



# Seventh Asian and Pacific Population Conference

BANGKOK, 15–17 NOVEMBER 2023

## Seventh Asian and Pacific Population Conference

**Agenda item 3. 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**

Thursday, 16 November 2023 (10:30-12:00 UTC+7)  
Bangkok and online

### **Round table 2: Health, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights**

#### **CONCEPT NOTE**

##### **1. Introduction**

The Asia-Pacific region has experienced significant progress in achieving universal access to health services, including sexual and reproductive health. The region is home to 4.7 billion people, around 60 per cent of the world's population. In part, this is also due to increased life expectancy, which is enjoyed across the region and celebrated as an improvement in health care provisions.

Access to universal health coverage (UHC), including sexual and reproductive health (SRH) is still an ambition and not yet a reality for many countries in Asia and the Pacific. The region is off track to make significant progress towards UHC by 2030 (Sustainable Development Goals, target 3.8) as improvements to health services coverage have stagnated since 2015, and the proportion of the population that faced catastrophic levels of out-of-pocket (OOP) health spending has increased. Proactive policy efforts are needed to decrease financial hardship from OOP payments – specifically, public health funding needs to increase further and be used more efficiently to provide financial protection and better service coverage. Coverage for medicines needs to be extended, and co-payments/user-charges for the poor need to be removed. Social protection and universal health coverage schemes are critical to ensure that comprehensive SRH care is available to all without catastrophic OOP expenditure. Greater domestic

financing at national and subnational levels is needed - especially in the context of decentralization of governance and budgeting.

Overall, HIV incidence is low in the region (0.03 per 1,000 population in 2020). Most new HIV infections in Asia and the Pacific (96 per cent) occur within key populations<sup>1</sup> and their sexual partners, which is significantly more than the global average (70 per cent). Approximately 83.3 per cent of all new HIV infections occur via sexual transmission, 5.3 per cent via vertical transmission – mostly subsequent to sexual transmission, and 11.4 per cent via shared drug injecting.<sup>2</sup> During 2022, domestic resources for HIV (85 per cent of those available), decreased by 3 per cent compared with 2021, with a 60 per cent funding gap in resource needs to meet UNAIDS' 2025 targets.<sup>3</sup>

Maternal mortality reductions have stagnated, and countries have to more than double the annual reduction rates to reach the Sustainable Development Goals targets on maternal and newborn mortality reduction. Health systems have been disrupted and investments are needed in strengthening workforce capacity but also in ensuring that midwives, doctors and nurses are recruited, deployed across countries and are retained with favorable remuneration and recognition of their contribution and critical role in ensuring the realization of SRH and rights. According to the 2021 State of the World's Midwifery report 2021,<sup>4</sup> there is a shortage of over 200,000 midwives in Asia and the Pacific, and lives are being lost due to lack of trained midwives deployed in health facilities across countries, including in remote locations.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights are an integral part of gender equality. Denial of these rights and services represents a form of gender-based violence (GBV). In Asia and the Pacific, between 12 to 64 per cent of women disclosed experiences of physical or sexual violence, or both, from an intimate partner in their lifetime.<sup>5</sup> Deep-rooted structural inequalities and persistent discriminatory social and gender norms often contribute to justifying GBV, in turn taking away women's and girls' fundamental human rights to live free of violence. GBV restricts choices and decision-making of those who experience it, curtailing their rights across their life-cycle of access to critical SRH information and services.

Climate change is leading to increased natural disasters in the region and so now - more than ever - health systems must become more resilient and provide continued access of populations to SRH during emergencies. This requires investments in the preparedness of the workforce, supply chains of life-saving maternal health drugs, treatment for STIs and HIV and contraceptives, and strengthening of the networks of care for emergency obstetric and newborn care, which is lifesaving and required even during emergencies.

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<sup>1</sup> Key populations are gay/bisexual and other men who have sex with men, people in prisons and other closed settings, people who inject drugs, sex workers and transgender people.

<sup>2</sup> Estimates calculated from 2022 UNAIDS Global AIDS Update data.

<sup>3</sup> UNAIDS (2023). The path to end AIDS – UNAIDS Global AIDS Update 2023.  
<https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/documents/2023/global-aids-update-2023>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unfpa.org/sowmy>

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Asia and the Pacific Regional Office. 2023. Violence against Women Regional Snapshot (2023), kNOWVAWdata Initiative. <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/resources/violence-against-women-regional-snapshot-2023-knowvawdata>

## 2. Objectives

The round-table discussion is expected to provide insights into progress and challenges with regards to health, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. The round table will:

1. Discuss the current state of health and sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights in Asia and the Pacific by looking at the good practices that supported achieving better health outcomes, improved coverage in the areas that need further investment to ensure universal access to quality health care, including sexual and reproductive health, and gender-based violence related information and services.
2. Discuss the critical social determinants that pose challenges, such as age, gender, geographic location, wealth quintile, and disability, that hinders individuals' ability to seek and access health care.
3. Identify how inequalities and vulnerabilities have been exacerbated by climate change, disasters, conflicts, the COVID-19 pandemic and digital transformations.
4. Identify the extent of progress and gaps in the implementation of gender-sensitive, rights-based approaches towards population and development issues, especially those linked to sexual and reproductive health.
5. Identify actionable strategies and effective mechanisms to address the structural causes of inequalities and social exclusion in the region, including UHC policies which incorporate SRH and address out of pocket expenditure. Share good practices and lessons learned to address them.

## 3. Content and format

The round-table discussion will consist of a moderated discussion among panellists, Q&A with meeting participants and concluding remarks by the panellists. The following guiding questions will be addressed:

1. Who is deprived of accessing health services including services for sexual and reproductive health or is not able to exercise their reproductive rights in Asia and the Pacific. How is this experienced? What are some of the underlying factors that contribute to this?
2. In what ways do megatrends such as climate change, disasters, conflicts, digitalization, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the post Covid-19 economic downturn impact UHC, including SRH and rights?
3. What laws, policies, systemic changes and approaches have been successful in building momentum to reach UHC, including SRH and reproductive rights for all?
4. How could data collection and analysis be improved to enable better tracking of SDG indicators linked to health care, including SRH and reproductive rights?

During the Q&A, Conference participants will be invited to speak from the floor and provide comments and any further reflections. The recording of the round-table discussion will be posted on the meeting website. A summary of the round-table discussion will be included in the Chair's summary of the meeting.

## 4. Agenda

10:30-10:35	Welcome and opening remarks, moderator
10:35-11:00	First round of questions, panellists
11:00-11:25	Second round of questions, panellists
11:25-11:50	Q&A
11:50-11:57	Concluding remarks, panellists
11:57-12:00	Closing remarks, moderator

## 5. Organizing team

The round table is being organized by ESCAP in collaboration with UNFPA Asia-Pacific Regional Office.

## 6. Background

According to resolution 74 (XXIII) of 17 April 1967 of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, the Asian Population Conference was established as a statutory organ of the Commission, to be convened every ten years synchronizing with the decennial population and related censuses, for the consideration of all aspects of population questions and of their impact on economic and social development. Since its first session in 1963, the Asian and Pacific Population Conference has been convened six times. The sixth Conference was held from 16 to 18 September 2013 at ESCAP, and members and associate Members adopted the Asian-Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development by vote.<sup>6</sup>

In 1994, United Nations Member States adopted the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, Egypt. The Programme of Action, which was extended by the General Assembly in 2010 beyond 2014 (resolution 65/234),<sup>7</sup> undertook a people-centered and rights-based approach to sustainable development. It emphasizes that achieving sustainable development requires that interrelationships between population, resources, the environment and social and economic development are fully recognized, properly managed and brought into a harmonious and dynamic balance. Population dynamics are both drivers and outcomes of sustainable development at national and sub-national levels and regional and global levels. To achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people, policies, including population-related policies, should be developed

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<sup>6</sup> Report of the Sixth Asian and Pacific Population Conference (16-20 September 2013, Bangkok)

<https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Report%20of%20APPC%202013.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Resolution adopted by the General Assembly (65/234 Follow-up to the International Conference on Population).  
A/RES/65/234

[https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A\\_RES\\_65\\_234.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_65_234.pdf).

and implemented in order to meet the needs of current generations without compromising the needs of future generations. Since 1994, the Commission on Population and Development, a functional commission of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, has reviewed and appraised the implementation of the Programme of Action in regular intervals.

In 2022, the Commission decided that the theme of the 57th 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.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, the Commission will undertake another review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action at the global level in 2024.

## 7. Suggested reading

- Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). (2014). [Report of the Sixth Asian and Pacific Population Conference \(16-20 September 2013, Bangkok\)](#).
- United Nations. (1995). [Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994](#) (Sales No. E.95.XIII.18, chap. I, resolution 1, annex).
- [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](#) (ESCAP/APPC(7)/2)
- [The impacts of climate change on population and development in Asia and the Pacific](#) (ESCAP/APPC(7)/3)
- [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: a summary of the outcomes of stakeholder consultations](#) (ESCAP/APPC(7)/INF/1)
- [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: a summary of the results of voluntary national surveys reported by member States](#) (ESCAP/APPC(7)/INF/2)
- [Gender equality and universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights in Asia and the Pacific](#) (ESCAP/APPC(7)/INF/3)
- [Universal health care in Asia and the Pacific](#) (ESCAP/APPC(7)/INF/4)
- [Data and statistics to monitor the implementation of the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development, as well as of the Programme of Action of the](#)

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<sup>8</sup> Resolution and Decisions of the Commission of Population and Development E/2022/25-E/CN.9/2022/7.

[International Conference on Population and Development and the key actions for its further implementation in Asia and the Pacific](#) (ESCAP/APPC(7)/INF/5)

## 8. Contact persons

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