Good afternoon, Chair, Distinguished Delegates, and Participants representing various UN agencies and other organizations!

First, I would like to thank the Chair and the secretariat for giving UNICEF the opportunity to participate in the 7th Asia and Pacific Population Conference. I want to start with some emerging issues/trends in the region when it comes to children and young people. 1) reduction in child and youth population; 2) aging population; 3) rapid urbanization; and 4) impact of climate on children and young people.

Asia and the Pacific Region is home to 55 percent of the world’s children – which translates to around 1.3 billion children, according to the United Nations Population Division. However, there is a growing decline in the share of the child population in the region to 47 percent by 2050 (1.1 billion), which demands our urgent attention. The share of the youth population 15-24 years is also projected to decrease by 90 million. The reduction in child and youth population and rapid aging poses challenges and advantages to many countries in the region. The rapid urbanization combined with a lack of urban planning and a gender-responsive care economy that supports childcare often leads to increasing urban poverty, adding to the complexity of the challenges.

As the UN agency committed to supporting the rights and well-being of children and adolescents, UNICEF is committed to working with you all to make those demographic shifts and urbanization to our advantage. We aim to empower young people, especially girls, equipping them with skills services, and opportunities to inform decision-making and to navigate emerging challenges posed by demographic shifts, urbanization, climate change, and an aging population.

The fertility is below replacement level in many countries and is showing a declining trend in Asia and the Pacific. However, adolescent fertility remains high in many countries. Every year, more than four million children are born to adolescent girls aged 15-19 years in Asia and the Pacific. UNICEF is committed to eliminating adolescent pregnancies and the related impact of child marriage and other gender-based discriminations that limit opportunities for girls. Our commitment extends to ensuring every girl enjoys her childhood and actively participates in decisions affecting her life.

The service provision for children in urban areas needs improvement, especially by supporting children in urban poor households, slums, and informal settlements. One way to address this challenge is to make cities more child-friendly with accessible and safe infrastructure and childcare services. UNICEF will be there to work with Governments and partners on this.
The link between climate change and its impact on children is overly complex and is posing an enormous threat to the rights and well-being of children and their development – fewer days in schools, more displacement, increased violence, and especially gender-based violence, and a shrinking civic space for adolescent and youth participation, etc. It is also well known that displacement due to natural calamities or conflicts affects women and children much harder than the rest of the population. In the recent period, the frequency of large-scale disasters has shown an increasing trend. In 2022 alone, about 23 million were internally displaced due to disasters in South-East Asia and the Pacific\(^1\). We need to work together to reduce the impact of climate change on future generations.

The health and well-being of women, children, and their families are also affected due to challenges posed by climate change and demographic shifts. Increases in communicable and non-communicable diseases and lack or inability to receive continuing care. Let us not forget our commitments, ensuring access to and availability of health care services to all children is a fundamental right of the child, and we have to work together to protect them.

UNICEF very much believes in evidence-based policy-making and programming, and we continue to support and strengthen countries’ capacity to generate high-quality data. For example, UNICEF’s Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) programme continues to support countries in collecting internationally comparable data on children and women.

Strengthening of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) and other administrative data systems is also key in ensuring regular data flow in a sustainable manner to monitor the progress. The administrative data systems must be agile to accommodate data demands during difficult times and are easy to integrate with different data systems – we have seen challenges and gaps in the administrative data systems during the COVID-19 pandemic. As UNICEF, we are committed to working with Governments, UN and other development partners to strengthen the admin data systems.

Let us work together to create a better future for children in Asia and the Pacific and around the world.

Thank you very much

\(^1\) IDMC-GRID 2023 Global Report