



**TAKING STOCK:**  
**SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE  
HEALTH AND RIGHTS**  
**in CLIMATE**  
**COMMITMENTS**

**AN ASIA AND THE  
PACIFIC REVIEW SUMMARY**

Sexual and reproductive health and rights and rights-based approaches in national climate documents: **A review of Nationally Determined Contributions since 2020 in Asia and the Pacific**



# INTRODUCTION

Climate change has lasting impacts on human health and disproportionately affects women and girls.

In many ways, Asia and the Pacific faces more severe climate change impacts than other regions. According to the Sixth Assessment report of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate

Change (IPCC), it will be the region most affected by heavy precipitation, agricultural drought, high temperatures, heatwaves and disasters over the coming decades, as it contains six of the 10 nations most affected by extreme weather events globally. Furthermore, the region is also home to 22 of the world's 52 Small Island Developing States (SIDS), for which the impacts of climate change, including decreased water quality from salinization, declines in fisheries and rising sea levels, represent an existential threat. Although the Asia-Pacific region has made substantial progress in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in recent decades, the benefits and costs of rapid growth in the region have not been shared equitably, and striking gaps in health outcomes persist, with wide ranges in inter- and intracountry indicators of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

Climate change directly and indirectly impacts women and girls and their sexual and reproductive health. Heat, air pollution and climate-related diseases all have adverse impacts on maternal and newborn health outcomes. In addition, climate-related loss of livelihoods increases poverty and food insecurity, which worsen maternal and newborn health and well-being. The

impacts of climate change often result in disruptions to essential services while simultaneously creating conditions of vulnerability that increase the risk of gender-based violence (GBV) and harmful practices such as child marriage. As a region prone to extreme weather events, there is a need for region-specific interventions that address the underlying structures and vulnerabilities, which, if left unaddressed, are likely to further worsen existing gender and health inequalities.

A Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) is a national climate plan, submitted by all signatories of the Paris Agreement, for reducing carbon emissions and adapting to and building resilience to climate change. As the NDCs support countries in a transformative shift towards a more sustainable future, they have the potential to create greater social inclusion and address the disproportionate impacts of climate change on women and girls.



## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY



This study, commissioned by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in collaboration with Queen Mary University of London, aims to provide an overview of the integration of SRHR, GBV, harmful practices and related themes in the NDCs.

The findings provide an entry point for dialogue and action at the global, regional, national and local levels on the intersections between climate change, SRHR, GBV and harmful practices. This study also

identifies the necessary actions for their more meaningful inclusion in climate policy and action, highlighting gaps, opportunities and best practices to allow for stronger language on the aspects of gender and climate negotiations at the global level.

## METHODOLOGY

This review involved a systematic content analysis of the inclusion of SRHR, GBV, harmful practices and five related thematic areas (health, gender, population dynamics, youth and human rights and participation) in NDCs submitted in or after 2020.



The UNFPA Asia and the Pacific region comprises 36 countries; however, only 25 were reviewed as 11 did not have an NDC or update published in and after 2020 or submitted an NDC after completion of the analysis.

The 11 countries include Afghanistan, the Cook Islands, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Islamic Republic of Iran, India, Kiribati, the Federated States of Micronesia, Niue, Palau, Timor-Leste and Tuvalu.



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# FINDINGS

## Sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence and harmful practices

The review of the NDCs shows that eight out of the 25 NDCs reviewed include issues related to SRHR, GBV and harmful practices. Specifically, there were seven references to SRHR, three to GBV and one to harmful practices.

Seven of the total SRHR references were to maternal and newborn health. Two references were to the importance of SRHR information, education and awareness. The quality and detail of these references are highly variable. While some references provide specific key indicators for SRHR, GBV and harmful practices in adaptation measures, others only mention them in broad terms in adaptation plans and others offer only simple descriptions of the current state of SRHR, GBV and harmful practices in the country or describe the negative impacts of climate change.

Examples of best practices include the following (see table 1, next page):

- The Lao People's Democratic Republic highlights the importance of health information and awareness by including an intervention on climate-informed health programmes in its NDC, with a target to inform at least 20 sensitive communities on water, sanitation, hygiene, dengue control, nutrition, women's health, reproductive health and child health, and with progress to be monitored at least four times per year (Lao People's Democratic Republic NDC, 2021: p. 23).

- Papua New Guinea demonstrates the importance of strengthening health systems in response to emerging climate-related diseases by using indicators and designated funding sources. The NDC includes an action to maintain high coverage of long-lasting insecticide-treated nets, with an indicator of success being that, by 2025, at least 85 per cent of pregnant women and children under five years should have slept under a long-lasting insecticide net the previous night, with funding from the Government of Papua New Guinea and The Global Fund (Papua New Guinea NDC, 2020: p. 49).
- Viet Nam recognizes the impacts of climate change on women's health, especially on pregnant women, as well as the higher risk of domestic violence due to family livelihood pressure and higher risk of early marriage (Viet Nam NDC, 2020: p. 14, 15).




**TABLE 1:**  
**Nationally Determined Contributions from Asia and the Pacific cited in this brief**

Country included	Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) reviewed	Submission date	Original language
Lao People's Democratic Republic (the)	<u>Updated NDC</u>	11 May 2021	English
Papua New Guinea	<u>Second NDC</u>	16 December 2020	English
Viet Nam	<u>Updated NDC</u>	11 September 2020	English

## Health

Health is the most extensive and detailed of the thematic areas analysed, with all 25 NDCs containing some reference to health. Prominent health-related themes include extreme weather events and/or disasters (all 25 NDCs), health surveillance including early warning systems (16), recognition of the need for further health-related research (7) and a budget line related to health (6).

## Gender

The majority of the NDCs reviewed (24) make some reference to gender equality. Specific references to gender equality include gender mainstreaming and/or responsiveness (17), women's participation in climate decision-making and action (13) and empowerment and capacity-building of women (8). Thirteen NDCs recognize the disproportionate impacts of climate change on women and girls. The NDCs vary considerably in the extent to which they describe specific interventions to address these gaps.

## Population dynamics, human mobility and urbanization

Nineteen countries address some aspects of population dynamics in their NDCs, while 10 describe urbanization, migration or human displacement.

## Youth

Of the 25 NDCs, 22 mention youth, with 13 recognizing the disproportionate impacts of climate change on young people, eight referencing youth participation and four including young people in disaster risk reduction.

## Leaving no one behind: human rights, participation and consideration of vulnerable groups

Twenty of the NDCs describe segments of their population as vulnerable, with women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons most commonly included as vulnerable groups. However, other segments of society are included to varying degrees. All 25 NDCs reference public participation in climate policy and/or action. Thirteen NDCs mention participatory strategies in sustainable resource management. Nine of the NDCs reference human rights. One NDC upholds the importance of meaningful participation of women, children, youth, persons with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), persons with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, older persons, local communities, civil society, faith-based organizations and the private sector.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## General recommendations

### Data and evidence

- 1. Strengthen the national-level evidence on the impacts of climate change on SRHR, GBV and harmful practices.** This should include improving data systems to better account and forecast for the differentiated impacts of climate change on SRHR, GBV and harmful practices, including through the conduct of gender-responsive climate vulnerability and risk assessments that integrate SRHR and GBV. Detailed country-level research, preferably led by local researchers, on the intersections between climate, SRHR and GBV is required to better support communities at the local and national level but also to contribute to the global evidence base.
- 2. Scale up efforts to collect and use disaggregated data and account for the differentiated impacts of the climate crisis.** The demonstration of such efforts in the NDCs is encouraging. Gender-disaggregated data supports the identification of groups that are more vulnerable to climate impacts and can help mobilize more sensitive and accurate climate action. This better represents the differentiated impacts of the climate crisis while supporting research, data, planning and intervention to reach better outcomes. This also enables gender-sensitive budgeting, including for components related to SRHR and GBV.



## Financing and accountability

- 3. Increase support, funding and evaluation for adaptation and resilience-building efforts, including within NDCs and in the development of climate policies.** While adaptation sections are increasing in frequency and detail within NDCs, greater support, evaluation and financing are required to ensure these policies reflect the needs of underserved populations and topic areas, such as SRHR and GBV.
- 4. Strengthen the integration of costed SRHR and GBV interventions across sectors in climate policy and action.** Include SRHR and GBV issues in domains such as gender and health, as these represent entry points for their inclusion in national climate policies. Costed action, tied to monitoring and indicators that reflect impacts on gender, health and SRHR and GBV, requires more financial and technical support. Many existing interventions, particularly related to gender and health, could begin to provide or increase the integration of programming on SRHR and GBV.
- 5. Strengthen health systems' resilience to climate change by ensuring the inclusion of SRHR and GBV.** This includes ensuring the inclusion of SRHR and GBV in vulnerability risk assessments, disaster preparedness plans and health information management systems. Ensure appropriate human resources are available for health, monitoring and evaluation indicators, the allocation of funds and a coordination mechanism.

## Gender equality and representation

- 6. Scale up and strengthen gender-transformative climate action through the inclusion of SRHR, GBV and harmful practices issues.** This includes the appointment and strengthening of the role of a National Gender and Climate Change Focal Point to be placed in the relevant ministry, as recommended by a decision of the 2019 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP25); the review of existing gender-related climate policies; and the integration of gender-transformative approaches in all aspects of climate change policies and programmes/interventions, based on a solid foundation of context-specific analysis.
- 7. Recognize the impacts of climate change on the drivers of GBV and harmful practices.** Support the development of best practices for responding to GBV and harmful practices, and for ensuring the resilience, including financial, of essential services to prevent and respond to GBV. This can be achieved through partnership with gender and rights actors such as organizations of persons with disabilities, women-led organizations, Indigenous peoples, youth-led organizations and front-line responders.



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**8. Ensure inclusion and a minimum standard of representation in the development and implementation of climate policy at multiple levels.** This includes the inclusion and representation of women, people with diverse SOGIESC, youth, Indigenous peoples, older persons, persons with disabilities and others as relevant.

**10. Mobilize and support young people.**

Support youth climate networks and establish a permanent youth engagement mechanism on climate change at the national level to ensure the mainstreaming of youth priorities across the design and implementation of national climate policy and action.

## Human rights and leaving no one behind

**9. Improve the understanding of the impacts of climate change on SRHR and GBV for people with diverse and underrepresented SOGIESC.** There is insufficient understanding and recognition of the impacts of climate change on people with diverse SOGIESC. Increasing this understanding will require specific, local and sensitive action that is participatory, accountable and calls on existing best practices.

**11. Take an intersectional approach to develop, review and implement climate policy that recognizes the structural drivers of inequality and accounts for multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.** Climate policy and action must recognize how many of the people who already face barriers to SRHR and GBV services and the realization of their reproductive rights are likely to be disproportionately affected by climate change.

**12. Ensure that climate policies are based on human rights and reflect the principles of the ICPD Programme of Action, including protecting the rights of women, children, refugees, displaced persons and persons with disabilities, in climate policy development.**



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A human rights-based approach that supports individuals to make the reproductive choices that best suit their personal circumstances is core to achieving SRHR. Population dynamics are relevant for climate policy and planning and the NDCs reflect on urbanization, changing population size and structure and the need for population dynamics analysis for forward planning.

## Region-specific reflections

### 13. Enhance recognition of climate change impacts on GBV and harmful practices in NDCs and relevant climate policies.

National climate policies should more meaningfully account for the delivery of GBV services during climate-related events. This includes strengthening the engagement with national gender/GBV-focused mechanisms (e.g. ministries, parliamentary caucuses, civil society networks) as well as climate-focused national mechanisms to present regional and national analysis of the interlinkages between climate change, GBV and harmful practices, and collectively develop a consensus on policy advocacy and programming strategies and interventions. This could be achieved through the creation of a common platform for meaningful dialogue, with key mechanisms, networks and leaders engaged in addressing GBV and climate change.

**14. Use adaptation measures for disaster risk reduction as an entry point for SRHR and GBV in climate policies.** Extreme weather events and disasters are discussed in all NDCs, with some noting the role of women in disaster risk reduction. Disaster risk reduction represents a key area to integrate SRHR and GBV. This includes

both the immediate needs of access to emergency contraception and saving lives in obstetric complications, as well as the need to reduce the vulnerability of existing SRHR health systems to absorb the impacts, respond to and recover from climate shocks. Relevant SRHR and GBV aspects must also be sufficiently integrated within anticipatory action and early warning systems.

### 15. Consider and include SRHR and GBV in migration and relocation policies.

NDCs acknowledge that relocations of populations are already ongoing due to both sudden-onset disasters and slow-onset weather events. However, at present, there is no consideration given to SRHR and GBV. Climate and disaster risk reduction policies should recognize the complex social, economic and financial barriers to SRHR and GBV services that migrants can face and ensure the provision of high-quality services. Furthermore, as migration accentuates the risk of GBV, it is crucial to provide access to services that prevent and respond to GBV among migrants.

**16. Use the theme of youth and health to integrate SRHR.** The Asia-Pacific region has the highest number of youth references to health, which represents an important entry point to strengthen adolescent and youth SRHR.

**17. Adopt a broader and more meaningful recognition of the impacts of climate change on SRHR, GBV and harmful practices in national climate policies.** While there are some references to SRHR and GBV in NDCs from the region, there are few details, few indicators and few costings or mechanisms for tangible implementation and action.







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