

Delivering Comprehensive Sexuality
Education for Out-of-school Young People

COUNTRY CASE STUDIES ON UNFPA'S GLOBAL PROGRAMME ON OUT-OF-SCHOOL CSE

Tunisia

The Country Case studies series is developed by UNFPA based on outcomes of the Global Programme on Out-of-School Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE).

UNFPA has since 2019 led the programme “Comprehensive Sexuality Education for Out-of-school Young People: Reaching Those Most Left Behind”, with the aim of empowering adolescents and youth from specific groups left behind with the information and skills they need to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health and rights. The programme is funded by the governments of Norway and Spain, and started its second phase in 2022. The programme implementation takes place in a total of 12 countries – Colombia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Iran, Malawi, Moldova, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Palestine, Philippines and Tunisia.

Out-of-school CSE holds the promise of reaching those left behind. In each of the countries, locally adapted interventions consider the needs, life experiences and vulnerabilities of left-behind groups of young people. This includes young people who are vulnerable either because they cannot attend school, or because the sexuality education curriculum offered in school does not adequately address their identity, whether that be as a girl, a young person with a disability, a young person living with HIV, an LGBTQ+ young person, or a migrant or young person displaced by conflict or humanitarian crisis. The initiative reaches out to young people from left-behind populations using the specially developed *UN International Technical and Programmatic Guidance on Out-of-school Comprehensive Sexuality Education*. Youth engagement is an integral part of the programme, and young people are themselves meaningfully included and engaged in the design and implementation of the activities.

In this Country Case studies series we present the experiences and lessons learned from UNFPA's work at the country level implementing CSE to meet the needs of young people most left behind.



Tunisia

DEVELOPING STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS OPPOSITION AND MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT CSE



TARGET GROUP:

Religious leaders, parents,
teachers and public
institutions



**GOVERNMENT
PARTNER:**

Ministry of Education



IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:

General Union of Tunisian
Workers, Tunisian Association for
Reproductive Health (ATSR), Arab
Institute for Human Rights (AIHR),
National Office for Family and
Population

Efforts to integrate comprehensive sexuality education into the education curriculum in Tunisia started in 2017 with advocacy and awareness-raising about the importance of providing adolescents and young people with knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about their sexuality and health. The integration process was led by the Ministry of Education, endorsed by the teachers union, and supported by UNFPA Tunisia, the Arab Institute for Human Rights (AIHR) and the Tunisian association for Reproductive Health (ATSR).

UNFPA Tunisia chose to align the integration of both in-school and out-of-school CSE so that these would take place at the same time, since the processes are linked and both would be subject to external scrutiny or opposition from the same range of stakeholders and gatekeepers. A technical committee – consisting of UNFPA, its partners, teachers' union representatives and the education steering committee – developed a plan to adapt and integrate international guidance on CSE in schools, and to mobilize civil-society organizations to endorse the integration and take part in the roll-out of out-of-school CSE.

Given the current context of education in Tunisia (see the Context box), it was anticipated that adding sexuality education as a separate subject would delay its introduction, and further burden a school timetable that was already criticized by teachers and parents for being too heavy. In addition, offering CSE as a new subject would mean recruiting and training teachers, which the Ministry of Education could not afford. By contrast, integrating CSE across different subjects would enhance sustainability and increase support from a range of subject teachers.

In 2019 the minister of education announced that sexuality education would be integrated as a mainstream subject across several school subjects. Unfortunately, this announcement met with a severe backlash from the media, religious leaders and parents. Within the ministry, too, the process was not fully endorsed.

To mitigate the resistance, the technical committee launched a series of consultations for parents, teachers and religious leaders to give input on the format, content and approach of sexuality education. The consultations enabled the committee to address the fears and misconceptions raised by the topic. For example, the use of “sexuality” and sex-related terminology in the subject title generated negative reactions, and was used by resistant forces to misrepresent CSE as a weapon to destroy social norms and lure youth and children into sexual activity. The technical committee

therefore decided that the modules to be introduced into school curricula would instead be described as part of “Comprehensive Education on Health”.

The consultation led to a response plan for each stakeholder:

- **Parents:** ATSR held field campaigns, awareness-raising sessions and workshops to help parents understand the importance of CSE. In partnership with UNFPA, five handbooks for parents were designed, covering CSE from different perspectives: religious, human rights-based and feminist, medical, socio-demographic and psychological. These handbooks complement the awareness-raising sessions and aim to engage parents meaningfully in their children's education.
- **Religious leaders and Islamic Education teachers:** Faith-based opposition was anticipated and was discussed at length. UNFPA and its partners promoted awareness among religious educators about the concept of sexuality education and the advantages provided by reaching the greatest cohort of adolescents in schools. UNFPA's partners, primarily ATSR, trained a group of religious educators as community-based CSE educators. Religious/Islamic Education instructors were sensitized using faith-based arguments from the Holy Koran to demonstrate how the text supports clear, objective and scientific sexuality education. Intensive trainings made it possible to incorporate CSE in Islamic Education and recruit religious education instructors as allies.
- **Media:** UNFPA, ATSR and AIHR launched a radio-based campaign to promote CSE and its advantages. The issues of sexuality education, sexual rights and gender equality were addressed by Radio Essaida through a monthly programme dedicated to sexual rights. Moreover, from 2019 to 2021, a social-media-based campaign addressed the primary misunderstandings about sexuality education, and awareness-raising campaigns and trainings for media representatives from various regions established a network of media supportive of CSE.

Successes

Aligning the integration timelines for in-school and out-of-school CSE enabled the technical committee to develop harmonized and complementary tools, in order to reach a large group of youth while tailoring the out-of-school programme to those from the most disadvantaged groups. By mainstreaming CSE across many subjects, the committee ensured its comprehensiveness. Synchronizing in-school and out-of-school CSE also made it possible to address all modules covered by international guidance documents, since if a module is not integrated or widely supported in the school curriculum, it can be addressed through the out-of-school programme. Despite opposition and challenges, the programme, both in-school and out-of-school, has acquired high-level national endorsement and is now anchored in the curriculum, giving partners a rare opportunity to make significant advances in the provision of CSE.



Challenges

Tunisia's complex and volatile political climate has frozen decision-making mechanisms. The prolonged conflict in the education sector has impacted the timeframe for CSE integration. In addition, resources are scarce: despite national support, the ministry cannot fund the programme's roll-out,

which requires resources for teacher training, programme monitoring, service adaptation and producing reference materials. Nevertheless, in 2023 UNFPA Tunisia plans to begin implementation of in-school and out-of-school CSE covering almost 100 schools in 13 regions.



Context

Around one-third of Tunisia's population are children aged 19 or under. School enrolment has increased, with 82% of children aged 12-18 enrolled, and almost 100% of younger children, providing a unique opportunity to invest in the country's largest in-school population yet. Advocacy for integrating CSE in schools arrived at a key juncture in Tunisia, marked by an increase in violence in schools, particularly gender-based violence. However, although the Ministry of Education formally announced CSE integration in schools

in 2019, the process has been delayed by a lack of political stability. There is an ongoing crisis in Tunisia's education sector, with conflict between the Ministry of Education, teachers, the union and parents over unfair workplace conditions and an overburdened school life. Alongside the country's political crisis, this has delayed significant reforms due to turnover of institutional staff and frequent government reshuffles. The COVID-19 pandemic has further postponed integration of CSE.



United Nations Population Fund

605 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10158
+1 212 297 5000
www.unfpa.org

Photo credits: UNFPA

**To get in touch with the UNFPA CSE Team,
Regional and Country Focal Points:**

Ilya Zhukov,

Global CSE Focal Point, UNFPA Headquarters — zhukov@unfpa.org

Petar Mladenov,

Programme Analyst, UNFPA Headquarters — pmladenov@unfpa.org

Kristine Bjartnes,

Programme Analyst, UNFPA Headquarters — bjartnes@unfpa.org

Olfa Lazreg,

Programme Specialist, Youth & HIV, Arab States Regional Office — lazreg@unfpa.org

Wafa Dhaouadi,

Youth Programme Consultant, UNFPA Tunisia Country Office — dhaouadi@unfpa.org

Rihab Bliidi,

CSE consultant, Youth Programme, UNFPA Tunisia Country Office — bliidi@unfpa.org