



UNFPA
in Asia and the Pacific

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Our Mission

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund is an international development agency that works globally to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled.

Mandate and Goals

UNFPA's assistance is guided by the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be reached by 2015. Each provide benchmarks to measure national efforts to reduce poverty, promote health and gender equality, and protect critical resources and the environment. It is well recognized that population issues are central to the promotion of sustainable development.

UNFPA's priorities include reducing maternal mortality and morbidity, ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health services including family planning, and preventing and managing HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. UNFPA also focuses on improving the lives of underserved populations, especially young people and women, by advocating for human rights and gender equality as well as promoting the inclusion of population dynamics in national planning for sustainable development.

Central to the ICPD vision is the goal of providing universal access to sexual and reproductive health services so that women and men can exercise their rights to make informed decisions in relation to their sexual and reproductive life, including the right to choose whether and when to have children.

According to the comprehensive ICPD agenda, enabling couples and individuals to manage their fertility is critical to alleviating poverty and building stable and sustainable societies. Empowering women is both a human rights and economic development imperative.

Population Dynamics and Development

The Asia and the Pacific region is home to 60 per cent of the world's population – some 4.3 billion people – and includes the world's most populous countries, China and India. The region also contains some of the smallest populations on the planet, especially among the Small Island Developing States in the Pacific. This diversity is accompanied by changing demographic trends, characterized by overall lower fertility and mortality rates, as well as rapid urbanization and sizeable migration flows within and outside the region.

Although the total fertility rate for the region as a whole is currently close to the replacement level of 2.1 births per woman, changes have not been uniform. Family size in East Asia has fallen to 1.7 children per woman, while remaining high in South Asia at 2.5 children per woman. While some countries are confronted with a “youth bulge”, which presents opportunities to accelerate development, others are ageing rapidly, making the provision of adequate health care and other services imperative. The skewed sex ratio at birth due to prenatal sex selection is also a concern in several of the most populous countries, with important consequences now and in the future for these societies.

Between now and 2050 the number of people aged 60 years and older in the region will more than double, reaching 1.3 billion. By the middle of this century, one in four people will be 60 or older, compared to one in ten today. The proportion of elderly in East and North-East Asia will be even higher – one in three people will be over 60; most in this group will be women without pensions or any type of social protection net.

Migration is also an important issue in the region: 40 per cent of all international migrants globally originate from Asia and the Pacific and there are even more people moving within their own countries. Although only two out of every five people in the region currently live in urban areas, this ratio will increase significantly in the next two decades as millions move from the countryside to towns and cities in search of employment and better opportunities. Rapid urbanization requires proactive planning to make urban areas places of economic growth and create new opportunities for sustainable development.



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Data for Development:

UNFPA is the main UN agency supporting the planning and implementation of population censuses. The Fund also supports demographic and household surveys, as well as the use of civil registration data, all necessary tools to allow countries to plan for the current and future needs of their citizens. Accurate and timely, disaggregated data on the number of people, their sex, age, location, knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and unmet needs can improve planning and policymaking significantly.

There is a clear need to strengthen data information systems and qualitative research to support the post-2015 development agenda. Moreover, information that is collected should be disseminated in a way that is easily accessible and usable by planners and policymakers.

Improving Maternal Health – Saving Lives

While progress has been made in meeting most of MDGs, the goal of reducing maternal mortality and morbidity has fallen woefully behind. In the Asia and the Pacific region, deaths and poor health among women remain unacceptably high. In 2010, for every 100,000 births in the region, 150 women died from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth. Subregional differences are stark: for every 100,000 live births, on average 220 women die in South Asia and 150 in South-East Asia, compared to 37 in East Asia.

The major causes of maternal death and disability include: excessive bleeding (haemorrhage); anaemia; infections/sepsis; obstructed labour; hypertensive disorders, and unsafe abortion.

UNFPA works to ensure that the four pillars of maternal health are universally available: the timing and spacing of pregnancies through the use of modern contraceptives; antenatal care; safe delivery; and emergency obstetric care.

UNFPA advocates for greater international commitment and support for sexual and reproductive health as a basic human right and a health sector priority. The Fund's work is broad-based: it supports family planning services including counselling and a full range of high quality contraceptive methods; develops the capacities of skilled birth attendance for maternal health care through training programmes and encourages the use of international clinical standards; promotes laws and policies that ensure the reproductive rights of women and adolescents, while discouraging harmful practices such as early marriage; and advocates for programmes to expand basic health coverage for the most impoverished and marginalized communities.





Supporting Maternal and Newborn Health in Lao PDR

The maternal mortality ratio in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, though reduced since 2005, is still too high - 357 women die for every 100,000 live births, one of the highest rates in the region. In order to improve maternal and newborn health, UNFPA launched the National Skilled Birth Attendant Plan. With few births taking place in hospitals and clinics, the Fund has focused its effort on training and equipping a new cadre of skilled birth attendants. By the end of 2012, over 400 midwives had been trained and returned to their health facilities, many in rural underserved areas. As a result, more than 40 per cent of all health centres in 9 out of 17 provinces have at least one community midwife on staff, a significant increase in the number of health facilities with a skilled birth attendant. In addition, advocacy efforts throughout the country have sensitized policymakers, service providers and communities on the need to upgrade midwifery skills.



Family Planning - Ensuring Every Pregnancy is Wanted

Providing family planning services, including counselling and contraceptives, is one of the most cost-effective public health interventions, contributing to dramatic reductions in maternal mortality and morbidity.

Over the last 20 years, the Asia and the Pacific region has seen impressive improvements in sexual and reproductive health. This is due in part to the increased use of modern contraceptives and improvements in the provision of reproductive and sexual health care. Despite improvements, there are still 140 million women in the region with an unmet need for family planning.

Though government support for family planning has grown stronger in many countries, much remains to be done. UNFPA is promoting a development agenda that encourages countries to make family planning services, including a full range of quality contraceptive methods, readily available to women, men and adolescents. This strategy prevents unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions, and reduces maternal deaths and disabilities, saving Asian countries billions of dollars in health care and related costs.

The Fund is also strengthening health systems and supply chain management in order to ensure uninterrupted supplies of contraceptives, improving the technical capacity of healthcare providers, including counsellors, and advocating for equitable access to quality reproductive health commodities and services.



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Women's Rights and Empowerment

The Asia and the Pacific region has among the poorest development indicators for women and girls. Deep-rooted gender inequality and discriminatory norms and practices reinforce patriarchal systems. Women in the region have the lowest rates of political representation and suffer from a high prevalence of gender-based violence.

Harmful practices, such as child marriage and gender-biased sex selection due to son preference, reinforce gender inequality across the region. Child marriage and early motherhood can severely curtail educational and employment opportunities for adolescent girls and young women, while threatening their survival and well-being.

Gender-based violence is endemic in the region. Women and girls are frequently subjected to all forms of violence and abuse. There is a lack of adequate data to inform policy and programme interventions, and insufficient monitoring to address impunity and provide protection. During conflicts and natural disasters, social structures are further destabilized, leaving many women and girls vulnerable to increased sexual violence, exploitative labour and trafficking.

UNFPA works in close partnership with Governments, other UN agencies and civil society networks to address violence against women and girls by strengthening national capacities to gather evidence to guide policy and programme responses, and to deal with it as a public health issue by making a wide range of services, including counselling and safe spaces, available for victims and survivors.





UNFPA has consistently promoted gender equality and the rights of women and adolescent girls through evidence-based advocacy and policy dialogue with government officials, civil society organizations, and community and religious leaders to ensure that these perspectives are integrated into national policies, development frameworks and laws.

Additionally, the Fund has fostered an enabling environment for rights-based and gender-sensitive approaches, working with men and boys as change agents to prevent gender-based violence, and working to eliminate gender discrimination and harmful practices such as child marriage and son preference.

Combating Gender-based Violence in Nepal

After a decade-long conflict in Nepal, UNFPA and UNICEF joined forces to provide health, psychosocial and legal support to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in the most conflict-affected areas of the country. A comprehensive initiative called Choose your Future reached nearly 36,500 women and girls through integrated interventions addressing a range of issues, including reproductive and sexual health, hygiene, HIV prevention, and their rights and responsibilities..

Promoting the Reproductive and Sexual Health of Young People

The Asia and the Pacific region has over 1 billion young people aged 10-24, constituting close to 55 per cent of the global youth population. Sexual and reproductive health issues, including adolescent pregnancy and childbirth, unsafe abortion and sexually transmitted infections, are challenges that need to be addressed so that young people can achieve their potential.

UNFPA is working with governments and civil society organizations to ensure that adolescents and young people have the knowledge and life skills needed for a healthy, productive future. Central to this is UNFPA's ongoing work supporting youth policy development and implementation, and collecting and analysing data to inform evidence-based policies and effective programming.

The Fund promotes comprehensive sexuality education for both in- and out-of-school adolescents by promoting supportive national policies, strengthening curricula, training teachers and developing tools to measure implementation in schools. Comprehensive sexuality education is complemented by the use of information communication technologies such as the Internet and social media, improving young people's access to reliable information.

UNFPA promotes the scaling up of youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services that respect clients' right to confidentiality and do not judge, stigmatize or discriminate against them, and it advocates for the elimination of legal and policy barriers to accessing information and services.

UNFPA also supports and partners with youth-led organizations in the region and provides opportunities for young people to participate in high-level advocacy events such as the Bali Youth Forum (2012) and the Sixth Asia-Pacific Population Conference (2013). The Y-PEER, or youth peer education initiative, active throughout the region, trains thousands of young people to be advocates for and sources of factual information on sexual and reproductive health, and to act as mentors to their peers on these important life-shaping issues.



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Advancing Effective Responses to HIV Infection

The region has seen impressive progress in combating HIV: there has been a 20 per cent reduction in new HIV infections since 2001. Yet, the epidemic continues to outpace the response. There are almost two new infections for every person on treatment. New HIV infections continue to be concentrated among key affected populations - injecting drug users, sex workers, men having sex with men, and transgender people.

UNFPA supports the scaling up of evidence- and rights-based responses to HIV, focusing on addressing sexual transmission among key affected populations, and tackling the legal, policy and attitudinal barriers that impact on these efforts. Laws that criminalize those living with HIV fuel stigma, discrimination and violence, and undermine efforts to prevent HIV infection and ensure that people living with HIV have access to treatment, care and support.

UNFPA's work in addressing HIV focuses on integrating HIV and sexual and reproductive health services. This helps to ensure that the HIV and sexual and reproductive health needs of people living with HIV, and those at higher risk of infection, are met, and that our efforts achieve positive outcomes in addressing both HIV and sexual and reproductive health.

Responding to Humanitarian Disasters and Conflicts

The Asia and the Pacific region is the most disaster-prone area in the world. The Global Risks Atlas 2013, which evaluates 179 countries, puts 3 out of 10 countries in the region in the Extreme to High Risk categories. In addition to cyclical floods, earthquakes, and other disasters, a number of countries are experiencing protracted civil conflict. Over the past four decades, the average number of people affected by annual flooding more than doubled, from 29.5 million to over 63 million, while populations in cyclone-prone areas jumped from 71 million to over 120 million.

In times of upheaval or natural disasters, pregnancy-related deaths and gender-based violence soar. Many women lose access to essential reproductive health services and give birth in appalling conditions without access to safe delivery services and life saving care.

UNFPA's country offices in the Asia and the Pacific region work closely with national governments and key civil society and other partners to ensure that the reproductive health and protection needs of women and girls are addressed before, during and after a crisis. UNFPA takes the lead with national partners to coordinate the prevention and response to gender-based violence, and the sexual and reproductive health response to disasters and conflicts. It works to ensure that life-saving supplies and services are accessible for the affected population, paying particular attention to the special needs of women and young people. Priority areas include maternal health, family planning, prevention of sexually transmitted infections including HIV, adolescent health, and combating gender-based violence.



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Responding to Natural Disasters in Pakistan

In Pakistan, following the terrible earthquake of 2005 and the devastating floods of 2010, 2011 and 2012, UNFPA responded rapidly with life-saving maternal and child health services. Thousands of people stranded in badly affected communities were reached by mobile service units—vans equipped to be turned into clinics quickly. Each unit has a cabin holding a delivery couch and medical instruments; tents on either side serve as an outpatient area and a pharmacy. After the earthquake, which killed 80,000 people and left 3.5 million homeless, UNFPA-supported medical staff treated 200,000 patients and provided emergency obstetric care for 1,600 women. In the three consecutive years of flooding, the Fund sent mobile units where needed and restored reproductive health services to flood-affected health facilities, aiding over 2 million women and adolescent girls.

Where We Work

The UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Office (APRO), in Bangkok, oversees a network of 23 country and subregional offices across Asia and the Pacific. APRO provides leadership in positioning the ICPD agenda at forefront of poverty reduction and development strategies throughout the Asia and the Pacific region. APRO is staffed by a team of technical, programme, and operations staff who provide countries with integrated support to strengthen national capacities and build strategic partnerships with regional institutions and development partners for the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and the MDGs.

At the request of host Governments, the UNFPA country offices engage in advocacy and policy dialogue, and manage UNFPA-supported country programmes that help develop national capacity to address sexual and reproductive health- and population-related challenges. In addition to government partners, UNFPA works closely with civil society organizations, other UN agencies and development partners.





UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Office

United Nations Building
Rajdamnern Nok Avenue
Bangkok 10200, Thailand

asiapacific.unfpa.org

