Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Seventh Asian and Pacific Population Conference

Bangkok and online, 15–17 November 2023

Items 2 and 3 of the provisional agenda

Review of progress made towards the implementation of the
Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and
Development, as well as of the Programme of Action of the
International Conference on Population and Development and the
key actions for its further implementation in Asia and the Pacific

Thematic discussion on achievements, challenges, gaps and
emerging issues in the implementation of the Asian and Pacific
Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development, as well
as of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on
Population and Development and the key actions for its further
implementation in Asia and the Pacific

Review of progress made towards the implementation of the
Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development, as well as of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the key actions for its further implementation in Asia and the Pacific

Note by the secretariat

Summary

Asia and the Pacific has been undergoing momentous demographic changes, from decreasing fertility and mortality rates to increasing migration, which are resulting in older and more urban populations. As the region is home to 60 per cent of the world’s people, its population dynamics and their linkages to sustainable development crucially affect global trends.

To provide region-specific guidance on population and development matters, in 2013 the members and associate members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific adopted the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development, which was drafted to be closely aligned with the 1994 Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

In 2020, at its sixth session, the Committee on Social Development endorsed the Asia-Pacific Indicator Framework for Voluntary Monitoring of Progress towards the Implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and of the Commitments Contained in the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development.
Development, which was developed on the basis of relevant Sustainable Development Goal indicators. In the present document, the secretariat uses the Framework, where applicable, together with responses to a voluntary member State survey and the latest publicly available data, to provide an overview of the status of implementation of the Ministerial Declaration.

The analysis of the secretariat shows that the Asia-Pacific region has made considerable progress in terms of socioeconomic development. Nonetheless, countries are facing new and ongoing challenges that have been exacerbated by climate change, disasters, conflicts, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and digital transformations. These challenges must be addressed through consistent, forward-looking policies that create more inclusive, equitable and just societies.

The Seventh Asian and Pacific Population Conference may wish to take note of the findings and recommendations contained in the present document and provide further guidance to the secretariat for accelerating the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration and the Programme of Action in Asia and the Pacific.

I. Introduction

1. Population and development considerations are of paramount importance in Asia and the Pacific. The region is home to 4.7 billion people, some 60 per cent of the world’s population (see figure I). What happens in the region has global effects. Furthermore, decreasing fertility and mortality rates and increasing migration are resulting in older and more urban populations. Although at the regional level the population continues to grow and there is much diversity, growth rates have been declining for decades.

Figure I
Population size by Asia-Pacific subregion and annual growth rate for Asia and the Pacific, 1950–2050

2. In recent decades, countries in Asia and the Pacific have made considerable progress in socioeconomic development. Nonetheless, they are facing new and ongoing challenges, including shrinking labour forces, ageing populations, the impacts of climate change and increased internal and international migration. Many people face persistent socioeconomic inequalities (including with regard to gender), human rights violations and ageism. Inequalities and vulnerabilities have been exacerbated by climate change, disasters, conflicts, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and digital transformations.

3. Pursuant to its resolution 74 (XXIII), by which it decided to establish the Asian Population Conference as a statutory body to be convened every 10 years, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, will hold the Seventh Asian and Pacific Population Conference from 15 to 17 November 2023. The Conference will review the status of implementation of the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development in the region. It will focus on the intersecting linkages and considerations between population and sustainable development, both now and in the future.

A. Follow-up to and review of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development

4. The Programme of Action, which was adopted in 1994, is the global guiding document on population and development. It is people-centred, rights-based and forward-looking on many issues, including those concerning women’s empowerment and gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. In 2010, the General Assembly, in its resolution 65/234, decided to extend the Programme of Action and the key actions for its further implementation beyond 2014.

5. The Commission on Population and Development has regularly reviewed and appraised the implementation of the Programme of Action. In 2022, it decided that the special theme of its fifty-seventh session, in 2024, would be “Assessing the status of implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and its contribution to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development during the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”.

B. Seventh Asian and Pacific Population Conference

6. The Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development was adopted in 2013, at the Sixth Asian and Pacific Population Conference. In 2020, at its sixth session, the Committee on Social Development endorsed the Asia-Pacific Indicator Framework for Voluntary Monitoring of Progress towards the Implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and of the Commitments Contained in the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development. The Framework, which covers all 11 Ministerial Declaration priority actions, comprises 76 indicators, including 67 Sustainable Development Goal indicators. The other indicators were drawn from internationally agreed frameworks. Throughout the present

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1 ESCAP/CSD/2020/3, annex IV.
document, when appropriate and when not otherwise noted, data are drawn from the Global Sustainable Development Goals Indicators Database² and other international sources.³

7. In order to assess progress made in implementing the Ministerial Declaration and the Programme of Action in Asia and the Pacific, a voluntary survey was sent to all ESCAP members and associate members. As at the time of writing, over half had completed the survey. Information from the survey responses, where applicable and space permitting, has been integrated into the present document.⁴

8. The objectives of the Seventh Asian and Pacific Population Conference are: to review progress made in the context of population and development; to identify related good practices, lessons learned, priority actions and emerging trends; to recognize the many achievements in population and development over the years and particularly since the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration in 2013; to look ahead and identify future challenges and opportunities; and to prepare a regional input to the global review of the Programme of Action at the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on Population and Development.

II. Revisiting the priority actions set out in the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development

A. Poverty eradication and employment

9. Despite declines in poverty across the region (see figure II), disparities continue and, in many cases, have been exacerbated. In some countries, poverty rates have stagnated or increased.

⁴ Additional information on the survey and stakeholder consultations is available at www.unescap.org/events/2023/seventh-asian-and-pacific-population-conference. For an analysis of the responses to the survey, see ESCAP/APPC(7)/INF/2 (English only).
Figure II
Population, in percentage, living in poverty at less than $3.20 a day at 2011 purchasing power parity, average 2000–2010 and latest data (post-2015)

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10. At the subnational level, differentials in poverty are often stark. This includes urban-rural dynamics and disparities, with rural poverty generally outstripping urban poverty.

11. Productive and decent work for all, in particular for women, remains a challenge and affects poverty. Women do most of the unpaid domestic and care work and are more susceptible than men to job loss and loss of access to government financial support.
12. However, Governments have been promoting the equal participation of women in the labour market. For instance, the Accelerator #5 platform in Armenia promotes women’s entrepreneurship and employment in areas with high economic potential, including through the provision of financial support to women who wish to obtain qualifications or training. In Samoa, a five-year project on women’s entrepreneurship was launched in 2019 to reduce poverty, enhance social well-being and promote sustainable economic growth.5

13. Youth unemployment in all subregions is much higher than unemployment among those aged 25 years or older. Youth unemployment among females is distinctly higher than among males in all subregions except East and North-East Asia. In the Pacific and in South and South-West Asia, female youth unemployment is between 20 and 25 per cent.6 That said, there are good practices from the region on providing employment opportunities for young people. For example, through village-level self-help groups in Viet Nam, young graduates are being recruited to support poverty reduction strategies. In the Russian Federation, there is a programme to monitor the employment of recent graduates to promote youth employment until 2030.7

14. Social protection is fundamental to insulate people from poverty over the life course. However, coverage of social protection measures is uneven across the region. Between 2018 and 2020, there was 100 per cent coverage by at least one social protection benefit in some countries, including Australia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, New Zealand and Singapore. Elsewhere, significant improvements have occurred. In Georgia, the percentage covered by at least one social protection benefit rose from 28.6 to 97.1 per cent between 2016 and 2020. In other countries, rates were very low, at below 10 per cent.

15. The COVID-19 pandemic has had severe negative impacts on employment and, thus, poverty. Migrants in particular have faced heavy economic burdens. Not only have migrants been disproportionally employed in front-line jobs in the health, care and service sectors, they have also been infrequently included in social security provisions. Border closures and lockdowns have left many unable to work and return home. Moreover, migrants have often faced increased risks of exploitation and abuse.

16. Regarding future employment, it is notable that the size of the region’s working-age population, in other words those between 15 and 64 years of age, has quadrupled, from 869 million in 1950 to 3.2 billion in 2023, and now represents 67.3 per cent of the region’s total population. The size of the working-age population is projected to peak at 3.3 billion in the mid-2030s. Between 2023 and 2050, the size of the working-age population is projected to shrink in 20 countries and areas. Unless appropriate labour and social policies are enacted and implemented, significant economic impacts are inevitable.

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5 Responses to the survey.
6 International Labour Organization (ILO), ILOSTAT. Available at https://ilostat.ilo.org/ (accessed on 20 August 2023).
7 Responses to the survey.
B. Health

17. The Asia-Pacific region has experienced many positive health developments. Life expectancy at birth has increased by about 30 years, from 42.9 years in 1950 to 74.9 years in 2023. Furthermore, over the past decade, and COVID-19 notwithstanding, the core measures of mortality have continually improved.

18. Nevertheless, the gap between the countries and areas with the highest and lowest life expectancies at birth is almost as great as the gap at the global level. In 2023, the projected life expectancy at birth in Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea and Singapore, as well as in French Polynesia, Hong Kong, China, and Macao, China, was 83 years or older. In contrast, the projected life expectancy at birth was below 73.4 years, which is also the global average, in 32 Asia-Pacific countries and areas. While overall life expectancy is improving, chronic diseases like heart disease and type 2 diabetes, which require long-term health and social care, continue to replace infectious diseases as the primary cause of ill-health, disability and death. Importantly, evidence has shown that these chronic diseases are both preventable and reversible through dietary and lifestyle changes.

19. Notable improvements have occurred in infant and child mortality. The infant mortality rate is under 5 infant deaths per 1,000 births in Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation and Singapore, as well as in Hong Kong, China, and Macao, China. Nevertheless, rates are above 30 infant deaths per 1,000 births in Afghanistan, Kiribati, Myanmar, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea and Turkmenistan.

20. An epidemiological transition – characterized by early deaths being replaced by late deaths and communicable diseases being replaced by non-communicable diseases as the leading cause of death – is occurring across the region. For instance, in South-East Asia, tuberculosis accounted for 6.0 per cent of total deaths in 2000 but by 2019 that figure was down to 3.6 per cent. Meanwhile, ischemic heart disease and stroke together accounted for 23 per cent of deaths in 2000; yet, by 2019, that figure was over 30 per cent. Among older people, non-communicable diseases have become the leading cause of death globally and in the Asia-Pacific region, while the number of disability-adjusted life years lost to Alzheimer’s disease and type 2 diabetes have risen dramatically across the region and globally.

21. Significant subregional differences in excess deaths attributable to COVID-19 as a percentage of total deaths have been recorded, with some countries in North and Central Asia being hit particularly hard. A major challenge, however, is how to accurately measure excess mortality and how to distinguish COVID-19 as the cause of death, especially among those who have already been diagnosed with a chronic disease. Beyond mortality, many people still suffer from long COVID, and the related mental health costs associated with loneliness, stress and anxiety have been high.

22. Regarding universal health coverage, numerous (mainly more-developed) countries have achieved over 75 per cent coverage on average. Other countries remain far from achieving the 100 per cent coverage target by 2030, with many having coverage rates below 50 per cent.

23. Since 2013, China has made improving health a top priority. In the Healthy China 2030 strategy, introduced in 2016, people’s health was stressed as a developmental priority. In 2019, the Healthy China Initiative 2019–2030 was promulgated as a plan for implementing Healthy China 2030.
By 2020, a basic medical and health-care system had been established, covering both urban and rural residents, with ever-increasing levels of health literacy, an improved and efficient health service system and basic sports and fitness services for all.8

24. Increases in long-term chronic illnesses place greater burdens on health-care systems. These increases, coupled with higher absolute and relative numbers of older people and the associated growth in long-term and social care needs, mean that sustainable health financing will become an ever-greater regional challenge. The development of telehealth systems can offset certain costs and increase access. However, the ongoing digital divide must not hinder access, nor compromise quality.

25. A central aim of universal health coverage is to mitigate the financial hardship of seeking care, defined by the level of out-of-pocket expenditure. Nevertheless, in many countries, this represents a large proportion of the total health expenditure (see figure III).

Figure III
Out-of-pocket and public health expenditures, selected countries in Asia and the Pacific, 2020


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8 Ibid.
26. In recent decades, a significant driver of improved health across the region has been the continued development and rolling out of comprehensive vaccine programmes. However, while full immunization coverage among 1-year-olds has risen sharply in many countries, coverage remains very uneven. For example, in 17 Asia-Pacific countries the target is to ensure that at least 95 per cent of the population has access to the vaccination against measles, but such access is at or below 50 per cent in 9 countries, leaving many vulnerable.

C. Sexual and reproductive health, services and rights

27. Continued declines in total fertility rates have occurred across the region. In some countries, rates have fallen well below 1 child per woman and are among the world’s lowest. More broadly, rates are well below 2 children per woman both in historically low-fertility countries like Japan and Singapore and in middle-income countries like Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Thailand, Türkiye and Viet Nam. Elsewhere, total fertility rates remain high. In Afghanistan, the rate for 2023 is projected to be 4.4 children per woman, among the world’s highest. Some countries have seen rapid declines: for example, in Timor-Leste, the rate in 2000 was around 6 children per woman; now, the figure is 3 children per woman.

28. Significant subnational disparities in fertility rates exist. India and China, for example, have much lower fertility rates in larger cities than in rural areas. Moreover, in several countries, women in the poorest wealth quintile have significantly higher fertility rates than women in the richest quintile.

29. Much progress has been achieved in reducing the rate of births among adolescent mothers. However, many countries are still far from achieving their 2030 target, and wide variation between countries remain.

30. Generally, falling fertility rates are viewed positively as an indicator of increasing reproductive autonomy. Nonetheless, they can also cause concern at both the individual and societal levels. In many low-fertility societies, gaps exist between reproductive aspirations and actual fertility. These gaps may represent an inability to meet individual reproductive goals, which family planning policies and other interventions may help to bridge. Elsewhere, low fertility rates worry Governments because they contribute to a stagnation and decline in population size. Consequently, in recent years, more than 10 Governments in the region have tried to implement explicit pronatalist policies to stimulate fertility.

31. Increased access to reliable family planning systems and to the knowledge and understanding needed to maximize their potential has led to declines in both fertility and maternal mortality across the region. Nevertheless, wide variations in contraceptive prevalence rates remain. While less than 30 per cent of married or in-union women aged 15–49 years in Afghanistan, Maldives, Timor-Leste, Tonga and Tuvalu use some form of contraceptive (latest data), significant progress is being made, especially through multisectoral cooperation. Generally, the unmet need for contraception is particularly high among unmarried adolescents. Furthermore,


many women face numerous challenges when using traditional methods in countries with restrictive laws, which may, in turn, result in unplanned or unintended pregnancies. Going forward, Governments and other stakeholders need to increase the opportunities for and capacity of women to make informed decisions about their own sexual and reproductive health.

32. The Government of Cambodia has established an e-learning platform for sexual and reproductive health professionals under the National Maternal and Child Health Centre of the Ministry of Health, in partnership with the midwives’ professional association and other health partners. By the end of 2022, 1,759 health-care professionals (1,670 of whom were females) had used the e-learning platform to learn about sexual and reproductive health and 2,923 health-care professionals (2,776 of whom were females) had signed up to do so. In 2022, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia, with support from UNFPA, carried out training sessions for teachers to improve reproductive health education in seven of the country’s provinces.11

33. Different communities and population groups have specific needs concerning access to reproductive and sexual health services. Migrant women frequently face barriers, and persons with disabilities, older persons, unmarried adolescents and ethnic minorities are often underserved. In 2021, the Ministry of Health of Viet Nam approved a national programme on the provision of reproductive and sexual health services for adolescents and other young people from ethnic minorities, as well as persons with disabilities and sexual minority groups.12

34. Importantly, and given the low-fertility rates recorded across the region, there is also increased discussion on improving reproductive technologies to support women in fulfilling their reproductive choices later in life.

35. Data from 2020 suggest that 26 Asia-Pacific countries have already met target 3.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals (by 2030, to reduce the maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births). In Bhutan, Kazakhstan, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Mongolia, the Russian Federation and Solomon Islands, for example, there have been some very rapid declines since 2000. However, the maternal mortality ratio in several countries is still over double the target (see figure IV).

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11 Responses to the survey.
12 Ibid.
Figure IV
Maternal mortality rate (deaths per 100,000 live births), in 2000 and 2020

36. Many countries have made progress in terms of the number of women giving birth in the presence of a skilled birth attendant; others, however, are far from the target. Often, women in urban areas are two to three times more likely to give birth with a skilled birth attendant compared to women in rural areas. In all countries, women with higher levels of education and/or in higher income brackets are more likely to give birth with a skilled birth attendant.

D. Education

37. Education across the region has been transformed over the past 20 years. The percentage of 20–24-year-olds with only a pre-secondary level of education has nearly halved and the share of those with post-secondary qualifications has increased. Gender dynamics vary considerably and are projected to change over time. For example, for five countries with available data in South and South-West Asia, the share of women over 25 years of age who in 2015 were classified as having no education was over 20 percentage points above that of males. Nevertheless, in other countries, the trend is reversing, especially among younger people. In the Republic of Korea, for example, the share of women aged between 25 and 29 years with a bachelor’s, a master’s or a higher-level degree is almost 10 percentage points higher than that of men.

38. Access to education by income level varies considerably both between and within countries. Stratification can also occur according to location (rural or urban) and gender, which can translate into challenges in gaining access to higher-paying jobs or labour force participation for women. There is strong evidence that interlinkages between health and education need greater attention.

39. Schools prepare young people for life through skills and career development. Comprehensive sexuality education can help students to navigate future personal journeys, while climate change education can promote informed decision-making regarding sustainability and the planet’s future.

40. Continuing education and lifelong learning are also critical, especially since many societies are ageing rapidly, but are often overlooked. Trade unions play a vital role in reskilling. Lifelong learning programmes, however, are still at a nascent stage in most Asia-Pacific countries. Moreover, many such programmes are hampered by the digital divide, which affects older persons, women and persons with disabilities in particular.

41. Technical and vocational education and training opportunities continue to be underdeveloped. Leveraging such opportunities, especially those with a green job focus, is a prerequisite for matching labour supply and demand and for supporting inclusive and sustainable development. The national development strategy of Tuvalu includes a focus on secondary education delivering work-related and transferable skills, including entrepreneurial and information and communications technology skills. In Solomon Islands, a new institutional and governance system has been developed to deliver quality and relevant technical and university education, support solid partnerships with the private sector and facilitate entry into the labour market.14

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14 Responses to the survey.
E. Gender equality and women’s empowerment

42. The empowerment of women largely depends on improving their social and economic agency, giving them a voice and improving their human and social capital. However, inequalities exist throughout the life course. Female labour-force participation is below that of males in most Asia-Pacific countries and is falling in many of them, often because of policies that do not enable women to juggle work and family life. As they grow older, women are at a significant disadvantage compared to men because of years of earning and saving less and, relatedly, because they have fewer benefits, including from pensions. COVID-19 has exacerbated many aspects, which, taken collectively, show that gender intersects with health, poverty and employment, often to the disadvantage of women.

43. National time transfer accounts (and time-use surveys) provide evidence that women disproportionately shoulder the unpaid burden of care, which restricts their employment opportunities. More still needs to be done regarding the participation of women in politics and senior management positions. In Asia and the Pacific, only New Zealand has reached the target of 50 per cent of women holding national parliament seats. That figure is below 25 per cent in 35 countries and below 10 per cent in 14 countries with available data. Similarly, women hold less than 25 per cent of managerial positions in Bangladesh, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Japan, Malaysia, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of Korea and Türkiye.

44. Progress on gender equality has occurred in countries in different areas. In the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, the Fourth Five-Year National Plan of Action on Gender Equality (2021–2025) has resulted in improved statistics on gender equality and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. In Maldives, recent legislative changes have prohibited the marriage of any person below the age of 18 years, and there is a more equal distribution of matrimonial property after divorce.\(^{15}\)

45. Gender-based violence is deeply rooted in discriminatory social norms and gender inequality. It manifests itself in many ways, including femicide, psychological violence, stalking, physical violence, forced marriage, sexual violence (including rape), female genital mutilation, forced abortion and forced sterilization, sexual harassment and unacceptable justifications for crimes, including crimes committed in the name of protecting an individual’s or a group’s so-called honour. Digital and online violence, which is increasing across the region, is often connected to offline violence. Gender-based violence against men and boys (and related mental health issues) is also a major concern, not least in the context of continued political conflicts in certain areas.

46. In 2018, in numerous countries in the World Health Organization (WHO) Western Pacific and South-East Asian regions, over 50 per cent of ever-partnered women had experienced sexual and/or physical partner violence during their lifetime, and over 40 per cent of ever-partnered women had gone through such experiences in the preceding 12 months.\(^{16}\) It is estimated that...

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\(^{15}\) Ibid.

20,000 women were killed by intimate partners in Asia in 2017, and harmful practices, including female genital mutilation, continue to exist across the region.

F. Adolescents and young people

47. Increasing educational attainment is critical for enhancing the capacity of countries to harness the demographic dividend. Access to health and decent employment for all young people are equally important. The number of people between the ages of 15 and 24 years differs across the region (see figure V), with the window offered by the demographic dividend remaining open for only a few countries. By 2040, the youth population is projected to be double that of 2000 in Afghanistan, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, among other countries. India is experiencing slowing population growth, yet its sheer size means that the labour force (people aged 15–64 years) is projected to grow by about 9 million annually over the coming decade, mostly driven by young people entering the labour market. This is both a major challenge and an opportunity for policymakers. In contrast, in several other countries the number of those aged 15–24 years has declined by over 20 per cent. Further declines are projected in the future, with significant implications for economic growth.

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**Figure V**

Number of 15–24-year-olds, indexed to 100 in 2000, 2020 and 2040

48. In some countries, especially in East and North-East Asia and North and Central Asia, these trends are driven primarily by low fertility. In the Pacific, high emigration rates either primarily drive or exacerbate low fertility. Falling numbers of young people could have serious consequences for their voices being heard in policymaking, which in turn underscores the importance of intergenerational solidarity and justice. Young people must be recognized as equal partners in finding solutions to socioeconomic challenges.

49. Although the focus on young people tends to cover those aged 15–24 years, children and adolescents aged 10–14 years are often the most marginalized and the most likely to drop out of school, marry early and be vulnerable to mental health issues. Furthermore, the specific needs of adolescents and other young people are often not properly addressed in areas such as sexual and reproductive health services. That said, in the Federated States of Micronesia, personal hygiene products are provided for schoolgirls so that students do not miss school owing to menstrual needs, while a school programme for sixth to eighth graders addresses unhealthy lifestyles, including smoking. In addition, campaigns have been launched to raise awareness about the importance of education, health and sports, with youth ambassadors promoting the participation of girls in sports.\textsuperscript{18}

50. As already noted, unemployment rates in the Asia-Pacific region are higher for young people than for older adults. More alarming is the fact that, in 2020, 24.8 per cent of young people were not in education, employment or training, with the figures being significantly worse for females than for males. During the period 2019–2022, youth unemployment was higher among males than females.\textsuperscript{19} Young men in the region also face higher rates of labour underutilization than young women. This situation calls for targeted macroeconomic, employment and labour-market policies. Integrating training and skills development in education and employment policies with a specific focus on youth is critical.

G. Ageing

51. It is projected that, in 2023, 697 million people aged 60 years or older will be living in the Asia-Pacific region, more than double than in 1990. By 2050, this figure is projected to double again (see figure VI). Even in populations with relatively young age structures, the number of older persons is projected to increase sharply over the coming decades. In Pakistan, for example, while a high fertility rate means that the share of older persons may not rise significantly, the number of persons aged 60 years or older is projected to reach 26 million by 2040, a threefold increase compared to the 8 million recorded in 2000.

\textsuperscript{18} Responses to the survey.

\textsuperscript{19} ILO, “Global employment trends for youth 2022: Asia and the Pacific” (August 2022).
52. The rapid speed of ageing in the region means that there is limited time to prepare for the impacts of ageing on public finances, health care and other services and to ensure the availability of accessible infrastructure.

53. The older the total population, the greater the proportion of women, who tend to live longer. This is especially true in North and Central Asia, largely owing to the historically high mortality rates among adult men. While women live longer, compounding inequalities over the life course mean that women suffer from multiple vulnerabilities relating to health, poverty and isolation.

54. Multigenerational living is still common in the region; in over 15 per cent of households in Bangladesh, Kiribati, Pakistan, Samoa, Tajikistan, Tonga and Tuvalu people above 65 years of age and under 15 years of age live together.\(^\text{20}\) As urbanization increases and attitudes towards care change, co-residence patterns are also altering, resulting in a general decline in family size. In some countries, trends towards lifelong childlessness and non-marriage

mean that more older persons will have to find alternative support networks in the future. These changes require a fresh look at care models for older persons.

55. While the increase in life expectancy is a positive development, a significant number of people live their later years, sometimes as much as a quarter of those years, with disabilities. Another consequence of the epidemiological transition is the growing prevalence of chronic diseases such as Alzheimer’s, which require complex and long-term care. Health-care spending at the macro and household levels is likely to increase, along with challenges in ensuring that older persons can age-in-place and receive primary care from individuals, families and communities when desired.

56. Although many countries still lack a systematic approach to providing long-term care for older persons, good practices in the region do exist. The Government of Mongolia, for example, is implementing projects to increase the quality and accessibility of long-term assistance services and strengthen the capacities of organizations and caregivers to provide health and social protection services.21 Long-term care insurance was established in Japan in 2000 and provides benefits to over 5 million persons aged 65 years or older, equivalent to about 17 per cent of all older persons.22

57. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown, and often amplified, critical human rights protection gaps for older persons at the global, regional and national levels, such as discrimination based on old age, lack of autonomy and participation in decision-making and freedom from violence, neglect and abuse. These rights violations often exacerbate the health, social and economic situation and overall well-being of older persons. Furthermore, they underscore the importance of adopting a human rights-based, people-centred and life-course approach to population ageing.

58. Because over time older individuals are more likely to be better educated, scope exists for improvements in health and livelihoods. For instance, in 2015, 35 per cent of those aged 70 years or older in China had only a primary education. By 2060, that figure is projected to fall to just 7 per cent. Moreover, the percentage of those aged 70 years or older with a post-secondary education will rise significantly.23 This trend can increase the potential for active and healthy ageing, enhance the employment prospects of older persons and generally improve civic and economic life. This “second demographic dividend”, as it is also known, relates to how living longer can lead to greater capital accumulation through savings. The speed of increases in adult longevity will most likely positively influence the national savings rate.

59. The potential benefits of improved education and health must be accompanied by better social protection to reduce the vulnerabilities to which older persons, especially older women, are exposed. Across the region, protection schemes vary widely in scope, coverage and generosity, yet there have generally been improvements over the past decade. In some countries,

21 Responses to the survey.
pension levels are high relative to earnings. In others, however, only people in certain economic sectors are covered by pensions.

60. In the Philippines, legislation passed in 2013 has improved the rights and welfare of older persons. For example, all older persons are covered by the national health insurance programme; ability, knowledge, skills and qualifications are promoted over age in decisions on employment, and age-based limitations in employment are prohibited; and social welfare assistance is available to cushion the effects of economic shocks, disasters and other setbacks faced by older persons. In Kazakhstan, “active longevity centres” have been operational since January 2023 to provide training in computer literacy, the use of smartphones and English. These centres also offer free legal and psychological consultations and classes in folk art.24

61. Moving forward, Governments and other stakeholders must expand the opportunities available for older persons to work, for example by increasing the statutory age of retirement. Besides improving income security, such measures promote older people’s engagement with the community and active ageing. Lifelong learning and reskilling should be embedded in educational and work systems over the life course. At the same time, technology’s potential benefits should be maximized.

H. International migration

62. Migration levels in the region remain high, with most international migration occurring between countries. Significant numbers of people, mostly men, migrate from South and South-West Asia to find work in the Middle East. Within the Asia-Pacific region, Australia and New Zealand, as well as Hong Kong, China, are preferred destinations for people from Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan and the Philippines. Much labour migration is managed through bilateral memorandums of understanding. People also migrate for educational reasons and family formation.

63. While women comprise around 50 per cent of migrants, that figure may increase as the demand for workers in highly feminized sectors (for example, health care, domestic work, entertainment, manufacturing and textiles) also increases and as full-time employment opportunities for men decrease. In countries with available data, migrant workers are largely concentrated in low- or medium-skilled manual labour25 with exacerbated risks of stigma, discrimination and gender-based violence.

64. Temporary labour migration programmes may soften the adverse economic impacts of rapid ageing by partially offsetting the expected declines in the domestic labour force. However, political, popular and cultural resistance to large-scale immigration exists across the region. Furthermore, the number of migrants required to keep population age structures constant is unrealistic over the medium-to-long term. Yet, targeted labour migration policies can still offset particular sectoral challenges, such as in the growing care sector. Additional concerns include general labour market shortages in countries of origin, including countries in the Pacific.

24 Responses to the survey.
25 Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Women Migrant Workers in the ASEAN Economic Community (Bangkok, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), 2017).
65. The economic contribution of migrants across the region is significant. In 2021, remittances comprised over one fifth of the gross domestic product in Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Samoa, Tajikistan, Tonga and Vanuatu. Remittances contribute to children’s education and care for older persons and ward off poverty. However, remittance costs are often high. In 2021, for the 27 countries with available data, the target of reducing transaction costs for remittances to below 3 per cent by 2030 was met in only five countries: Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Bangladesh, Nepal, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, which are important countries of origin, are not far off the target, at 3–5.5 per cent. Meanwhile, the figure is above 9 per cent in Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu.

66. Other concerns include high recruitment costs, poor working conditions, limited access to services, stigma and abuse. These factors often affect migrant women hired as domestic workers, as well as those engaged in dirty, dangerous and demanding work. To mitigate migrants’ vulnerabilities, several Asia-Pacific countries have established policies and schemes that are aligned with the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. For instance, in Cambodia pre-departure training and guidelines on dispute resolution are provided for migrant workers. Other countries have posted labour attachés to consular offices in destination countries to protect migrant workers and help to resolve problems.

67. While most people move in search of a better life, it has been estimated that, at the end of 2021, 7.9 million refugees and people in refugee-like situations (around 13 per cent of whom were under the age of 5 years) were living in the region. Together, Türkiye, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Islamic Republic of Iran and China, in decreasing order, hosted 91 per cent of the region’s refugees and people in refugee-like situations.

68. Trafficking in persons is a serious problem across the region. In South Asia in 2020, for example, there were 0.4 victims per 100,000 people in the wider population, while women and girls made up 43 and 24 per cent, respectively, of victims of trafficking.


27 Responses to the survey.


29 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022 (United Nations publication, 2023), chap. II.
I. Urbanization and internal migration

69. Across the region, urban populations continue to grow. While the Pacific and North and Central Asia are already highly urbanized, the other subregions are urbanizing rapidly, especially East and North-East Asia. In 2020, 19 of the world’s 30 largest cities were in the Asia-Pacific region, with a combined population of 360 million.\(^\text{30}\) By 2035, five of the world’s six most populous cities are projected to be in the Asia-Pacific region. However, urbanization in most countries is concentrated in small and mid-sized towns and cities.

70. Urbanization has brought challenges. Half or more of the urban population in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar and Pakistan resides in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing. Nevertheless, since 2000, significant progress has occurred in many countries. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, the percentage of urban dwellers living in inadequate housing fell from 47.2 to 2.4 per cent between 2000 and 2020, while in Kazakhstan the figure fell from 25 per cent to almost zero.

71. For many, especially in the Pacific, it is still difficult to gain access to safe sanitation systems. Nonetheless, rapid progress has been made. For example, in China, the proportion of the population with access to sanitation services rose from 13 to 67 per cent between 2000 and 2022. In Viet Nam, urban planning and development capacity has improved in recent years, with an emphasis on using new, advanced and environmentally friendly building materials and on research into energy-saving, green development services and solutions for rapid and sustainable urbanization.\(^\text{31}\)

72. As many cities have inadequate public transport, their residents tend to rely heavily on their own motorcycles and cars. The infrastructure is often not designed with citizens in mind, especially pedestrians, older persons, persons with disabilities or families with young children. As the region’s population ages, urban spaces must adapt to people’s changing needs. The WHO Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities, which was established in 2010, is at the early stages in the region.

73. While facing the challenges of rapid urbanization, countries like China, Japan and the Republic of Korea have also had to address the changing needs of shrinking and ageing rural populations. Here too there are challenges linked to the provision of adequate infrastructure and public services, especially health care, and the maintenance of cultural heritage and local languages. Low fertility rates and emigration can cause vicious cycles, as rapid population decline contributes to economic slowdown, which, in turn, reduces the incentives for young people to stay.

74. Disasters are a primary driver of forced migration, with climate change being a growing aggravating force. During the period 2010–2021, people across Asia and the Pacific were displaced over 225 million times by disasters triggered by natural hazards, accounting for over three quarters of the global number of people forced to migrate. East Asia and South-East Asia witnessed the most disaster-related displacements, equal to nearly two thirds of the total

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\(^{31}\) Responses to the survey.
for the whole Asia-Pacific region, followed closely by South Asia. The people of the Pacific faced the greatest risk of displacement relative to population size. Elsewhere, conflict is shaping and driving forced internal displacement and contributing to increases in the numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers.

J. Population and sustainable development

75. Asia and the Pacific is the region most prone to climate-induced disasters, which have increased in frequency and intensity. Its people are highly dependent on natural resources and agriculture, and often live in densely populated coastal areas. Many countries have weak institutions and lack social protection. Poverty remains widespread.

76. The region faces numerous environmental threats, including slow-onset disasters from sea-level rise and drought and sudden-onset disasters such as typhoons, hurricanes and floods. In 2021, over 100 natural hazards occurred in Asia, of which 80 per cent were floods and storms. These resulted in around 4,000 deaths. Overall, 48.3 million people were directly affected, causing $35.6 billion in economic damages. Climate change directly affects people’s lives, health and well-being; it also intensifies socioeconomic disparities, contributes to population displacement and exacerbates conflicts. Persons in vulnerable situations are disproportionately affected by climate change.

77. The activities carried out by people in Asia and the Pacific also contribute significantly to climate change. In 2020, the region accounted for more than half of global greenhouse gas emissions and its share continues to increase as populations grow and economies continue to be powered by fossil fuels. Emissions have more than doubled since 1990, driven by the electricity generation, manufacturing and transport sectors. The region also accounts for over half of global energy consumption, with 85 per cent of that energy being sourced from fossil fuels. Despite the increase in electrification, many people still lack access to electricity and continue to rely on traditional biomass (such as burning wood) for cooking and heating. In fact, only 65 per cent of the Asia-Pacific population has access to clean cooking fuels and technologies. Poor indoor air quality, for example, contributed to around 2.2 million premature deaths in the WHO Western Pacific region in 2016. Women and children often bear the burden of gathering fuel, which reduces the time available to them for education and other productive and leisure activities. In

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33 Ibid.
38 WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific, “One third of global air pollution deaths in Asia Pacific”, news release, 2 May 2018.
general, countries in the region are regressing on climate action (Sustainable Development Goal 13). 39

78. Protecting the environment is vital for strengthening capacity in the areas of mitigation and resilience. In fact, community-based climate activism represents a critical step towards developing sustainable resiliency. Furthermore, education too is essential for raising awareness and building resilience. In 2020, Sustainable Development Goal indicator 13.3.1 was achieved in Cambodia, Georgia, India, Myanmar, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation and Türkiye. Moreover, Maldives has implemented several legal instruments to support efforts to mitigate climate change and the country is making progress in the areas of sustainable public services, energy efficiency, upgraded infrastructure and conservation of reefs and wetlands, among others. 40

K. Data and statistics

79. In order to accelerate progress on and evaluate the status of implementation of the priority actions of the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development, it will be necessary to collect relevant data and information. Towards that aim, in 2020, at its sixth session, the Committee on Social Development endorsed the Asia-Pacific Indicator Framework for Voluntary Monitoring of Progress towards the Implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and of the Commitments Contained in the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development.

80. An analysis of data available from the Asia-Pacific SDG Gateway, 41 which is maintained by the Statistics Division of ESCAP, shows that capacity to report through the Framework varies widely across the region. At the regional level, there is sufficient data to report on 62 per cent of the indicators set out in the Framework. While two subregions – North and Central Asia and South and South-West Asia – have sufficient data on 76 per cent of the indicators, and South-East Asia has sufficient data for 74 per cent of indicators, the Pacific is able to report on only 47 per cent of the indicators. The equivalent figure for East and North-East Asia is 53 per cent.

81. Looking at data availability by Sustainable Development Goal, significant data gaps exist on Goal 5 (Gender equality), Goal 14 (Life below water) and Goal 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions), for each of which there is sufficient data on under 30 per cent of indicators. Regarding Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) and Goal 12 (Responsible consumption and production), sufficient data is available in respect of under 50 per cent of indicators. 42

82. Progress is, however, being made towards the completion of census and civil registration and vital statistics systems. Most Asia-Pacific countries conducted a population and housing census between 2010 and 2019. Despite COVID-19-related setbacks, positive developments in these areas have been underpinned by strategic leadership and planning. For example, of the


40 Responses to the survey.


42 For a detailed analysis of the availability of data, see ESCAP/APPC(7)/INF/5.
47 countries and areas reporting data on indicator 17.18.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals,\(^{43}\) 40 have national statistical plans that are being implemented.

83. Surveys frequently supplement censuses and civil registration and vital statistics systems. In the past decade, demographic and health surveys have been carried out across the region, including in several low-income countries. Multiple indicator cluster surveys have been conducted in most countries, generating data on the well-being of children and women. Moreover, comparative, harmonized longitudinal surveys have been developed, although more needs to be done to enable a subnational analysis.

84. National Transfer Accounts provide information on economic flows from one age group or generation to another, typically for a national population in a given calendar year. They have been calculated in approximately half of the region’s countries.

85. New technologies are making it easier to collect data, and the increasing availability of geolocation data can enhance understanding of socioeconomic issues. Big data are also being integrated more, complementing traditional data. These developments must be approached ethically, particularly when they concern the use of personal information.

III. Conclusions and recommendations

86. The Asia-Pacific region is at a critical juncture. It has made significant progress in terms of socioeconomic development but faces significant challenges, in part because rapid demographic shifts have resulted in older, more urban populations. Moreover, many countries in the region continue to deal with persistent socioeconomic inequalities (including gender inequality), ageism and disrespect for human rights, internal displacement, poverty and limited access to health, education and employment. Inequalities and vulnerabilities have been exacerbated by climate change, disasters, conflicts, the COVID-19 pandemic and digital transformations. Limited financial resources, capacities and data make it difficult to fully implement the priority actions set out in the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development.

87. It is, therefore, important to apply a holistic, people-centred, rights-based and gender-sensitive approach to address existing and future population and development challenges and opportunities. Human rights and gender equality are the basis for a more peaceful and prosperous future for all. Rather than focusing on one population and development challenge or opportunity at a time, efforts should be made to address interlinkages and consider how action (or inaction) today affects outcomes for current and future generations.

88. People, in all their diversity, have different and changing needs, from birth through adolescence to adulthood and old age. What happens earlier in life has consequences for later life. Therefore, a life-course approach to population and development is essential.

\(^{43}\) Number of countries with a national statistical plan that is fully funded and under implementation, by source of funding.
89. As life expectancies increase, more people of different age groups are living together for longer periods, underscoring the importance of intergenerational relations and solidarity. Long-term planning is needed to deliver prosperity to all members of present and future generations.

90. Health-care coverage, including access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, must be expanded. The social determinants of health must be addressed, and financial and societal barriers to health must be abolished. Health-sector innovations and new technologies must be made available in a responsible way and access to person-centred, community-based and integrated care, including mental health services and long-term and palliative care, must be facilitated. Furthermore, more attention should be given to increasing awareness of health, promoting health literacy, supporting innovative health financing, assisting and recognizing the contributions of caregivers, in particular women, and developing human resources for health.

91. Social protection is a human right and must be guaranteed to everyone over the life course. Investments in basic social protection have an immediate impact in terms of reducing poverty, inequalities and purchasing power disparities. Moreover, employment must become more flexible and provide options for people – especially women, persons with disabilities, older persons and migrants – to work in different ways. Achieving gender parity in the workforce is the most effective way of increasing productivity and income. Training, upskilling and reskilling opportunities should be available to all.

92. Climate change threatens all aspects of life. Climate-induced disasters are becoming more pronounced and more frequent. Lives are lost, people’s health is affected, communities are displaced and infrastructure, economies and livelihoods are disrupted and destroyed. Countries in the region must prioritize a low-carbon pathway and focus on developing climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience-building strategies that leave no one behind. Moreover, climate change strategies must be mainstreamed in all national strategic planning activities.

93. The collection of disaggregated data at the national and subnational levels must be strengthened. Data on Sustainable Development Goals-based population and development indicators must be prioritized so that countries can monitor the status of implementation of the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development. Information on population dynamics and projections must be considered in planning efforts.

94. Partnerships and regional cooperation are vital. In a globalized world, population and development challenges and opportunities are connected across boundaries and within countries, from the local to the national levels. Community-level work must be strengthened, as it often drives what occurs at higher levels. Funding, including through public-private initiatives, and capacity-building for better population and development outcomes must be increased. Political will and collaboration between diverse stakeholders with a focus on sustainability are crucial to develop and implement forward-looking, people-centred policies.

95. The Conference may wish to take note of the findings and recommendations contained in the present document and provide further guidance to the secretariat on accelerating the implementation of the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development and of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development in Asia and the Pacific.