80,000 female and 47,000 male

Comprehensive knowledge of HIV

Eastern and Southern Africa: 35% female and 36% male

West and Central Africa: 20% female and 26% male⁶

*The African region will only reap the benefits from the **demographic dividend** if young people are educated, healthy and employed.*



5-25% of adolescent girls have sexual intercourse before the age of 15.⁷

12% of adolescent girls aged 15-19 have given birth (global average 5%).⁸

Maternal mortality is the **leading cause of death among girls aged 15-19** globally.

Too many young people receive **confusing and conflicting information** about relationships and sex as they make the transition from childhood to adulthood. This has led to an increasing **demand from young people for reliable information which prepares them for a safe, productive, and fulfilling life.**

CSE responds to this demand, empowering young people to make informed decisions about relationships and sexuality and navigate a world where gender-based violence, gender inequality, harmful norms, negative notions of masculinities, early and unintended pregnancies, and HIV and other STIs still pose serious risks to their health and well-being.

I want to think that CSE/Life Skills-based Sexuality Education (LSBSE) is a single stride in the right direction in preventing early and unintended pregnancy.

- High school life skills teacher, Lesotho

Are African governments supportive of CSE?

As a result of the high rates of new HIV infections, early marriage, early initiation of sexual activity, and early and unintended pregnancies, many African governments are highly supportive of CSE. CSE and access to, and usage of, adolescent- and youth-friendly SRH services are recognized as key interventions to improve the health and well-being of young people and enable countries to reap the benefits of a demographic dividend. To show their commitment, governments have signed up to a number of regional commitments and standards that directly advocate for, or require CSE and adolescent- and youth-friendly SRH services to be implemented.

Title	Content
SADC Minimum Standards for Child and Adolescent HIV, TB and Malaria Continuum of Care and Support (2010)	The provision of CSE is identified as a minimum standard.
Eastern and Southern African Ministerial Commitment on comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health services for adolescents and young people (2013)	"Initiate and scale up age-appropriate CSE during primary school education to reach most adolescents before puberty, before most become sexually active, and before the risk of HIV transmission or unintended pregnancy increases. Using agreed international standards, ensure that CSE is age-, gender- and culturally-appropriate, rights-based, and includes core elements of knowledge, skills and values as preparation for adulthood: decisions about sexuality, relationships, gender equality, SRH, and citizenship."
Pan-African High-Level Conference on Education Nairobi Declaration and Call for Action on Education - Bridging continental and global education frameworks for the Africa We Want (2018)	"We commit to achieving gender equality through: • Rendering all aspects of the education system gender-sensitive, responsive, and transformative. • Providing sexuality education in schools and tertiary institutions and ensuring access for adolescents and young people."
African Union Roadmap on "Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in Youth" (2016)	"Scale up age-appropriate and culturally sensitive comprehensive education on SRH in order to avert many complications and challenges associated with unintended pregnancies and STIs, and their consequent impact on the development and well-being of young people, for in- and out-of-school youth, and implement innovative behavioural change programmes using new media and technology."
Addis Ababa Declaration on Population and Development in Africa Beyond 2014 (2013)	"Adopt and implement relevant CSE programmes, both in and out of school, that are linked to SRH services, with the active involvement of parents, community, traditional, religious, and opinion leaders; and young people themselves."
The African Union's revised Maputo Plan of Action 2016-2030 for the Operationalization of the Continental Policy Framework for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (draft)	Target "adolescents and youth (both in and out of school) with age-appropriate and culturally sensitive comprehensive education on SRH that involves parents and communities".
African Common Position on the African Union's Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa	Provide (inter alia) "education (including life skills and health education, including comprehensive education for sexual health)"
International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Resolution 2012/1 Adolescents and youth. The Commission on Population and Development (2012)	Calls upon governments "... to give full attention to meeting the reproductive health-service, information and education needs of young people... and to provide them with evidence-based comprehensive education on human sexuality, SRH, human rights, and gender equality to enable them to deal in a positive and responsible way with their sexuality."

About UNESCO

UNESCO is the United Nations' specialized agency for education. It provides global and regional leadership in education, strengthens national education systems, and responds to contemporary global challenges through education, with a special focus on gender equality and Africa.

UNESCO's mission on the area of health education

- Promoting healthy lifestyles among girls, boys, young women, and men through skills-based education in formal educational settings, non-formal educational activities, and informal education.
- Ensuring that all children benefit from good quality comprehensive sexuality education that includes information on HIV prevention.
- Ensuring that all children and young people have access to safe, inclusive, health-promoting learning environments.

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#O3Campaign #ESACCommitment



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youngpeopletoday.org
en.unesco.org/themes/health-education



¹ UNESCO. 2018. Revised Edition. International technical guidance on sexuality education. An Evidence-informed approach.

² CSE, its effects, and promising implementation practices are well researched subjects. Two main evidence reviews exist: The 2008 review was based on 87 studies; the 2016 review on 22 rigorous systematic reviews, 77 randomized controlled trials (RCT), of which more than half were situated in low or middle income countries, and information from non-RCT publications and online resources (40 studies were conducted in African countries). For further details see UNESCO. 2018. Revised Edition. International technical guidance on sexuality education. An Evidence-informed approach.

³ UNFPA. 2012. Status Report: Adolescents and young people in sub-Saharan Africa.

⁴ <http://aidsinfo.unaids.org/>. 2016 data for young people aged 15-24 years.

⁵ UNICEF. State of the World's Children. 2017 Statistical Tables.

⁶ statcompiler.com, statistic applies to most countries in the region.

⁷ UNICEF. State of the World's Children. 2017 statistical tables.

⁸ UNESCO. 2018. Revised Edition. International technical guidance on sexuality education. An Evidence-informed approach.