

Third Stakeholder Consultation for the Seventh Asian and Pacific Population Conference

Universal Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) in Asia and the Pacific: equality, quality and accountability

Thursday, 17 August 2023 (11:00-14:00 UTC+7) Online (Zoom)

CONCEPT NOTE (15 August 2023)

1. Introduction

Pursuant to ESCAP resolution 74 (XXIII) of 17 April 1967 and Commission on Population and Development decision 2022/101, ESCAP, in collaboration with UNFPA, will organize the Seventh Asian and Pacific Population Conference from 15 to 17 November 2023 at the United Nations Conference Centre in Bangkok, Thailand. The Population Conference is a statutory organ of ESCAP and convenes every ten years.

The intergovernmental meeting and its preparatory process will coincide with other important events and developments: the 60-year commemoration of the first Asian Population Conference, held in December 1963 in New Delhi, India and the 10-year anniversary of the adoption of the 2013 Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development. It will also mark the half-way point toward achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific. It will also be held one year prior to the assessment of the status of implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development during the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on Population and Development in 2024.

The 2013 Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration (APMD) on Population and Development adopted at the Sixth Asian and Pacific Population Conference in paragraph 79 ‘Resolve[d] to promote the right of women and girls to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, including sexual and reproductive health, in order to achieve gender equality, and reaffirm further that expanding access to sexual and reproductive health information and education and high-quality sexual and reproductive health services is essential for achieving the goals enshrined in the Beijing Platform for Action, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the key actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the [Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals] and the recommendations arising from their subsequent reviews’;

The Third Thematic Stakeholder Consultation, will focus on achieving universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Key themes within this consultation will focus on sexual and reproductive rights (SRR); access to SRHR through Universal Health Coverage (UHC); sexual and reproductive health services, information and education for all; and policies, governance, financing for SRHR. Evidence in the region points to the need for urgent action to protect the human rights of people affected, in particular women, girls and gender diverse persons.

Increased inequalities in many countries in the Asian and Pacific region have resulted in lack of access for couples and individuals to safe, acceptable, affordable, effective, and voluntary forms of modern contraception. Demands for these services will continue to grow over the next several decades, especially for those who face greater barriers in accessing such services¹, as highlighted by the 2013 Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration. And due to the impacts of COVID19 in Asia and the Pacific², 60 per cent of women faced barriers to seeing a medical professional in 2020³. In addition to the lack of access to SRHR services, information and education, rates of sexual and gender-based violence increased, in particular for marginalized communities such as LGBTIQ and sex workers.

The consultation will take stock and assess progress, gaps challenges in reducing inequalities, upholding human rights with focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights of people in the region and discuss the way forward. Main findings and recommendations of the consultations will be summarized in an information paper to be submitted to the Seventh Asia Pacific Population Conference Intergovernmental meeting in Asia and the Pacific. The objective of these consultations is to bring a bottom-up participatory approach of the review and appraisal of the 2013 Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development (APMD) priority action areas and modalities of implementation at the regional level. Moreover, the consultations aim at identifying challenges, gaps and opportunities across all 11 priority areas in the APMD, from CSO perspectives. The first consultation will discuss the APMD priority actions in a cross-cutting manner from the lens of inequalities, exclusion and multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

2. Objectives of consultations

The purpose of the stakeholder consultation is to facilitate and expand collaboration and participation in the regional review and appraisal process, and in particular to elicit stakeholder experiences and views around the review objectives, namely:

- Take stock of the overall progress of implementation of the priority issues of the APMD and the ICPD PoA in Asia and the Pacific to date
- Identify key challenges, opportunities, gaps, and prevalent and emerging issues
- Identify established and emerging good practices and lessons learnt
- Identify resource requirements and capacity building needs
- Formulate recommendations

The consultation is a closed meeting and will not be recorded. To have open and frank discussions, the **Chatham House Rules will be followed**, which means that participants are free to use the information received but may not reveal the identity or the affiliation of the speaker(s), or of any other participant.

¹ 2013 Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development, paragraph 36

² Several governments throughout the Asia-Pacific region imposed lockdown orders, restrictions on travel and physical meetings and gatherings, stay-at-home and/or work-from-home orders, and curfews.

³ UN Women. (2020). Unlocking the Lockdown. The Gendered Effects of Covid-19 on Achieving the SDGS in Asia and the Pacific.

A summary note of the consultation will be drafted and made publicly available after the consultation. Registration will close on 16 August at 24:00 hours (midnight) (*Bangkok time*).

3. Consultation sub-themes focus

The third stakeholder consultation theme is as follows: Universal Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) in Asia and the Pacific: equality, quality & accountability.

Subtheme 1: Sexual and Reproductive Rights & Justice

This sub-theme will focus on sexual and reproductive rights and achieving justice in Asia and the Pacific. Violations of sexual and reproductive rights are often due to deeply ingrained beliefs and harmful societal values pertaining to sexuality and SOGIESC, disproportionately impacting women, young people and gender diverse persons across the region. Achieving sexual and reproductive rights and bodily autonomy entails respect for expression of sexuality and SOGIESC, and decriminalization of adult consensual behaviors, and sex work. A rights-based approach places a focus on eliminating sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and harmful practices such as early and child forced marriage and female genital mutilation, and involuntary or forced sterilization. Harmful and negative gender stereotypes also impact the issue of infertility, and who is understood to be 'desirable' in terms of forming a family and who is counted as having fertility problems.

A rights based approach involves uncovering and addressing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination based on age, sex, SOGIESC, location, economic class, gender, ethnicity, religion, minority status, and disability amongst other aspects. By incorporating principles of **equality**, the discussions in this sub theme will harness recommendations for the achievement of sexual and reproductive justice in the region, and will address the following questions:

- Who are excluded and how do we ensure inclusion and meaningful participation of communities, in particular those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, to ensure **principles of equality** for achieving sexual and reproductive rights and justice?
- What are the biggest gaps, and emerging issues in sexual and reproductive rights and justice for the region?
- What are the opportunities/best practices to address sexual and reproductive rights and justice, and advance **equality**?
- How can we learn from/ advance sexual and reproductive rights and justice as we recover from COVID?
- Recommendations for the way forward

Subtheme 2: Access and inclusion of SRHR in UHC

Strong health systems are needed to ensure equitable and universal **access** to quality healthcare, with a focus on SRHR. Marginalized groups in particular face intersecting forms of discrimination and structural barriers to accessing UHC and the fulfillment of their SRHR. At the same time, SRHR selfcare, which includes self-management, self-testing, and self-awareness,⁴ places decision-making directly into the hands of people and

⁴ WHO Consolidated Guideline on Self-Care Interventions for Health Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, available at <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/325719/WHO-RHR-19.14-eng.pdf?ua>

integrating it into UHC can reduce the current burden placed on healthcare systems, improving health outcomes and at the same time helping government achieve their commitments to UHC⁵.

This sub-theme will discuss recommendations for achieving self-care for SRHR in Asia and the Pacific and thus access to quality healthcare, and will address the following questions:

- Who are excluded and how do we ensure inclusion of communities' equitable and universal **access** to quality healthcare, in particular SRHR, for those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination?
- What are the biggest gaps, and emerging issues in SRHR self-care for the region?
- What are the opportunities/best practices to address access to UHC and SRHR self-care, and advance the voice and agency of marginalized groups?
- How can we learn from/advance self-care and **access** to SRHR in UHC as we recover from COVID?
- Recommendations for the way forward

Subtheme 3: Sexual and reproductive health services, information, and education for all

This sub theme will focus on the achievement of access to **quality** health services, information, and education for all. Quality SRHR services are defined within the framework of available, affordable, accessible, **acceptable**, and quality, and taking a lifecourse approach. An essential and comprehensive package of SRH services includes contraceptive services, maternal and newborn care, and prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS and STIs; comprehensive sexuality education; safe abortion care; prevention, detection and counseling for gender-based violence; prevention, detection and treatment of infertility and cervical cancer; and counseling and care for sexual health and well-being⁶, access to hormone therapy.

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) 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 ⁷. While most countries in the region have some form of sexuality education, it is often not comprehensive, and it is unevenly implemented.

This sub theme will discuss recommendations for access to **quality** health services information and education, including emerging opportunities such as digital health interventions and assisted reproductive technologies, and will address the following questions:

- Who are excluded and how do we ensure inclusion and access of communities, in particular those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, to **quality** SRH services, information and education that is available, affordable, accessible, and acceptable?
- What are the biggest gaps, and emerging issues in SRH services, information, and education, including comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) for the region?
- What are the opportunities/best practices to address **quality** SRH services, information, education, (including CSE) and advance the voice and agency of marginalized groups?
- How can we learn from/advance as we recover from COVID?

⁵Agenda 2030, the Political Declaration on UHC, and International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action

⁶Accelerate progress—sexual and reproductive health and rights for all: report of the Guttmacher–Lancet Commission (2018) available at [https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736\(18\)30293-9.pdf](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736(18)30293-9.pdf)

⁷ UNESCO (2018) International technical guidance on sexuality education. P16 available at <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/ITGSE.pdf>

- Recommendations for the way forward

Subtheme 4: Policies, Governance, Financing for SRHR

This sub theme will uncover the role of policies, governance and financing in ensuring **accountability** for the achievement of SRHR for all. The political environment impacts whether countries advocate for, ignore, or do not provide access to SRHR, including national policies and legislation with a global impact. All forms of reproductive coercion violate human rights. Examples of harmful laws include those that restrict women's and adolescents' access to health services by requiring third-party authorisation, laws that require service providers to report personal information (breaching patient confidentiality), and laws that criminalize same-sex relationships or access to safe abortion services. It is important to strategize opportunities to work and partner with health sector trade unions. Finally, there is a need to address high out of pocket expenditures which unfairly impact marginalized communities, and commit budget allocation to ensure the **availability, affordability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality** SRHR for all. Health sector reforms upholding the right to health should inform policies, governance, and health financing.

This subtheme will discuss the way forward with recommendations to strengthen policy, governance and financing related to SRHR, and will address the following questions:

- Who are excluded and how do we ensure the inclusion and needs of communities, in particular those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and ensure **accountability** for SRHR policies, governance and finance?
- What are the biggest gaps, and emerging trends regarding SRHR policies and governance in the region?
- What are the opportunities/best practices to ensure **accountability**, and advance the voice and agency of marginalized groups?
- How can we learn from/advance SRHR policies, governance and financing as we recover from COVID?
- Recommendations for the way forward

4. Content and format

The consultation will consist of an opening keynote address on the topic followed by two rounds of four simultaneous subtheme discussions. This will be followed by the closing plenary where the key highlights and recommendations will be shared by the respective sub-theme leads. The floor will then open to questions and comments. A closing and next steps will follow.

5. Organizing team

This stakeholder consultation is co-designed and implemented by a team of stakeholders led by the 7th APPC CSO Steering Committee Asia Pacific Alliance for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (APA), Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM), Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), Caram Asia, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), HelpAge, International Community of Women Living with HIV Asia Pacific (ICWAP), IPPF ESEAOR, IPPF SARO, Pacific Feminist SRHR Coalition, Tsao Foundation, Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR), Y-Peer Asia Pacific, YouthLEAD, and United Nations agencies UNESCAP and UNFPA .[1]

6. Participants

Participation in the stakeholder consultations should be balanced with regard to geography/region, gender and area of work/sector. Civil Society Organisations engaged in ICPD and APPC processes in Asia and the Pacific will be actively engaged. Further to this, CSOs working on APMD priority action areas also will be included in the process. In the interest of ensuring diverse representation at the consultation, we ask that only one person or two per organization participates.

7. Expected outcomes and next steps

A summary report will be drafted after the meeting and posted on the ESCAP website. The summary will inform an information paper that will be drafted, summarizing the outcomes of all stakeholder consultation.

8. Background

The Asia-Pacific region is home to 60 per cent of the world's population. It is undergoing a momentous transition from younger, more rural populations to older, more urban ones. While sharing some general trends, other population levels and trends differ across subregions and countries. For example, some are already experiencing population decline, whereas others continue to grow, albeit at a declining rate. The size, structure and dynamics of regional populations influence and are influenced by economic and social development, climate change, natural disasters, and conflicts. In order to ensure sustainable development, it is important to fully understand the interactions between these factors.

9. Background documents

[2013 Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development;](#)
[Midterm Review of the Asian and Pacific Declaration on Population and Development;](#)
[2020 Report of the Committee on Social Development on its sixth session, containing the Asia-Pacific indicator framework;](#)
[Summary report prepared in follow-up to the Midterm Review of the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development in 2018;](#) and
[2021 ESCAP Population Data Sheet.](#)

Additional information is available on the UN ESCAP dedicated [website](#)