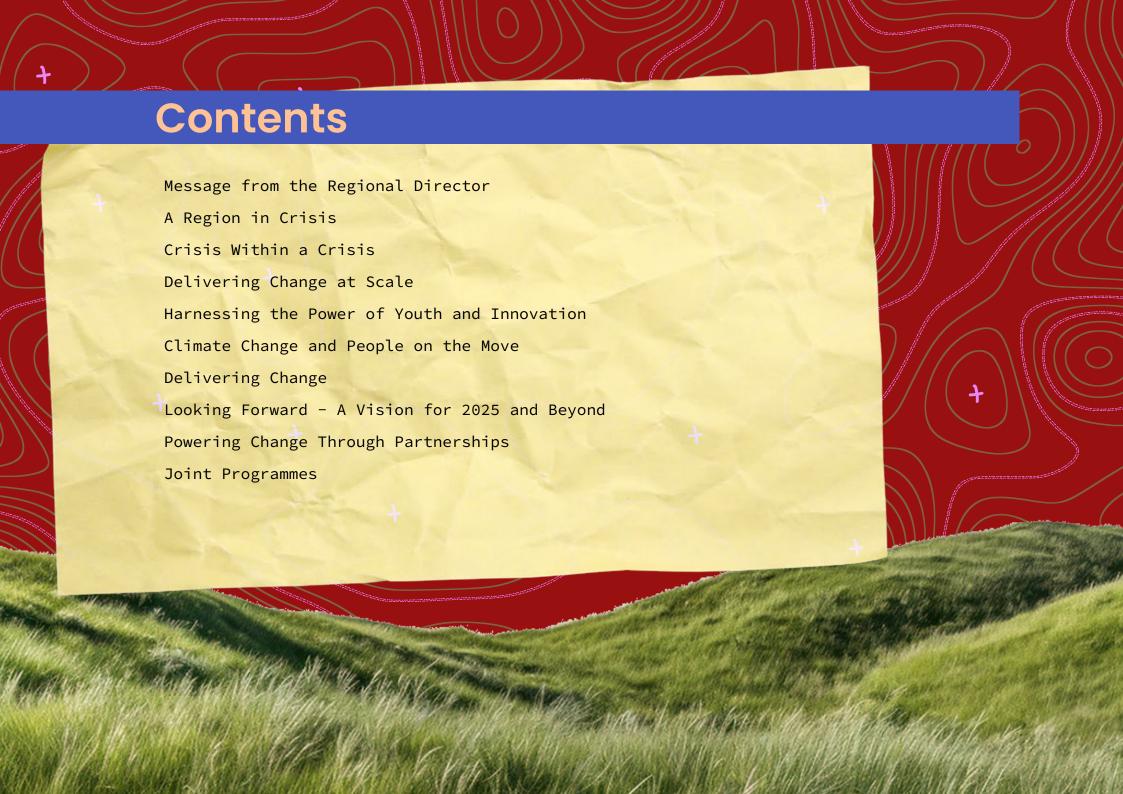


Breaking barriers, building solutions

UNFPA East and Southern Africa -2024 Highlights Advancing the Three Zeros and Beyond









Message from the Lydia Regional Director Ligono

2024 has been a year of transformation, challenges, and remarkable progress for UNFPA East and Southern Africa. From humanitarian responses in climate-stricken regions to strengthening health systems and championing gender equality, our work has remained focused on ensuring that every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled. As we reflect on our achievements the past year, we recognize the tireless efforts of our teams, partners, and communities who drive change and create a lasting impact.

A region in crisis

The East and Southern Africa region is one of striking contrasts. It is a region of immense potential, home to some of the fastest-growing economies on the continent, yet it continues to deal with deep-seated challenges such as poverty, gender inequality, climate change, and protracted conflicts. The region is also at the forefront of rapid demographic shifts, with a growing youth population that has the power to drive economic growth, innovation, and social transformation. However, this potential can only be realized if young people, particularly adolescent girls, have access to the rights and services they need to thrive.

The past year has seen a series of overlapping crises that have disproportionately affected women and girls. From the devastating floods in Malawi that displaced over 14,000 people to ongoing conflicts in South Sudan and parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), humanitarian needs have escalated.

Climate-induced disasters have heightened food insecurity, forced migration, and disrupted access to essential health services, including sexual and reproductive health care. In response, UNFPA has worked tirelessly to integrate Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) services into humanitarian interventions, ensuring that women and girls in crisis settings are not left behind.

Crisis within a crisis

Reports indicate that 1 in 3 women in the region has experienced some form of gender-based violence in her lifetime. Women and girls in fragile settings face an increased risk of sexual violence, early marriage, and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM).

countries adopting progressive policies on family planning and maternal health. In 2024, over 21 countries



The road ahead

As we move forward into 2025 and the last five years before the deadline of the Sustainable Development Goals, our focus remains on accelerating progress toward the three transformative results: ending preventable maternal deaths, ending the unmet need for family planning, and ending gender-based violence and harmful practices. We will continue to advocate for stronger policies, increased investments, and deeper partnerships to drive meaningful and lasting change

The road ahead is challenging, but with the support and dedication of our teams and partners, I am confident that we will continue to make a lasting impact on the lives of millions.



Photo: ©UNFPA East and Southern Africa

Delivering Change at Scale



Ending preventable maternal deaths

Maternal mortality has declined by 48 per cent since 2000, but more needs to be done. This year, six countries conducted assessments on implementing a human rights-based approach to family planning, ensuring that access to contraception is recognized as a fundamental right. Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Madagascar received support in identifying and addressing barriers to contraceptive access, ensuring that women and girls have choices regarding their reproductive health.

Scaling midwifery interventions

To further drive change, ESARO has invested in strengthening midwifery programs, recognizing midwives as a cornerstone of maternal health. Over 5,000 midwives and community health workers were trained across the region, ensuring the availability of skilled care at the moment of childbirth.

The introduction of task-shifting models in Zambia and South Sudan allowed nurses and midwives to expand their scope of practice, addressing gaps in service delivery.

A story from Malawi

In a small village in Malawi, Martha*, a young mother, nearly lost her life due to postpartum hemorrhage. Thanks to a UNFPA-supported midwifery training program, Sarah, a local midwife, was equipped with the necessary skills and tools to intervene just in time. "Without this training, I wouldn't have known how to manage such a critical situation," Sarah recalls. Martha and her newborn are both thriving today, highlighting the lifesaving impact of these initiatives.

Addressing the unmet need for family planning

Despite progress, an estimated 43 million women in the region still lack access to modern contraceptives. This unmet need leads to unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and increased risks to maternal and child health. UNFPA has been at the forefront of expanding access to contraceptive services by:

- Supporting governments in developing rights-based family planning policies aligned with international standards.
- Strengthening supply chain management systems to ensure contraceptives reach last-mile communities.
- Expanding youth-friendly reproductive health services to empower adolescents with comprehensive sexuality education and access to contraception.
- Investing in digital health solutions, such as telemedicine services, to reach underserved populations.

By 2027, our goal is to increase contraceptive uptake by 30 per cent, particularly among adolescent girls and young women, ensuring that every individual has the autonomy to make informed reproductive choices.

Eliminating gender-based violence and harmful practices

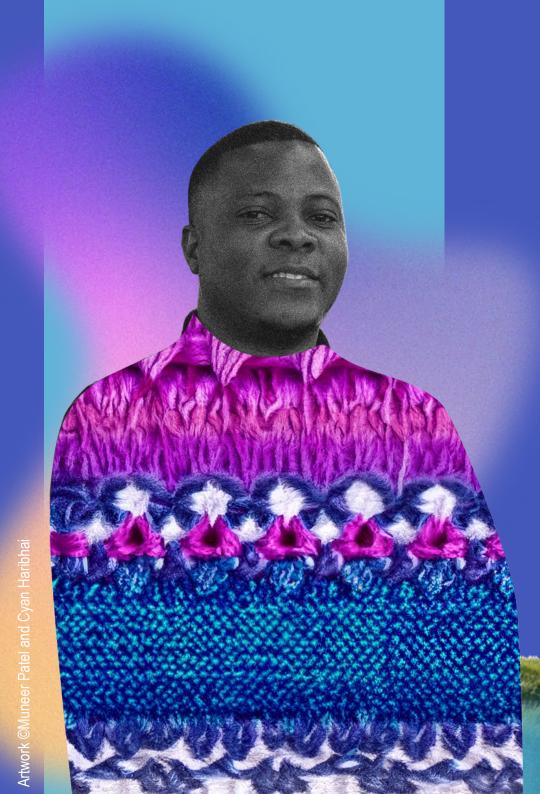
Building on commitments made through the Beijing Platform for Action, UNFPA has played a leading role in legislative advocacy and grassroots interventions in the region to end gender-based violence (GBV) and harmful practices.

Legislative wins and community-based interventions

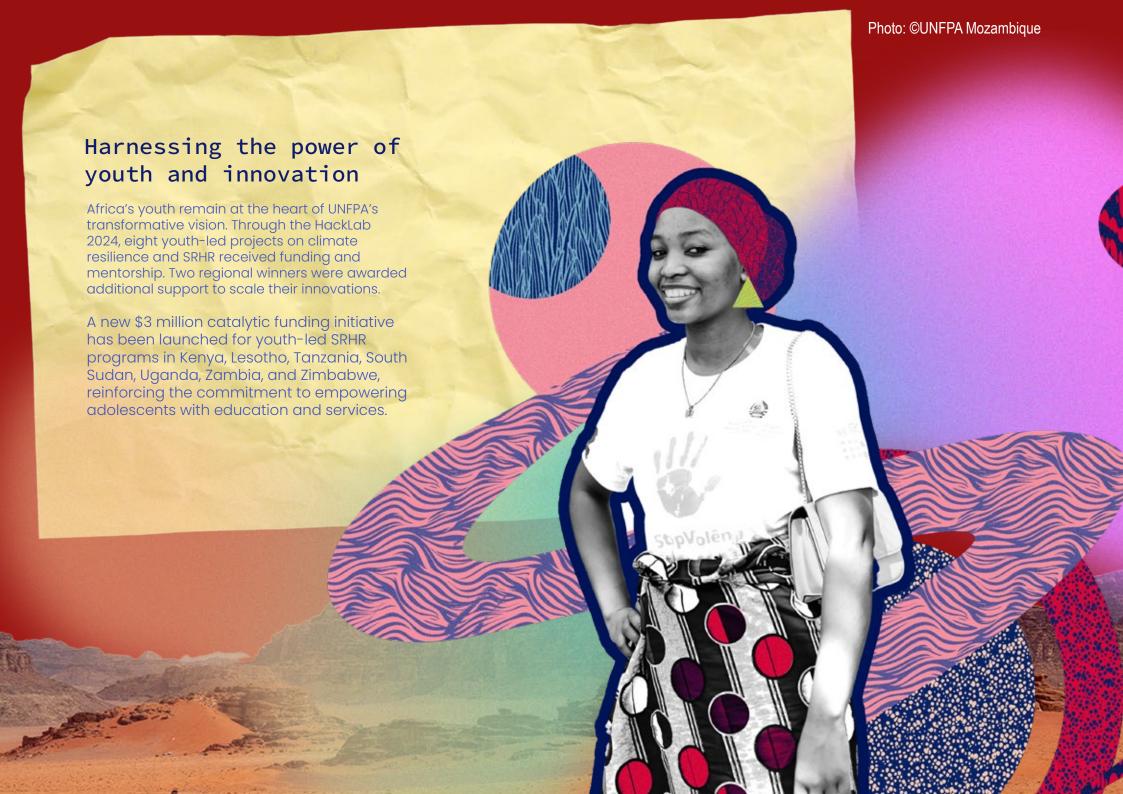
- Child Marriage Prevention Zambia strengthened its anti-child marriage laws, with UNFPA providing technical support for policy drafting and implementation.
- Community-Based Action In Kenya, the Tiko App has become a digital hub for sexual and reproductive health services, reaching over 50,000 young women with essential resources.
- Solar-Powered Safety Women and girls in South Sudan received solar-powered lamps, enhancing their safety and mobility at night.

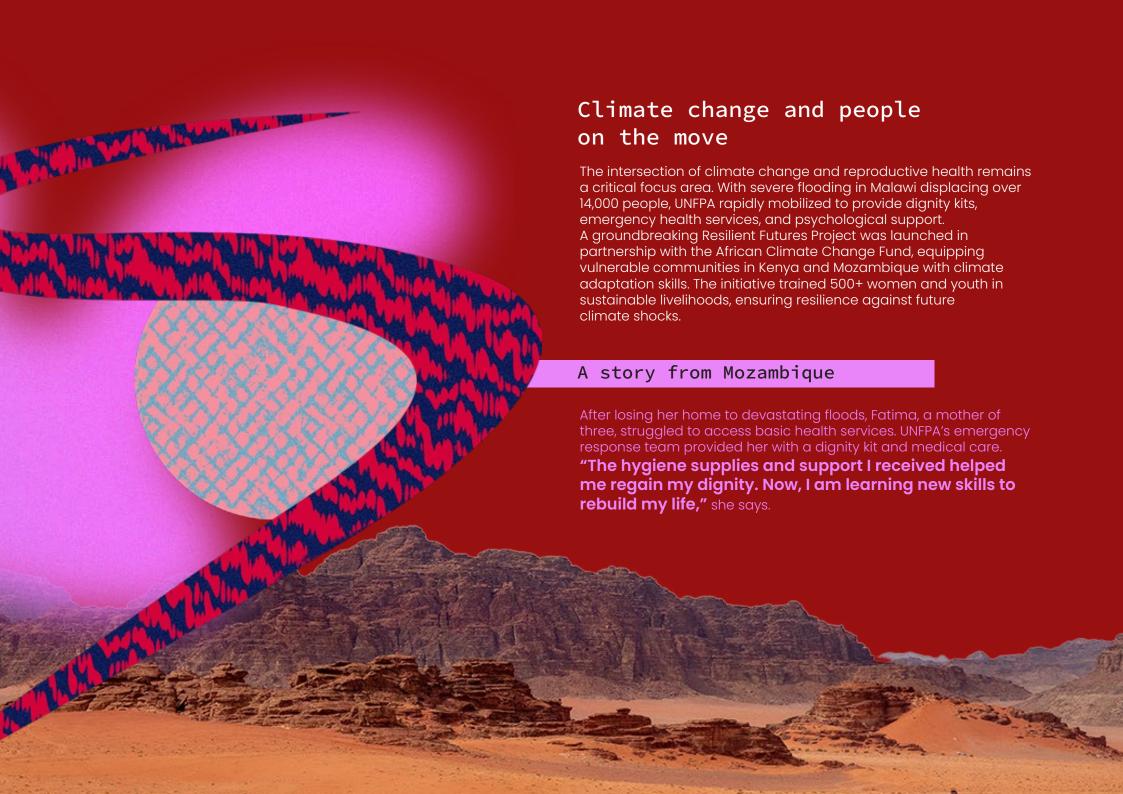
A story from South Sudan

When Amina*, a 16-year-old girl from South Sudan, escaped a forced marriage, she sought refuge at a UNFPA-supported safe house. There, she found not only shelter but also legal aid and psychosocial support. "For the first time, I feel safe. I am now studying to become a teacher so I can help other girls avoid what I went through," she shares.











Delivering Change

Ending preventable maternal deaths

At the core of our progress is a commitment to a human rights-based approach, ensuring equitable access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for all, especially marginalized communities. Our youth-centered approach continues to empower young people through comprehensive sexuality education, while gender equality and women's empowerment remain central pillars in dismantling harmful social norms and advancing women's rights. Our emphasis on accountability, transparency, and inclusivity ensures that our

programs are effective, ethical, and responsive to diverse needs.

The progress we have made is driven by a combination of structural, economic, and societal factors that influence the accessibility and quality of sexual and reproductive health services in East and Southern Africa. These driving forces shape our strategic priorities and guide our interventions to maximize impact:

Demographic shifts and population growth

The region is experiencing significant demographic transitions, with a rapidly growing youth population. This presents an opportunity to harness the demographic dividend by investing in young people's health, education, and economic opportunities. However, high fertility rates, unplanned pregnancies, and barriers to contraception access continue to hinder progress.

Gender inequality and social norms

Deeply entrenched gender norms continue to limit women's autonomy and decision-making power over their reproductive health. Harmful practices such as child marriage, female genital mutilation, and gender-based violence remain pervasive. Strengthening legal frameworks, engaging men and boys, and shifting societal attitudes through advocacy and education are crucial in dismantling these barriers.

Economic disparities and health inequities

Poverty remains a significant barrier to accessing quality health care. Women and girls in low-income communities often face financial obstacles that prevent them from obtaining essential sexual and reproductive health services. Expanding domestic health financing, reducing out-of-pocket costs, and enhancing social protection mechanisms are necessary to ensure equitable access to care.

Climate change and humanitarian crises

The increasing frequency and severity of climate-related disasters—droughts, floods, and cyclones—are exacerbating vulnerabilities, particularly among women and girls. These crises disrupt health services, displace communities, and increase exposure to GBV and unintended pregnancies. Integrating SRHR into disaster risk reduction and humanitarian response efforts remains a top priority.

Urbanization and migration patterns

Rapid urbanization is changing the landscape of health service delivery. While cities offer better access to modern health infrastructure, they also bring challenges such as overcrowding, informal settlements, and increased demand for services. Similarly, cross-border migration due to conflicts and economic pressures affects access to consistent health care for displaced populations.

Technological innovations and digital transformation

The digital revolution is providing new opportunities to enhance SRHR service delivery. Mobile health applications, telemedicine, and Al-driven health solutions are expanding access to family planning, maternal health care, and information dissemination. UNFPA is leveraging these tools to bridge service gaps, particularly for remote and underserved populations.

Policy and governance landscape

Political will and strong governance structures are essential for advancing SRHR. While some governments in the region have shown leadership in prioritizing reproductive health, others remain resistant due to socio-political and religious factors. Strengthening policy advocacy, accountability mechanisms, and regional collaboration is key to ensuring sustained progress.

Looking forward – a vision for 2025 and beyond

Demographic shifts and population growth

Building on the momentum of 2024, UNFPA East and Southern Africa will focus on implementing transformative strategies that will bring us to the next decade.

Scaling up investments in sexual and reproductive health and rights

We will work closely with governments to enhance domestic resource mobilization, reducing reliance on external aid and ensuring sustainable SRHR programs. By 2026, at least 60per cent of countries in the region will have integrated SRHR financing into national health budgets, aligning with global SDG commitments.

Expanding access to family planning and maternal health services

Despite progress, 43 million women in the region still lack access to modern contraceptives. We aim to bridge this gap through policy reforms, expanded supply chains, and digital innovations in health service delivery. By 2027, we project a 30 per cent increase in contraceptive use among adolescent girls and young women.



Strengthening humanitarian preparedness and response

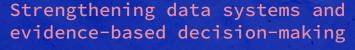
Given the region's vulnerability to conflicts and climate-induced disasters, we will integrate SRHR into emergency response frameworks. By 2025, our goal is to ensure that SRHR services are available in at least 80 per cent of humanitarian settings across Fast and Southern Africa.

Leveraging digital health and technological innovations

Telemedicine and Al-driven health solutions will be key in improving access to SRHR services. We will launch new digital platforms tailored to youth-friendly reproductive health services and increase mobile-based SRHR education programs to reach at least 15 million young people by 2026.

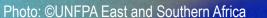
Advancing gender equality and ending harmful practices

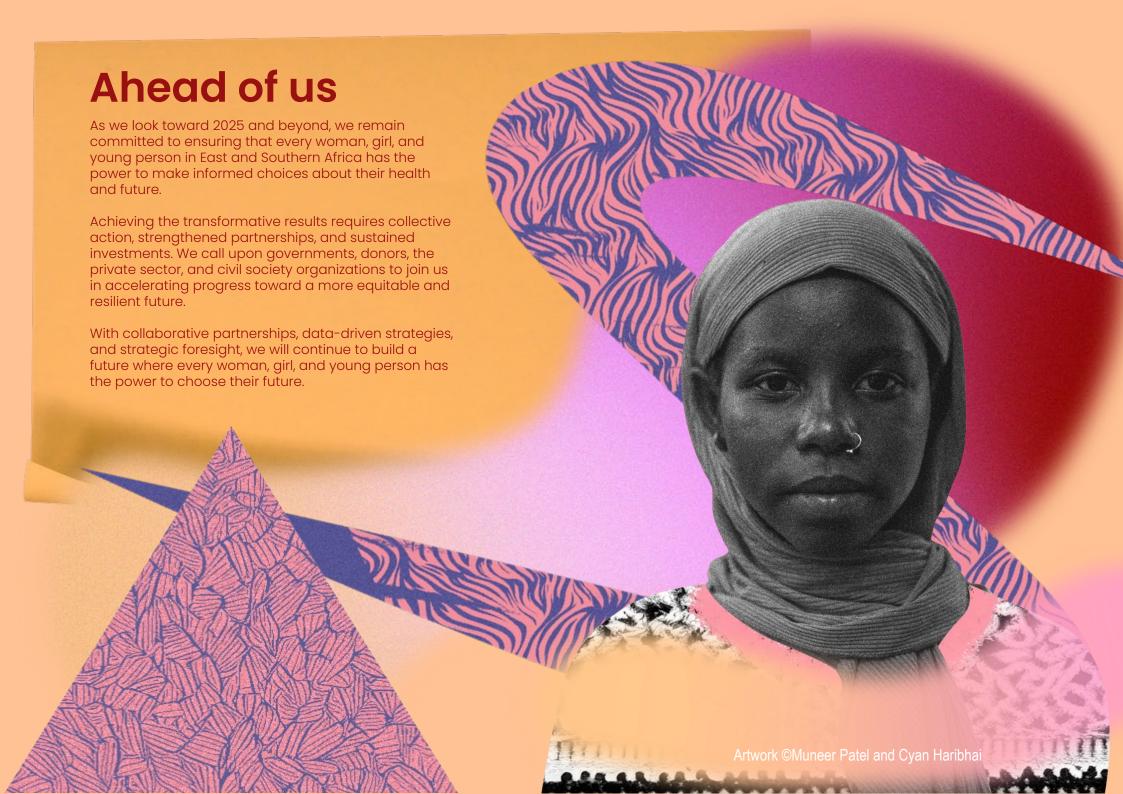
By 2030, we aim to reduce child marriage rates by 50 per cent across the region through strengthened legal frameworks and grassroots advocacy. Efforts will also focus on expanding safe spaces for GBV survivors, providing psychosocial support, and strengthening legal protections.



We will support national statistical agencies to improve data collection and demographic intelligence to guide policymaking. By 2025, at least 70 per cent of countries in the region will have fully integrated SRHR indicators into national development plans.

- Shifting from service availability to quality of care—ensuring SRHR services are not only available but also accessible, acceptable, and high-quality.
- Strengthening resilience and humanitarian preparedness—recognizing the impact of climate change and protracted crises on reproductive health.
- Expanding financing mechanisms—moving beyond donor funding to domestic resource mobilization and innovative financing models.
- Leveraging digital innovation—mainstreaming AI, telemedicine, and digital health solutions to expand access to SRHR services.
- Addressing intersectionality—tackling the social, economic, and cultural determinants affecting reproductive health outcomes.
- Strengthening partnerships—building multi-sectoral collaborations, including private sector engagement, to ensure sustainable impact.







Powering change through partnerships

In 2024, partnerships remained a cornerstone of UNFPA East and Southern Africa's efforts to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) across the region.
Collaboration with governments, civil society, the private sector, development agencies, and grassroots organizations played a critical role in mobilizing resources, expanding service delivery, and strengthening policy advocacy.

This year, UNFPA set an ambitious resource mobilization target of \$128.44 million and successfully secured \$180.24 million, exceeding expectations.

These funds have been instrumental in enhancing healthcare access, improving gender equality initiatives, and expanding humanitarian response efforts in fragile settings. Strategic partnerships facilitated the implementation of tailored interventions, ensuring that programs reached the most underserved communities and aligned with national and regional priorities.

Beyond financial contributions, partnerships contributed to capacity-building, digital innovation, and policy engagement, creating an enabling environment for sustainable progress.

The integration of innovative financing models and multi-sectoral approaches strengthened program impact and scalability, reinforcing commitments to long-term solutions in SRHR. Looking ahead to 2025, UNFPA East and Southern Africa will continue to diversify funding sources, strengthen multi-stakeholder collaborations, and leverage emerging opportunities to accelerate progress toward the three transformative results. Addressing persistent gaps will require adaptability, strategic investment, and continued engagement with key stakeholders to drive sustainable change.

Through these efforts, UNFPA remains committed to ensuring that every woman, girl, and young person in East and Southern Africa has access to the services and support necessary to realize their rights and potential.



Empowering youth through the Safeguard Young People Programme

Since 2013, the Safeguard Young People (SYP) Programme, led by UNFPA East and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO), has empowered young people across 11 countries to make informed sexual and reproductive health (SRH) choices. The programme focuses on preventing STIs including HIV, early and unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, child marriage, harmful practices, and gender-based violence.

SYP is implemented in partnership with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (EKN), and regional bodies such as SADC, EAC, the SADC Parliamentary Forum, relevant UN agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs), and youth networks (AfriYAN, Y-Act, Y+). This multi-sectoral collaboration enhances programme coherence, sustainability, and scalability across the region.







