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Theme topic, "A common agenda to advance sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific": subregional perspectives

Review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific: disaster risk reduction

Asia-Pacific riskscape at 1.5ºC: subregional pathways for adaptation and resilience

Note by the secretariat

Summary

Risk in the Asia-Pacific region continues to outpace resilience especially in the areas of each subregion that are vulnerable to climate change. In recognition of the fact that every fraction of a degree in warming translates into additional risks, the present document provides an updated regional riskscape showing the extent of disaster risk to peoples and economies if global temperatures rise by 1.5°C or more. In line with resolution 77/1 of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the outcome of the seventh session of the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction, which recommended a scale-up of regional and subregional cooperation strategies that address the convergence of crises, five subregional cooperative actions are suggested to narrow the adaptation gaps: strengthening early warning systems, making water resources more resilient, making new infrastructure resilient, protecting mangroves and improving dryland agriculture crop production.

Given the specific subregional contexts of increasing exposure to tropical cyclones in the Pacific small island developing States and the Sundarbans delta in the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna basin, increased flooding in the lower Mekong River Basin, the Aral Sea catastrophe and sand and dust storm corridors in South-West, North and East Asia, pathways are proposed to accelerate adaptation actions in the subregions.

The Commission may wish to consider the findings, possible solutions and policy recommendations contained in the document and provide guidance to the secretariat in that regard.

* ESCAP/78/L.1/Rev.1.

I. Introduction

1. Over the past two years, the Asia-Pacific region has been reeling from successive disasters amid multiple waves of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. While the region has made significant progress in managing disaster risk in the past two decades, the pandemic, combined with the persistent reality of climate change, is reshaping the Asia-Pacific disaster riskscape (i.e. the extent of disaster risk faced by the region across a spectrum of hazards)[1] and demanding a more systemic approach to risk management.

A. A year of extremes

2. In 2021, Asia and the Pacific witnessed multiple cascading risk scenarios. South Asia was the worst hit; India, Bangladesh and Nepal were severely impacted by floods and cyclones as the Delta variant of the virus responsible for COVID-19 triggered a new peak in infections and deaths. India faced five cyclonic storms in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea: Cyclones Tauktae, Yaas, Gulaab, Shaheen and Jawad. In South-East Asia, Indonesia was the worst affected by disasters, while Thailand, Myanmar and the Philippines saw large-scale flooding triggered by a number of typhoons. In East and North-East Asia, the Henan Province of China and the Volzhsky district and Samara Oblast in the Russian Federation were all affected by severe flooding. Japan was hit by an earthquake in its north-eastern region and by massive landslides triggered by rain in the city of Atami. The Pacific island countries faced significant flooding due to storms and rising sea levels. The recent volcanic eruption in Tonga on 14 January 2022 triggered a tsunami that raced across the vast Pacific Ocean and reached as far as the coasts of Japan and the Americas. Some islands disappeared, and many others were covered by volcanic dust and ash that drove up air, water and food toxicity levels. The country's submarine fibre-optic cable was badly damaged, leaving the population cut off from reliable global communications for weeks. Simultaneously, Tonga was grappling with an outbreak of COVID-19 cases that necessitated a lockdown and further complicated the delivery of critical water and food supplies. The eruption in Tonga is illustrative of a cascading risk scenario where one disaster triggered another, exposing and exacerbating multiple critical vulnerabilities.

3. Disasters related to a weather, climate or water hazard, on average, have killed 115 people and caused $202 million in losses daily. The number of these disasters has increased by a factor of five over a 50-year period, driven by climate change and more extreme weather as well as improved reporting.[2]

[1] *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2019: The Disaster Riskscape across Asia-Pacific – Pathways for Resilience, Inclusion and Empowerment* (United Nations publication, 2019).

[2] World Meteorological Organization (WMO), *Atlas of Mortality and Economic Losses from Weather, Climate and Water Extremes (1970–2019)*, No. 1267 (Geneva, 2021).

B. Code red for humanity: climate extremes are the key drivers of risks

4. Climate change is widespread, rapid and intensifying. In its Sixth Assessment Report, released in August 2021, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change states that in the present time frame, some trends are now irreversible.[3] The Secretary-General underscored the findings of the Report, warning of a code red for humanity. The Report serves to present new scenarios from the Coupled Model Intercomparison Project 6 and uses Shared Socioeconomic Pathways to describe five broad narratives of future socioeconomic development. The temperature increase ranges from a best estimate of below 1.5°C to more than 4°C by 2100.

5. One of the key findings of the report is that the difference between 1.5°C and 2°C of global warming is substantial: every fraction of a degree translates into increased risks. Thus, adapting to the scenarios of 1.5°C of warming and beyond will be critical to building resilience and accelerating progress on the Sustainable Development Goals in the Asia-Pacific region. This view is underscored by the Glasgow Climate Pact, adopted by the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in late 2021.

6. Against this background, the information contained in the present document, presents an updated contour of the region's risks, highlighting key regional and subregional specificities for a temperature increase of 1.5°C and beyond under two different Shared Socioeconomic Pathway scenarios: scenario 2, a moderate middle-of-the-road scenario if business as usual continues; and scenario 3, a worst-case scenario, chosen for analysis owing to the considerable mitigation and adaptation challenges it would entail. The document serves to identify subregional priorities and propose tools, including those emerging from new technologies and available at the Asia-Pacific Risk and Resilience Portal, in support of building disaster resilience and climate change adaptation. Lastly, the document serves to highlight opportunities for subregional cooperation, in particular through the Asia-Pacific Disaster Resilience Network.

II. Asia-Pacific riskscape at 1.5ºC and beyond

7. Using the new Coupled Model Intercomparison Project 6 models, the secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has downscaled global warming trends to the Asia-Pacific region and its subregions. The analysis highlights that while there are overarching risks for the whole region that necessitate region-wide collaboration, there are also subregional specificities that are best addressed through subregional cooperation.

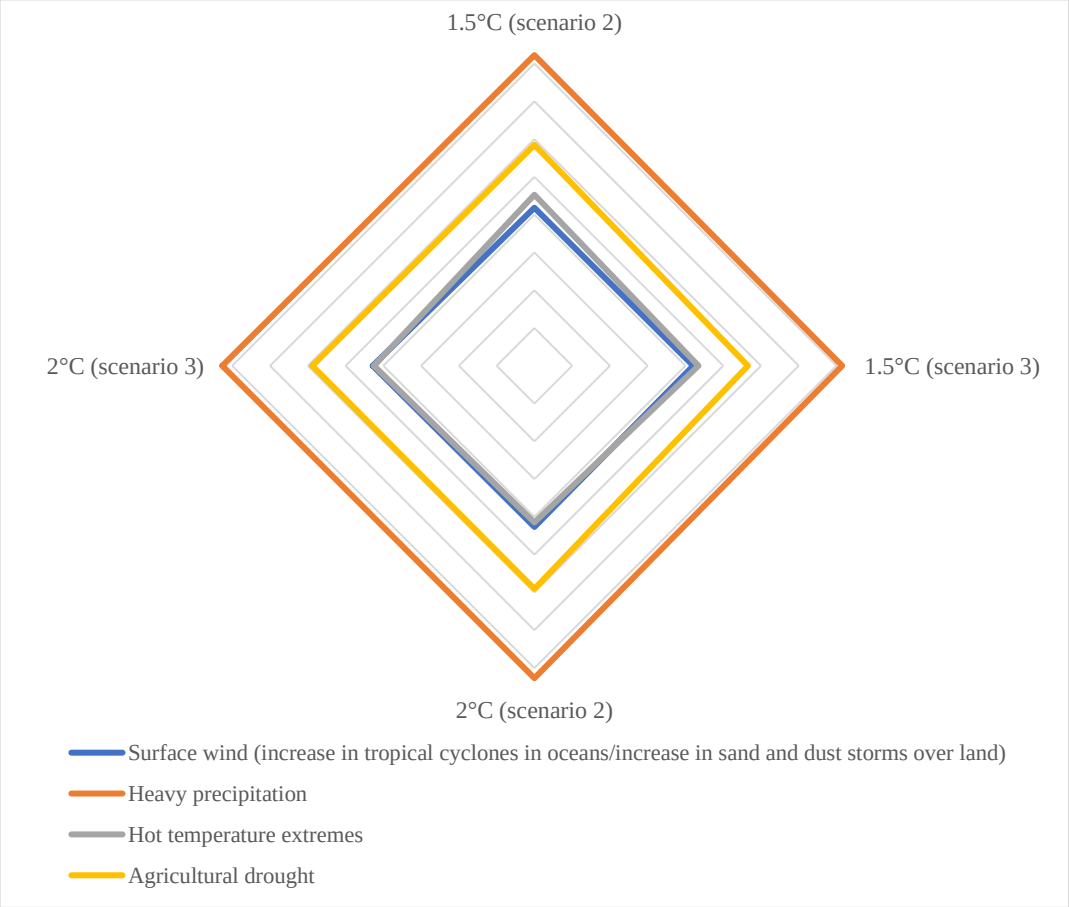
8. Figure I shows a comparison of the differential impacts of four climate-related weather extremes, namely surface wind (which can lead to more frequent and intense tropical cyclones in oceans and more frequent and intense sand and dust storms over land), heavy precipitation over land, hot temperature extremes over land, and agriculture/ecological drought, under a 1.5ºC and 2ºC temperature increase for two socioeconomic scenarios, namely scenario 2 (middle of the road) and scenario 3 (rocky road with considerable challenges for both adaptation and mitigation). The results of the analysis show that under all scenarios, compared to global averages, the region will be most

[3] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis* (Cambridge, England, Cambridge University Press, 2021).

impacted by heavy precipitation, followed by agricultural drought, hot temperatures/heatwaves and warming winds with intensifying tropical cyclones. While heavy precipitation will have the greatest impact in all scenarios, agricultural drought will be slightly higher under scenario 3 with 2ºC warming, while both surface winds and hot temperature extremes are slightly higher under scenario 2 with 1.5ºC warming. These trends are also mirrored in the latest climate change research in the region.[4]

Figure I

Differential impacts of climate hazards in Asia and the Pacific under Shared Socioeconomic Pathway scenarios 2 and 3 with global warming of 1.5ºC and 2ºC



Source: Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) calculations based on data from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Working Group I Interactive Atlas. Available at https://interactive-atlas.ipcc.ch/ (accessed on 11 February 2022).

Notes: Measurement units of weather extremes: intensity of surface wind/tropical cyclones (metres/second), heavy precipitation (mm), hot temperature extremes over land (days with temperature above 35ºC), agricultural/ecological drought (number of dry days). Results are based on the standard deviation of the regional maximum unit from the global mean.

[4] Qing-Yuan Wu and others, "Asian summer monsoon responses to the change of land-sea thermodynamic contrast in a warming climate: CMIP6 projections", *Advances in Climate Change Research*, No. 13 (2022), pp. 205–217. Available at www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1674927822000077.

9. The regional analysis, however, masks subregional specificities, which are important when considering population and livelihood resilience. Compared to other subregions, for example, the Pacific is disproportionately impacted by high surface winds under both scenarios with either 1.5ºC or 2ºC warming. These can lead to much more frequent and more intense tropical cyclones in the Pacific compared to any other subregion.

10. Furthermore, each subregion will have its own variation of risks to which it will have to adapt in the future under both scenarios with either 1.5ºC or 2ºC warming. Figure II shows the trends in each subregion described below.

11. In East and North-East Asia, under a moderate scenario 2 with 1.5ºC warming, heavy precipitation followed by agricultural drought will be the key drivers of risks, but if the subregion moves to a worst-case scenario (scenario 3) with either 1.5ºC or 2ºC warming, it will be more impacted by high surface winds that bring more frequent and intense tropical cyclones. The North and Central Asia subregion will face increasing surface wind over land with potentially more frequent and intense sand and dust storms. The subregion also remains highly impacted by agricultural drought and extreme heat for all climate scenarios. As noted above, the Pacific subregion will be disproportionately impacted by surface winds over oceans that increase the frequency and intensity of tropical cyclones, especially if the Pacific moves to either scenario 3 with 1.5ºC warming or to scenarios 2 or 3 with 2ºC warming. In South-East Asia, a wetter climate emerges at 1.5ºC of warming scenario and will continue at 2ºC, with potential increases in flooding risks in the Mekong River Basin.[5] The subregion will also be impacted by more frequent tropical cyclones, especially under a moderate scenario 2 with 2ºC warming. Lastly, the South and South-West Asia subregion will be impacted by all climate extremes. For all scenarios, it will simultaneously be impacted by extremes in precipitation and dry days, which could potentially lead to more flooding and increases in drought intensity, which in turn could potentially increase cascading disasters in one of the most vulnerable geographical areas of the world: the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna basin.[6] In addition, under scenario 3 with 1.5ºC warming and beyond, the subregion will also be impacted by more frequent tropical cyclones together with hot temperature extremes. These subregional trends are also reflected in the most current research on climate change scenarios.[7]

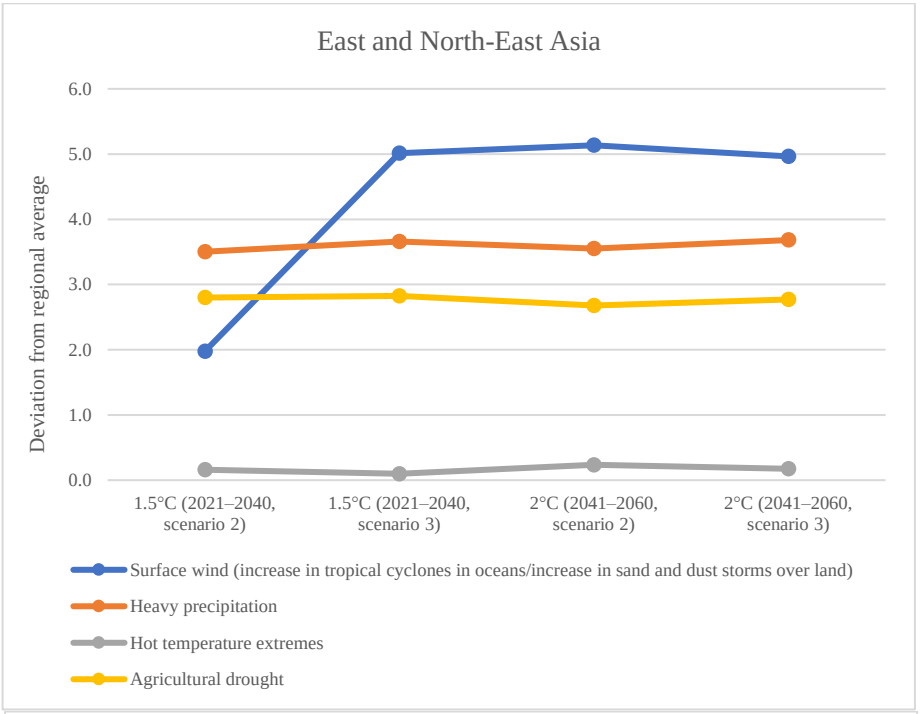
[5] World Wildlife Fund, “Greater Mekong”. Available at https://greatermekong.panda.org/challenges_in_the_greater_mekong/climate_change_in_the_greater_mekong/ (accessed on 7 February 2022).

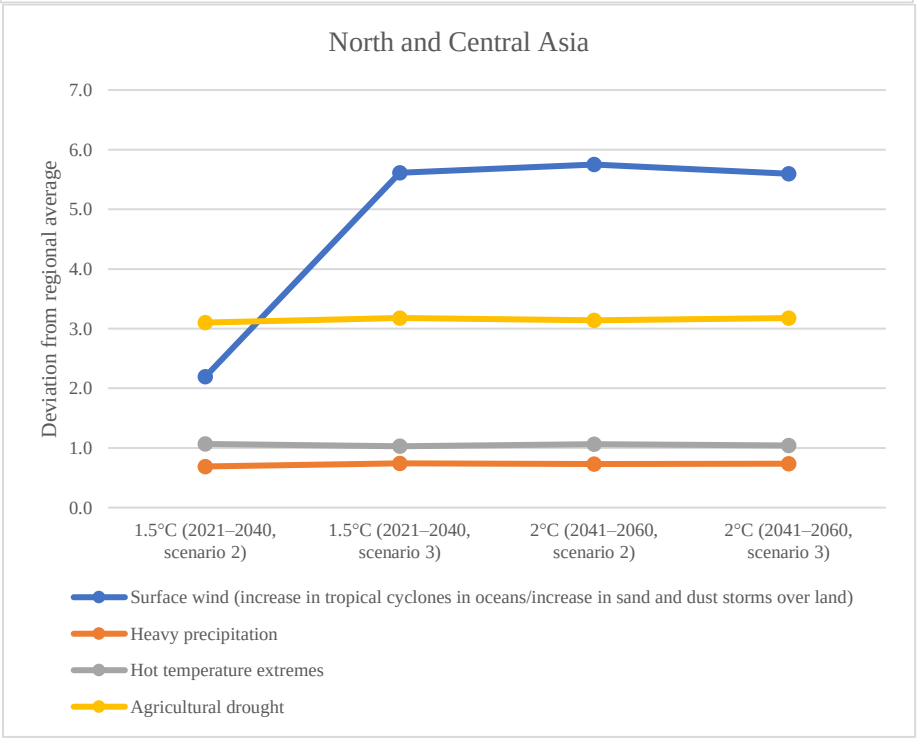
[6] P F Uhe and others, “Enhanced flood risk with 1.5ºC global warning in the Ganges-Bhramhaputra-Meghna basin”, *Environmental Research Letters*, vol. 14, No. 7, 16 July 2019. Available at https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/ab10ee.

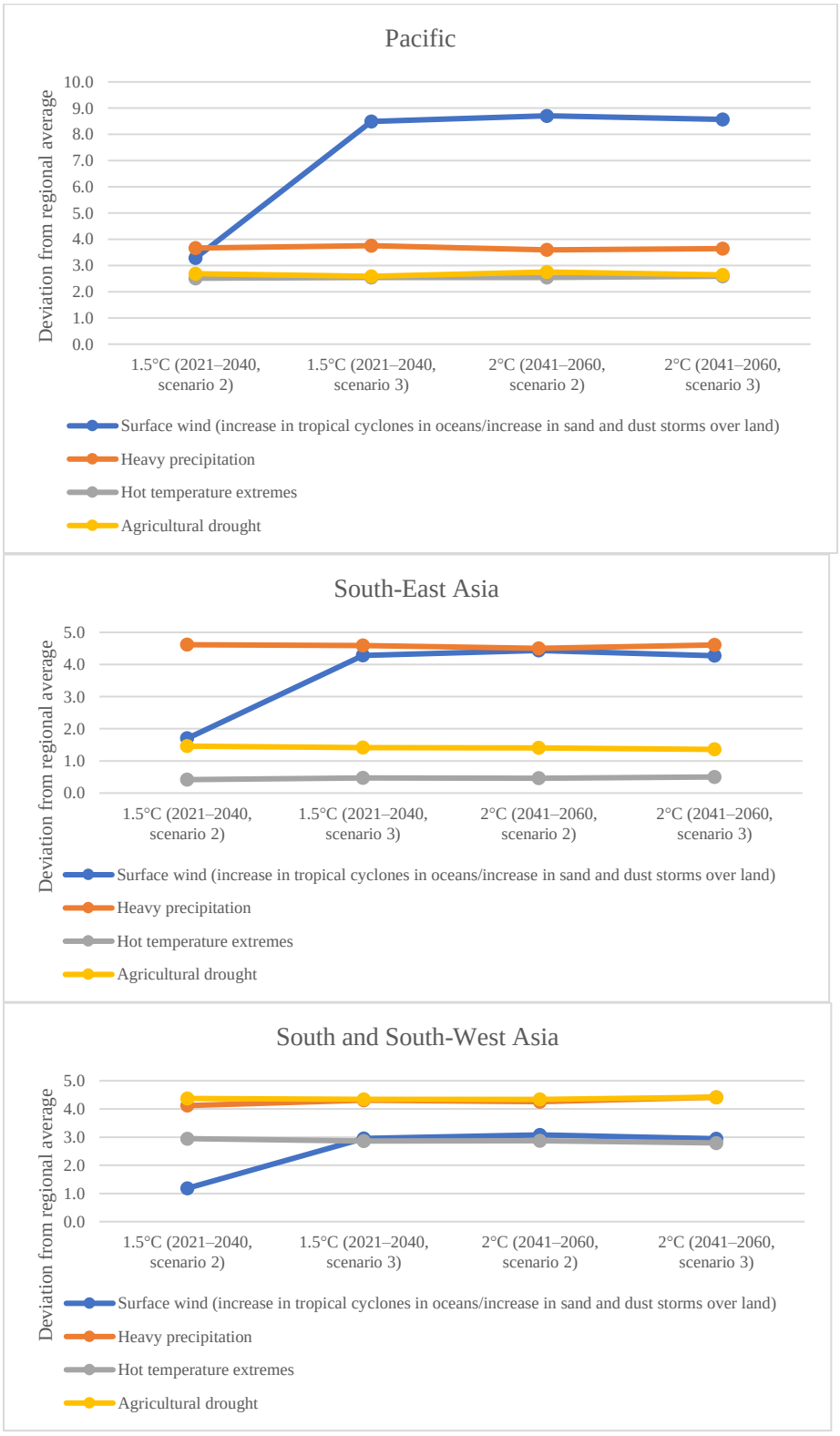
[7] Yang Liu and others, “Changes in climate extremes in Central Asia under 1.5 and 2ºC global warming and their impacts on agricultural productions”, *Atmosphere*, vol. 11 (2020), No. 10, p. 1,076; and Greenpeace East Asia, “5 ways the climate crisis will change Asia”, 18 August 2021.

Figure II

Relative intensity of weather extremes in Asia-Pacific subregions under Shared Socioeconomic Pathway scenarios 2 and 3 with global warming of 1.5ºC and 2ºC







Source: ESCAP calculations based on data from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Working Group I Interactive Atlas (see figure I).

Notes: Measurement units of weather extremes: intensity of surface wind/tropical cyclones (metres/second), heavy precipitation (mm), hot temperature extremes over land (days with temperature above 35ºC), agricultural/ecological drought (number of dry days). Results are based on the standard deviation of the subregional maximum unit from the regional mean.

12. The increasing intensity of climate extremes will create new ecological niches for vector-borne and other diseases, increasing the variability in risks such as length of transmission and geographical area. Climate-related hazards, such as tropical cyclones, floods, droughts and extreme heat, can themselves create outbreaks of diseases, such as malaria and dengue (due to floods and tropical cyclones), malnutrition (due to droughts), heat syncope and heatstroke (due to extreme heat) and respiratory issues (due to sand and dust storms). The specific combinations of risks from the intersection of climate-related biological and natural hazards, which will increase under 1.5ºC and 2ºC climate change scenarios for each subregion, are noted in the *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2021* (see table 1).

Table 1
Risks from the intersection of climate-related biological and natural hazards increasing under 1.5ºC and 2ºC climate change scenarios

Subregion	*Climate extreme spotlight*	*Related biological and health risks*
East and North-East Asia	Drought and land desertification	Leptospirosis, dengue, malaria, tick-borne encephalitis and other vector-borne diseases, as well as infectious gastroenteritis and injuries
		Malnutrition and undernutrition
North and Central Asia	Drought and hot temperature extremes/sand and dust storms	Malnutrition, undernutrition, heat syncope, heatstroke, excess deaths from heatwaves, and respiratory diseases
Pacific	Tropical cyclones	Leptospirosis, dengue, malaria, tick-borne encephalitis and other vector-borne diseases, as well as infectious gastroenteritis and injuries
South-East Asia	Tropical cyclones and heavy precipitation	Leptospirosis, dengue, malaria, tick-borne encephalitis and other vector-borne diseases, as well as infectious gastroenteritis and injuries
South and South-West Asia	Heavy precipitation and drought	Leptospirosis, dengue, malaria, tick-borne encephalitis and other vector-borne diseases, as well as infectious gastroenteritis, malnutrition and undernutrition
	Hot temperature extremes and tropical cyclones	Heat syncope, heatstroke, excess deaths from heatwaves, leptospirosis, dengue, malaria, tick-borne encephalitis and other vector-borne diseases

Source: Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2021: Resilience in a Riskier World – Managing Systemic Risks from Biological and Other Natural Hazards (United Nations publication, 2021).

13. While these specific subregional risks will mean that each subregion must determine its own set of customized adaptation priorities to respond, the risks are also transboundary in nature and thus require subregional cooperation efforts and approaches for building resilience. Table 2 provides a few subregional spotlights of transboundary risks and their impacts under the 1.5ºC climate scenarios.

Table 2
Transboundary risks and disasters and their subregional impacts under Shared Socioeconomic Pathway scenarios 2 and 3 with 1.5ºC warming

Subregion in spotlight	*Transboundary risk*	*Impacts on population, livelihoods and economies*
East and North-East Asia	Drought and desertification under scenario 2 with 1.5ºC warming	Approximately 58 per cent of agricultural production (quantity) in Mongolia, 19 per cent in the Russian Federation and 18 per cent in China will be exposed to intensifying desertification risk.
North and Central Asia	Aridity of Aral Sea Basin under scenario 2 with 1.5ºC warming	Increasing dry days can affect hydropower plant capacity; in Kazakhstan, for example, it will affect almost 4 per cent of hydropower plants in the next 20 years.
Pacific	Tropical cyclones under scenario 3 with 1.5ºC warming	The increase in surface wind/tropical cyclones will be felt by populations in the Pacific small island developing States; countries may face increasing annual wind speed as follows:
		French Polynesia (high percentage of increase); American Samoa, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu (moderate percentage); Fiji and New Caledonia (low percentage).
South-East Asia	Flooding and tropical cyclones in lower Mekong under scenario 2 with 1.5ºC warming	Lower Mekong is clearly emerging as wetter (floods) and with impacts from increasing tropical cyclones.
South and South-West Asia	Widespread aridity under scenario 2 with 1.5ºC warming	Population exposure to increase in extreme heat and drought is estimated as follows: Islamic Republic of Iran (77.2 per cent of total population), followed by Afghanistan (61.3 per cent), Pakistan (59.9 per cent), India (2.0 per cent) and Turkey (1.2 per cent).
	Multiple hazards in Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna basin under scenario 2 with 1.5ºC warming	Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna basin will experience the increasing intensity of risk; the north-western (including coastal) parts of India and south-eastern parts of Pakistan will emerge as risk hotspots owing to cyclones arising from the Arabian Sea.

Source: ESCAP calculations based on data from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Working Group I Interactive Atlas (see figure I).

III. Adapting to the cascading challenges of the disaster-climate-health nexus posed by warming of 1.5°C and beyond

14. The above section provides an overview of the new risks at the subregional level stemming from global warming of 1.5°C and beyond. Given that the increasing extremes under a scenario of 1.5°C warming are already being felt by the Asia-Pacific region, it is important to increase investments in key adaptation measures while also implementing mitigation targets.

15. The way forward for adaptation has emerged from the Glasgow Climate Pact, adopted at the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties, which set new global targets for adaptation funding. The current aspiration is a 50:50 balance between mitigation and adaption, with a greater share of the adaption funding going to the most vulnerable countries. Current adaptation funding shares remain at 20 to 25 per cent across all financing sources.[8]

16. In addition, the Glasgow Climate Pact provides some direction for adaptation and advancing nature-based solutions. In particular, the Coalition for Disaster-Resilient Infrastructure launched the Infrastructure for Resilient Island States initiative aimed at addressing the multifaceted issues related to infrastructure systems in small island developing States. A two-year programme on the global goal on adaptation was also launched at the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties.

17. The secretariat is supporting the members and associate members of the Commission through analytical work in building regional and subregional resilience to climate change by focusing on the key adaptation priorities of the Glasgow Climate Pact and the Global Commission on Adaptation,[9] namely strengthening early warning systems, making water resources more resilient, making new infrastructure resilient, protecting mangroves and improving dryland agriculture crop production. These five measures will provide the highest cost-benefit ratio in terms of building resilience to tropical cyclones, heavy precipitation, hot temperature extremes and agricultural drought. According to the *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2021*, the full cost of these adaptation measures in the region is estimated at $202 billion, with an additional $68 million to adapt to the climate-related biological hazards. The highest adaptation costs will be in East and North-East Asia, followed by the Pacific, South and South-West Asia, South-East Asia, and North and Central Asia.[10]

18. In addition, in 2021, the secretariat launched the Asia-Pacific Risk and Resilience Portal[11] to operationalize the Asia-Pacific Disaster Resilience Network. The Portal is an easy-to-use and comprehensive repository of climate change impacts on the Asia-Pacific region, its subregions and its countries. Noting the specificities of the weather extremes in each subregion, the Portal

[8] Additional information is available at https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-glasgow-climate-pact/cop26-outcomes-finance-for-climate-adaptation#eq-2.

[9] Additional information is available at https://gca.org/about-us/the-global-commission-on-adaptation/.)

[10] *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2021: Resilience in a Riskier World – Managing Systemic Risks from Biological and Other Natural Hazards* (United Nations publication, 2021).

[11] Available at https://rrp.unescap.org/.

has developed an adaptation priority matrix for each subregion and country based on the new climate scenarios. For example, in the Pacific subregion, an adaptation measure like protecting mangroves is imperative, because mangroves not only provide physical protection from tropical cyclones but are also a key ecological livelihood system for coastal populations. Similarly, in South and South-West Asia, better-integrated early warning systems in the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna basin, for instance, can support vulnerable populations in building resilience to floods, droughts and related biological hazards while protecting mangroves and improving water resource management. Likewise, advancing integrated early warning systems for floods and tropical cyclones will support populations in the lower Mekong River Basin.

IV. Subregional initiatives to adapt to cascading risks

19. Adaptation and resilience pathways are key to climate actions that allow the Asia-Pacific region to be prepared for the crisis. As risk continues to outpace resilience, especially in the vulnerable parts of each subregion, the secretariat is working on subregional actions to narrow down the adaptation gaps in the context of increasing exposure to (a) tropical cyclones in the Pacific small island developing States, (b) floods in the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna basin and lower Mekong River Basin, (c) drought and slow onset disasters in South-East Asia, (d) the Aral Sea catastrophe and (e) risk corridors of drought, desertification, land degradation and sand and dust storms in South-West, North and East Asia. The ESCAP secretariat's ongoing initiative with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) secretariat on the *ASEAN Regional Plan of Action for Adaptation to Drought 2021–2025* can be replicated in multi-hazard risk hotspots in other subregions.

20. As there are risk hotspots with distinct disaster, climate and health interfaces[12] at play in some vulnerable subregions, the ESCAP secretariat is also scaling up regional and subregional cooperation strategies that integrate disasters, including climate-related disasters, and associated health perspectives, to complement national efforts in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In this regard, as recommended by the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction at its seventh session, the secretariat, in partnership with key stakeholders, is organizing consultations with member States and expert meetings to shape appropriate policy tools and guidance that will support the implementation of the health aspects of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, including by taking note of the Bangkok Principles for the implementation of the health aspects of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and other relevant regional and subregional frameworks and initiatives.

21. After the volcanic eruption in the Pacific Ocean on 15 January 2022 affecting Pacific small island developing States, the secretariat immediately contacted members of the Regional Space Applications Programme for Sustainable Development. More than 20 gigabytes of high-resolution satellite imagery and 10 analytical reports assessing damage were shared by the United Nations satellite centre, a cooperating partner of ESCAP.

22. Underlying its work across all subregions, in implementation of the Asia-Pacific Plan of Action on Space Applications for Sustainable Development (2018–2030), the secretariat has been working with member

[12] *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2021*.

States to increase the contributions of digital innovations and advanced technologies in space applications, such as Earth observation, global navigation systems, and space-based services, to data-driven and evidence-based policymaking for adaptation.

23. Furthermore, the Asia-Pacific Risk and Resilience Portal leverages geospatial and multisectoral data to customize cost and adaptation priorities for subregions and countries. This work is in response to the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction, which, at its seventh session, in highlighting the importance of the analytical findings of the *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2021*, requested the secretariat to further deepen its analytical research and disseminate the findings through the Portal.

24. A key result of increasing temperatures under scenarios 2 and 3 with 1.5ºC warming is also an increase in sand and dust storms. The Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management, as a regional institute of ESCAP and a member of the United Nations Coalition on Combating Sand and Dust Storms, cooperates with other Coalition partners and member States to promote North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation to reduce the risk and negative socioeconomic impacts of sand and dust storms, as mandated in General Assembly and Commission resolutions. In this regard, the Centre, in consultation with partners and member States, is developing a regional plan of action on sand and dust storms.

25. The ESCAP secretariat has expanded its partnerships. It signed a memorandum of understanding with the secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme and the secretariat of the Pacific Community. These three partners, together with WMO and others, prepared two reports on the state of the climate, focused on Asia and the South-West Pacific, respectively. Furthermore, the secretariat's conclusion of a memorandum of understanding with the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, the Economic Cooperation Organization, the Central Asia Centre for Emergency Situations and Disaster Risk Reduction and the Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System for Africa and Asia will help the secretariat to expand and deepen its subregional activities. The partnerships that the secretariat has entered into with academic institutions, such as the Asian Institute of Technology, the Association of Pacific Rim Universities and Keio University will help the secretariat to narrow the gaps between research and operational practices related to adaptation and resilience.

V. Issues for consideration by the Commission

26. Considering the emerging risks from the disaster-health-climate nexus under both Shared Socioeconomic Pathway scenarios 2 and 3 with either 1.5ºC or 2ºC warming, and drawing from the key solutions discussed in section IV, the secretariat will respond to imminent and cross-cutting challenges by deepening regional cooperation and through the adoption of subregional approaches, including in the context of the Asia-Pacific Disaster Resilience Network.

27. The Commission may wish to provide guidance to the secretariat on its future work, including the priority areas and partnerships listed in the present document, with a view to strengthening regional and subregional cooperation in the area of disaster risk reduction.