

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (ESCAP)

Regional Expert Group Meeting on HIV/AIDS
27 November 2018
United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok

Concept Note

Organizational arrangement

A Regional Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on *Reviewing Implementation of Commitments from the Asia Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on HIV and AIDS Beyond 2015* will be jointly organized by ESCAP and UNAIDS Co-sponsors¹ on 27 November 2018 in Bangkok, Thailand. The venue will be the United Nations Conference Centre.

Purpose and expected outcomes of the Meeting

The purpose of the Meeting is to review national progress in meeting the commitments contained in the *Asia Pacific Regional Framework for Action on HIV and AIDS beyond 2015* which was adopted at the Asia Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on HIV and AIDS in January 2015. The Framework was developed in response to commitments contained in General Assembly resolution 65/277 on the Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS: Intensifying Our Efforts to Eliminate HIV and AIDS; UNESCAP Resolutions 66/10 and 67/9; and the outcome of the Asia-Pacific High-level Intergovernmental Meeting on the Assessment of Progress against Commitments in the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS and the Millennium Development Goals.

The expected outcomes of the Meeting include the following:

- (i) Provide countries with an opportunity to report on progress against the *Asia Pacific Regional Framework for Action on HIV and AIDS beyond 2015* across its three pillars, namely:
 - a. Continuing national reviews and multisectoral consultations on legal and policy barriers;
 - b. National stakeholder consultations to promote access to affordable medicines, diagnostics and vaccines; and,
 - c. Evidence-based national HIV investment cases and sustainability plans.

This will include sharing of key milestones achieved, lessons learned, local solutions to challenges met, and strategic opportunities and entry points to integrate HIV in other national health and development programs and sustainability plans;

¹ Including UNDP, UNFPA and UNODC

- (ii) Share experiences and lessons learned on their own HIV response progress to fast track their responses towards achieving the commitments agreed to in the Regional Framework; and,
- (iii) Review countries' progress against the outcomes of the 2016 High Level Meeting on HIV where member states agreed to targets for 2020 and 2030.

The outcome of the Meeting will be contained in a paper on the meeting's proceedings which will be presented to Member States of ESCAP for their endorsement in the Fifth Session of the Committee on Social Development, due to be held from 28-30 November 2018.

Background on the substantive issues to be addressed

There were an estimated 5.1 million people living with HIV in Asia and the Pacific in 2016, a number which grew by 100,000 over the year (there were 270,000 new infections and 170,000 deaths, leaving the growth at 100,000).² The risks of exposure to HIV in Asia and the Pacific are particularly elevated for certain key populations, notably men who have sex with men, sex workers, transgender people and people who inject drugs; these risks are exacerbated among young key populations, and key populations in urban areas. The vulnerabilities of these populations to HIV exposure are significantly exacerbated by the stigma and discrimination in both policy and practice faced by members of these key populations which prevent them being able to adopt effective health-seeking behaviours such as condom use, PrEP use, and use of clean needles for injecting drug use.

Following early progress in the region in halting the increase in new infections resulting from health-focused approaches to issues such as injecting drug use and sex work, support from international donors and success in making use of TRIPS flexibilities to support the roll-out of generic anti-retroviral treatments to people living with HIV, progress has stalled. The number of new infections has declined by 13% since 2010 overall, but epidemics are re-emerging in several countries in the region. This reflects factors such as the transition of many countries of the region to middle-income status resulting in reduced donor support for HIV responses.

While national funding has increased to meet this gap in some countries, HIV responses remain underfunded across many countries of the region. Furthermore, legal and policy barriers that impede HIV responses such as criminalization of sex work, compulsory centres for drug users, criminalization of consensual adult same-sex sexual behaviours and travel restrictions for people living with HIV remain in place in many countries of the region. As a result, the rights of key populations are not fully-respected and they continue to face stigma and discrimination that prevent them from accessing services and taking actions to protect their health. Many countries in the region, while experiencing overall decreases in new infections, have seen significant increases in new infections amongst key population groups.

² http://www.aidsdatahub.org/sites/default/files/publication/UNAIDS_RST-AP_Regional_and_country_snapshots_2017_r1.pdf

In 2016, Member States adopted the *Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS: On the Fast Track to Accelerating the Fight against HIV and to Ending the AIDS Epidemic by 2030*.³ In this document, Member States committed, inter alia, to meeting:

- the 90-90-90 treatment targets (by 2020, 90 per cent of people living with HIV knowing their status; 90 per cent of those knowing their status on anti-retroviral treatment; and 90 per cent of those on anti-retroviral treatment having viral suppression);
- reducing the number of new infections among young people in Asia and the Pacific by 75 per cent to 88,000;
- reducing the number of new infections in children and young people under the age of 15 by 95 per cent to 1,900; and
- ensuring that 81 per cent of people living with HIV are on treatment by 2020

Significant acceleration of progress will be required to reach this goal in the Asia-Pacific region, given current trends. The number of new infections will need to be reduced to 90,000; the number of people on treatment will need to increase; and a significant funding gap will need to be closed.

Regional response

The Asia-Pacific region has taken a strong position on ending the HIV epidemic as a public health threat. Through resolutions 66/10 and 67/9 adopted at the ESCAP Commissions in 2010 and 2011, countries of the region committed to address HIV through a human rights-based approach which eliminated stigma and discrimination against members of key populations and which lifted legal and policy barriers; to prioritise high-impact interventions that targeted key populations; to promote access to medicines, diagnostics and vaccines; and to ensure the financial sustainability and national ownership of national HIV responses, including through the development of national HIV strategies. These resolutions fed into the global High Level Meetings on AIDS in 2011 and 2016, helping shape the global landscape of HIV responses.

These resolutions were followed by a series of intergovernmental meetings in 2012 (the Asia-Pacific High-level Intergovernmental Meeting on the Assessment of Progress against Commitments in the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS and the Millennium Development Goals and the Asia-Pacific) and 2015 (The Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on HIV and AIDS), during which member States endorsed the Regional Framework to Support the Implementation of International and Region-specific Commitments and the Regional Framework for Action on HIV and AIDS Beyond 2015. These frameworks for action focused in particular on the human rights of key populations through carrying out national reviews and multisectoral consultations addressing the legal and policy barriers faced by key populations in the region; while the 2015 Framework further addressed financing of HIV responses through undertaking national stakeholder consultations to promote access to affordable medicines, diagnostics and vaccines and developing evidence-based national HIV investment cases and sustainability plans (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. Regional Framework for Action on HIV and AIDS Beyond 20154

³ A/RES/70/266

⁴ See E/ESCAP/HIV/IGM.2/5

January 2015	Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on HIV and AIDS		
May 2015	Consideration by the Commission at its seventy-first session, of the outcome of the Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on HIV and AIDS		Continuing national reviews and multisectoral consultations on legal and policy barriers
June 2015 and after	National stakeholder consultations to promote access to affordable medicines, diagnostics and vaccines	Evidence-based national HIV investment cases and sustainability plans	
	Regional input into the high-level meeting on HIV/AIDS to be convened by the General Assembly (2016)		
	Regional review of the progress made in implementing the Regional Framework for Action on HIV and AIDS beyond 2015 (2018)		

The Framework further called for a regional review of progress made in implementing the regional framework for action on HIV and AIDS beyond 2015 in 2018. In light of this mandate, ESCAP and UNAIDS and Co-sponsors will collaborate to carry out this Regional Review on 27 November 2018.

The 2018 EGM is a unique platform for country leaders from government, civil society, people living with of affected by HIV, and development partners to review progress achieved thus far, to share and exchange experiences and new perspectives and insights.

Participation

The expected number of participants at the Meeting is 50. Participants will include 1-2 government officials in an expert capacity from relevant ministries such as health, legal, social welfare, and community development from each of the UNESCAP member states; and participants from civil society. The invited experts would be expected to have concrete expertise and involvement in addressing issues contained in the Asia Pacific Regional Framework for Action on HIV and AIDS Beyond 2015, and in the General Assembly resolution 65/277 on the Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS: Intensifying Our Efforts to Eliminate HIV and AIDS; and UNESCAP Resolutions 66/10 and 67/9.

In addition to country and civil society representatives, participants will include experts from international organizations, including the Asian Development Bank (ADB), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), World Bank (WB), the World Health Organization (WHO), the US Governments PEPFAR initiative, and the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria.

Partners

The meeting will be jointly organized by the Social Development Division of ESCAP, UNAIDS, UNDP and UNODC.

Format of the meeting

The expert group meeting will involve 2 sessions held on the 27 November 2018. Sessions will include reports on country progress, statements by civil society, and from bilateral and multilateral partners working in support of country level HIV responses.

Language of the meeting and documentation

The expert group meeting will be held in English.

Logistical arrangements

Selected participants will be provided with airfare and accommodation according to the UN rules and regulations.

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