



POLICY BRIEF

Beyond silence: Why Egypt's classrooms need comprehensive sexuality education now

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This paper explores the barriers to implementing CSE in Egypt's formal education system and highlights how institutional silence, gender norms, and misinformation continue to endanger young people's health and autonomy.

ABSTRACT

Despite Egypt's formal commitments to youth rights and international frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), **Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) remains largely absent from the national curriculum.** What exists is fragmented, outdated, and shaped more by fear, control, and moral panic than by rights, science, or lived realities. **This paper explores the barriers to implementing CSE in Egypt's formal education system and highlights how institutional silence, gender norms, and misinformation continue to endanger young people's health and autonomy.**

Using qualitative interviews with 16 civil society actors, educators, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) trainers across Egypt, the study reveals the disconnect between policy and practice, and between what young people need and what they are allowed to know. It unpacks resistance from schools, parents, and policymakers, and traces how the framing of CSE as a tool of population control or fear preservation undermines its transformative potential. The paper also highlights how youth, especially in underserved areas, are already seeking information online, often from unregulated, harmful sources, and how community-led initiatives are stepping in to fill the gap.

Ultimately, this research calls for a reimagined, decolonial, rights-based approach to CSE, one that is co-created with young people, inclusive of marginalised identities, and responsive to Egypt's cultural realities. Without urgent political will and cross-sector collaboration, the silence around sexuality education will continue to reinforce cycles of violence, shame, and disempowerment. Egypt's youth are ready for change. *The question is: will the system rise to meet them?*



APPROACH

The paper is grounded in 16 semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDIs) (January–May 2025) with practitioners across governorates (Upper/Lower Egypt; urban/rural), complemented by a desk review of grey literature (UNESCO, UNFPA, Egyptian Civil Society Organisations CSOs) and validation dialogues co-organised with the Youth Consortium for CSE. Ethical safeguards included informed consent, anonymisation, and financial compensation for time. Findings are qualitative (non-representative) but triangulated to illuminate patterns and operational gaps.

AIM

The aim of the paper is to inform policymakers, education authorities, civil servants, civil society organisations, donors, and researchers on the timely necessity of embedding CSE in the Egyptian formal education system.

[Access the full policy paper from this link.](#)



DEMOGRAPHIC FRAMING

Egypt's youthful population, according to the Population Council Egypt's Office Survey of Young People in Egypt (SYPE) Program (2022), amounts to the following:

60%

under 30 years of age

20%

approximately, aged 18-29 years

This creates both opportunity and obligation: without credible, age-appropriate CSE, inequities deepen and preventable harms persist.



BRIEF SUMMARY

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in Egypt remains one of the most contested, and neglected, areas of schooling, despite international commitments to uphold young people's health, dignity, and rights.

As abuse rises and misinformation spreads, adolescents are left to navigate their bodies and emotions in silence.

Young people routinely lack accurate, age-appropriate information about bodies, boundaries, and relationships. **Formal schooling largely avoids or omits sexual and reproductive health and rights content; teachers are underprepared; families often choose silence.** Adolescents turn to social media, peers, or pornography for “sex education.”

Since 2022, select “sexual education/harassment” topics and a population-focused “reproductive health and population issues” framework have appeared, but they privilege risk-avoidance and fertility control over rights-based CSE.

Interviewees report that puberty and reproductive-health chapters are routinely omitted in classrooms, while parent-child communication is rare. **A 2019 youth survey cited in this paper found 88% of 18–30-year-olds rely on social media^[1], pornography, or friends as their main source of “sex education.”** In the first two months of 2025, Egypt's Child Helpline 16000 logged 227,523 calls and processed 11,644 complaints (including sexual abuse, FGM, and child marriage^[2]), and in the Sharqia Governorate alone, a region in Northern Egypt, 89 child sexual-abuse cases were recorded, underscoring the cost of silence and the urgency of rights-based CSE.

Despite institutional reluctance, several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and youth-led initiatives across Egypt have demonstrated that context-sensitive, participatory, and rights-based CSE delivery is not only feasible, but also in demand. Programmes by the Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance (CEWLA), and the Egyptian Family Health Society (EFHS) show that school-based CSE is both effective and well-received when adapted to local contexts. Online platforms like Love Matters Arabic and The Sex Talk Arabic further demonstrate strong youth demand for accurate, stigma-free information. However, these promising efforts remain small and fragmented. Without institutional support and coordination, their reach and sustainability remain limited.

Core recommendations range from adopting value-based, rights-affirming messaging; to strengthening teachers' capacities and engaging parents / the “movable middles”; localising content and delivery; embedding CSE across subjects rather than as a standalone course; centering youth in design and delivery; safeguarding impartiality and inclusion (disability, rurality, migrants, languages); coordinating and scaling what already works; advancing Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA) regional learning alongside domestic political advocacy; and securing strategic, long-term international support for youth-led, locally rooted initiatives.

^[1] [2019 survey by Love Matters Arabic](#)

^[2] [Daily News Egypt, 2025](#)

INTRODUCTION: THE URGENCY OF NOW

In today's Egypt, adolescents are far more likely to learn about their bodies or sexual health from TikTok and other forms of social media than from a trusted adult or classroom. The education system continues to look away, leaving young people vulnerable to confusion, exploitation, and misinformation.

Despite commitments under the SDGs and ICPD, the absence of accurate, age-appropriate, and culturally relevant information undermines young people's health and dignity. This paper seeks to unpack these tensions, mapping the current landscape of CSE, identifying barriers to implementation, and exploring possibilities for reform within Egypt's education system.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

1) Governmental framing: moral policing and population control

Recent government-endorsed curriculum reforms have approached sexuality education primarily through the lenses of population control and moral regulation, with language centred on "protection from deviance" rather than empowerment or rights. As a result, core competencies of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), such as consent, communication, emotional literacy, relationships, and help-seeking, are either omitted or sidelined.

This framing reduces CSE to a defensive tool rather than a developmental one. It also narrows the space for teachers to engage students meaningfully, reinforcing control rather than care, and undermining the the credibility and appeal of the content among learners.

2) The practice gap

While national strategies reference adolescent health and reproductive awareness, these commitments have not translated into meaningful classroom practice. Teachers remain undertrained, under-resourced, and unsupported. Where reproductive health (RH) content does exist, often in biology or science classes, it is frequently skipped, glossed over,

or dismissed altogether. Teachers may cite cultural sensitivity or defer responsibility to parents, many of whom are also ill-equipped or unwilling to discuss these topics.

The result is a vacuum of reliable information, particularly harmful for girls and adolescents in rural or marginalised areas, who face greater stigma when seeking services or asking questions. This practice gap reinforces a culture of silence, disempowerment, and risk.

3) Inequities and harm

Access to accurate SRHR (sexual and reproductive health and rights) education and services is deeply unequal across Egypt. Youth in Upper Egypt, rural communities, or low-income households face compounded barriers, ranging from early marriage and school dropout to limited mobility and deeply gendered expectations.

Fear-based messaging further disconnects young people from their bodies, positioning sexuality as dangerous or shameful rather than natural and manageable.

CSE, if designed inclusively and delivered equitably, can help mitigate these harms. But without addressing the structural inequities that shape access and engagement, its potential remains unrealised.

4) Informal models show promise—at a limited scale

Despite institutional reluctance, several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and youth-led initiatives across Egypt have demonstrated that context-sensitive, participatory, and rights-based CSE delivery is not only feasible, but also in demand. Initiatives from women's organisations in Egypt, such as [Center For Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance](#) (CEWLA's) "Right to Health" sessions, include outreach to school students using interactive materials. They also offer practical models for integrating CSE in ways that are locally resonant and accessible. Similarly, Egyptian Family Health Society's (EFHS) multi-governorate initiative showcased the potential of structured, school-based delivery under approved frameworks, helping validate the effectiveness of classroom-based CSE.

On the digital front, platforms like Love Matters Arabic and The Sex Talk Arabic have gained significant traction among young people, especially in urban and semi-urban areas, offering accessible information on relationships, sexuality, and bodily autonomy. These platforms demonstrate the existing appetite for accurate, shame-free content, especially among adolescents who lack trusted adults or school-based instruction.

However, these efforts remain limited in scale and fragmented. Without institutional integration, these models risk being short-lived or siloed, unable to reach most of Egypt's youth. To build on what works, these initiatives require formal recognition, cross-sector coordination, sustainable funding, and pathways to scale.

5) How CSE should look like (from the field)

Across the interviews and policy dialogues conducted, a clear consensus emerged on what CSE should look like in Egypt. CSE should

be embedded within broader youth education programmes rather than treated as a standalone topic. It must be age-appropriate, culturally responsive, and grounded in participatory learning methods. Most importantly, it should be co-designed with young people to ensure relevance, ownership, and impact. This was a consistent message across all 16 interviews with educators, activists, and civil society actors working in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

The vision goes beyond biology. CSE should prioritise life skills such as setting boundaries, understanding consent, practicing empathy, and building communication abilities, skills that are essential for safe relationships, self-worth, and emotional well-being.

Curricula must be iterative and sequenced across school years to ensure continuous learning. Content for younger children might begin with lessons on privacy and identifying safe/unsafe touch, while older adolescents can engage with more complex topics like healthy relationships, digital safety, and sexual decision-making. Sequencing allows for gradual, developmentally appropriate progression.

Inclusivity must be embedded in the design from day one, not added later as an afterthought. That means ensuring materials and teaching methods are adapted for learners with disabilities, those from rural areas, and linguistic minorities. For instance, visually impaired students may need tactile or audio materials, while students in marginalised or underserved areas may benefit from context-specific case studies and locally relevant content.

The challenge is not only about what to teach but how to teach it: creating interactive, safe, and non-judgmental environments where young people feel empowered to ask questions, share stories, and explore their rights.

The goal is to make CSE a toolkit for life, not a one-off lecture in risk avoidance

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS^[3]

1. Use value-based, rights-affirming messaging to counter resistance



To challenge the fear-driven claim that CSE promotes sexual activity, **the messaging should be framed around safety, dignity, health, and youth empowerment**, positioning it as a tool for understanding bodies, setting boundaries, and preventing harm. Additionally, explicitly aligning CSE with Egypt's commitments to end violence against women and girls can foster broader societal support for a rights-based approach. In short, value-based messaging, grounded in local stories and lived experiences, should affirm that bodily literacy is a right, and that rights-based CSE is a practical tool for family safety, community wellbeing, and youth autonomy.

Primary stakeholders:

Civil society organisations (CSOs) | Youth advocates | Media organizations

2. Invest in the 'Movables Middle': capacity strengthening for teachers, engagement with parents, and community-based dialogue



Teachers, parents and local leaders can become powerful allies when supported. Foster sustained and targeted capacity strengthening for educators on content and stigma navigation. Offer workshops and dialogue spaces to foster parent understanding and build trust around CSE. Investing in the "movable middle" means equipping those closest to young people with the tools to support, not suppress, their right to learn.

Primary stakeholders:

Ministry of Education | Teacher training institutes | CSOs | Parent-teacher associations | Local councils

[3] These recommendations are drawn from a series of interviews with activists, educators, and practitioners who have worked for years on Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) and broader SRHR efforts in Egypt and the region. You may agree with some and find others less applicable, and that's entirely valid. These are not definitive answers, but rather starting points, evolving ideas based on lived experience and trial. If you arrive at different conclusions, we encourage reflection on what shaped your path and what can be learned through dialogue.

3. Reconsider the name: rethink labels, not values



Reframing CSE, without changing the substance, can create strategic entry points in conservative or sensitive contexts. Using terms like “life skills,” “health education,” “adolescent health,” or “children’s health” to ease resistance while keeping content rights-based. Honest naming still matters, and in many settings it should remain; **the point is to choose language that opens doors without diluting content or values.**

Primary stakeholders:

CSOs | Policymakers | Curriculum developers | Ministry of Education | Media organizations

4. Localise the content: beyond a single way of delivery



Localise and adapt the content, methods, language, and delivery models to reflect Egypt’s social, linguistic, and regional realities while keeping the core aim unified: enabling young people to understand their bodies and their rights. **Use accessible formats, accommodate disabilities, and partner with local actors who understand community dynamics, where and when needed.**

Primary stakeholders:

Curriculum developers | Ministry of Education | Ministry of Health | Ministry of Social Solidarity | Local education directorates | Community-based organizations | Youth representatives

5. Engage cultural and community representatives — with clear guardrails



The engagement of religious/faith and cultural leaders is highly contested. Some interviewees viewed their selective engagement as a pragmatic entry point in conservative settings; noting that leaders can open doors, ease fear, and reassure families. Others strongly opposed this approach, warning that it risks blurring rights-based messaging and legitimising restrictive positions such as on child marriage or Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). **Engagement with religious and cultural leaders, if used at all, must be strictly context-specific, time-bound, and governed by clear safeguards.** It should occur only when trusted figures can help overcome genuine access barriers and when they publicly commit to principles of child protection, anti-violence, and non-discrimination. Their role should remain limited, for example, parent/community briefings on safety and help-seeking, listening sessions that surface concerns for educators to address, and signposting to services. They are not curriculum

spokespeople, do not teach in classrooms, and hold no veto power over content. In areas where cultural or religious leaders are more trusted than schools, engagement should be strictly tactical, not a pillar of delivery, and must safeguard content integrity and youth rights.

Primary stakeholders:

Ministry of Education | School administrations | CSOs | Community councils / Parent associations

6. Build on what exists and use it to navigate pushback



Leverage existing toolkits and programmes that are already working across Egypt and the broader SWANA region. Catalogue and adapt these resources, use them as evidence to support implementation, and coordinate efforts to avoid duplication. Showcase success stories to build credibility and momentum. Where political will exists, draw on regionally grounded frameworks, such as the [UNFPA Arab States operational guidance](#) and local pilots to position CSE as both practical and rights-based. Review past efforts with a critical eye: keep what works, discard what doesn't, and adapt approaches with humility and clarity. Above all, **political will must translate into evidence-based action so that data dispels fear, and progress withstands backlash.**

Primary stakeholders:

Ministry of Education | Ministry of Health | CSOs | Youth-led organisations | Teacher-training institutes | Monitoring and evaluation units | Donors and philanthropic partners | Academic institutions

7. Centre youth in advocacy, messaging, and design



Young people, as carriers of the questions both asked and the ones left unspoken, must co-design, deliver, and evaluate CSE. Support peer-led circles, compensate youth contributors, and ensure inclusion across region, class, ability, and gender. **Their participation is essential, not optional.** When young people co-own the process, CSE becomes what it is meant to be: a rights-based, relatable, and respectful learning space that builds empathy over bullying, mutual respect over shame, and healthy body image and emotional support over silence.

Primary stakeholders:

CSOs | Youth-led groups | Ministry of Education | Ministry of Social Solidarity | Ministry of Youth and Sports | Donors | International organizations

8. Ensure intersectional inclusion while safeguarding curriculum neutrality



CSE must be impartial and intersectionally inclusive. **Design CSE to reflect the diversity of learners from the outset. Ensure content is rights-based, accessible, and non-stigmatising. Respect and inclusion are core, not additions.**

In Egypt, inclusion goes beyond gender or sexual identity to encompass disability, migration status, rural/urban location, ethnicity, language, religion, socioeconomic background, and age. A one-size-fits-all model is not only ineffective, it is exclusionary. Impartiality also means no group is positioned as the “norm” and others as deviations; content is rights-anchored and supportive rather than stigmatizing. Inclusivity, in this sense, is not about promoting any particular lifestyle; it is about ensuring every student can learn safely, be seen accurately, and access the same protections and opportunities.

Primary stakeholders:

Curriculum developers | CSOs | Disability rights groups | Ministry of Education | Ministry of Youth and Sports

9. Make It fun, engaging and age-appropriate



CSE should not be heavy-handed or intimidating. **CSE should be interactive, playful, and relatable. Using storytelling, games, music, films, and other creative tools, reduces resistance and builds trust with young people and makes the content relevant and reflective of the daily lives of young people.**

Age-appropriateness should be treated as a design rule, not an add-on. Content should build progressively across age groups, matched to developmental stages and cultural context (e.g., early years: body parts, privacy, safe/unsafe touch; middle years: emotions, boundaries, help-seeking; secondary: consent, relationships, contraception, services). Pilot, gather feedback, and iterate, so the sequence stays developmentally sound, culturally sensible, and practical for classrooms.

Primary stakeholders:

Ministry of Education and curriculum developers | Educators and youth facilitators | CSOs | Youth-led groups

10. Embed CSE across the curriculum



Integrate CSE into existing subjects, Science, Ethics, Arabic, Civics, and Physical Education (PE) (e.g., In Civics/Life Skills, cover consent, digital safety, and by-stander intervention; in PE, address body image and safe hygiene) for a holistic approach. **This whole-school approach surrounds young people with consistent, rights-based messages without overloading teachers, and allows gradual, developmentally appropriate progression.** All while establishing safe spaces in schools, with referral mechanisms and trained mentors.

Primary stakeholders:

Ministry of Education and curriculum units | School leadership and counsellors | Teacher-training institutes | CSOs | Local youth-led groups

11. Build regional solidarity and cross-border learning in SWANA to invest in political advocacy



Learn from regional peers (e.g., Tunisia, Lebanon, Palestine) whose experiences offer practical, culturally resonant lessons more relevant than distant global models. Shared languages, legal systems, post-colonial histories, and social challenges across the SWANA region make regional solidarity a strategic foundation for advancing reproductive justice. Reclaiming Egypt's role in this movement requires grounding strategies in collective knowledge and aligning ministries and youth groups around a common CSE mandate. Prioritise cross-border and cross-sector partnerships, across education, health, civil society, and research, with youth as co-designers, not tokens.

Where data are limited, structured exchanges (e.g., policy roundtables, practitioner residencies, joint pilots) can accelerate learning and implementation. Domestically, align institutions through inter-ministerial coordination, teacher training pipelines, and monitoring frameworks—using regional evidence to build national consensus.

The goal is twofold: learn with the region and advocate within the state, so policy commitments convert into classroom practice.

Primary stakeholders:

Policymakers and relevant ministries | Regional bodies and platforms (for example, LAS and allied regional forums) | CSOs | Youth coalitions | Educators and researchers | International and regional donors

12. International support: strategic, grounded, and equitable



Support must prioritise long-term, youth-led, and locally grounded grassroots initiatives. **It should create sustainable space for adaptation and local ownership by simplifying funding processes and treating local actors as co-creators, not just implementers.**

Above all, international organisations must position themselves as partners, not saviours, listening more, directing less, and investing in what already works. The goal is not to lead movements from the outside, but to amplify them from within.

Primary stakeholders:

Donors | International organizations | Funding agencies | Youth-led initiatives

CONCLUSION

From a decolonial and intersectional perspective, this paper calls for the comprehensive integration of a rights-based CSE framework into Egypt's national education system. Egypt's adolescents deserve more than silence, stigma, and a single skipped chapter. They deserve a coherent, age-appropriate, inclusive, rights-based education that equips them to set boundaries, seek help, and build respectful relationships. The evidence and workable models already exist; what is missing is political will, institutional courage, and coordination at scale.

By localising content, embedding CSE across subjects, backing teachers and parents, centring youth, and leveraging SWANA regional learning, Egypt can move from fear to fairness—and from omission by design to protection by design. The generation is ready. It's time the system was, too.

Because knowledge should never feel like a privilege.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Yasmine Aburaya is a gender equality and youth participation advocate from Egypt, focusing on eliminating violence against women and girls. She is the Founder and Executive Director of Your Voice Against VAW Initiative and holds a Master's degree in international cooperation and human rights from the University of Bologna. She contributes to regional feminist and youth spaces, including the Arab States Civil Society and Feminists Network and the Dutch MFA Youth Advisory Committee. Yasmine is the Global Ambassador for Egypt with the International Youth Council on Gender Equality and has collaborated with national and international civil society networks to promote gender justice and community-led change.



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ABOUT THE PAPER

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