



**ECOSOC
YOUTH
FORUM**

#YOUTH2030

8th Economic and Social Council Youth Forum

ONLINE REPORTING

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

8 April 2019

CR 8, 1.45-3.45 p.m.

United Nations Headquarters, New York

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<u>CURRENT LANDSCAPE</u>	
What is the current landscape for this region or SDG, including issues, opportunities, recent trends, gaps, challenges?	
- Adolescent and youth population	
The Asia-Pacific region (including Western and Central Asia) contains nearly 60 percent of the world's youth population (58%), with 700 million youth aged 15 to 24 years. In 2020, India will have the highest youth population globally, at 248 million (representing 18 percent of the country's total population). Afghanistan, Micronesia and Timor Leste have the highest percentage of the population who are youth in the region (22%), followed by Nepal and Tonga (21%). In	

comparison, several countries have low percentages of youth populations with Japan lowest at 9% and China at 11%.

- Education

Asia and the Pacific has had significant success in expanding participation in school especially for primary education. By 2016, primary net enrolment was over 93% for the region. The fastest progress was in South and West Asia: between 2000 and 2017 primary net enrolment increased from 77% to 90%. Nevertheless, In Asia, 128 million (almost the half of the global out of school children number) children and youth were still out of school in 2017 – 18 million were of primary school age, 26 million of lower secondary school age, and 84 million of upper secondary school age. The majority of these children were in South and West Asia.

The most extensive global assessment of educational outcomes is the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment, which tests 15-year-olds in 73 school systems around the world, of which 16 are in Asia and the Pacific. In a typical school system about six out of ten students in 2015 had the minimum level of proficiency in mathematics and reading. Of the 16 Asia-Pacific countries, 10 showed better-than-average results, with around 80% of students possessing the minimum levels of proficiency in mathematics and reading. In the other six countries, between 31% and 49% of students met the minimum standard in mathematics and 45% to 63% in reading. The low level of achieving proficiency in mathematics and reading, and the high number of out-of-school children in a considerable number of school systems in the region suggest that these systems are not preparing the majority of students well for the basic knowledge skills that are required for continuous learning.

- Youth unemployment and decent job opportunities

Today, over 63 million young people are unemployed across the globe, and 141 million youth are working, yet living in poverty. Youth unemployment in Asia and the Pacific is expected to reach 27 million youth in 2019, at a time when millions of new job seekers are entering the labour market. Youth living in rural areas, around half of the region's population, are most likely to be among the working poor, facing particular challenges such as limited access to information and education, land, financial services and markets. Moreover, youth's voices are often not heard during the policy process to reflect and address their multifaceted needs. This situation sheds light on the economic potential and role of decent jobs to transform the lives of young women and men across the region.

- Adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights

Youth's sexual and reproductive health has implications for their immediate and future health, well-being and opportunities. Child marriage and adolescent pregnancy cause girls to drop out of education and limit their future employment opportunities. Adolescent pregnancy rates are highest in Nepal, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh, and usually higher in rural areas and lower socioeconomic communities. In Bangladesh, 58% of women 20-24 had given birth as teenagers, with 39% in Nepal and Afghanistan (DHS 2014-2016). Rates of adolescent pregnancy have dropped significantly in most countries in South Asia in the past two to three decades linked to

the decrease in child marriage. However, it is of concern that adolescent pregnancy rates are increasing in South East Asia and Pacific. Young people face many challenges in accessing the SRH services they need to avoid unintended pregnancy. These barriers include legal barriers requiring parental consent for teenagers, social cultural barriers for unmarried sexually active young people as well as financial and other access barriers.

- Peace and security

In 2016, an estimated 408 million youth (aged 15-29) reside in settings affected by armed conflict or organized violence which means that at least 1 in 4 young people are affected by violence or armed conflict. In Asia Pacific, where 60 percent of the world's conflicts are located, young people are affected by a number of protracted crises, long-running conflicts, and humanitarian crises. Moreover, violence against women and girls across the region disrupts lives and threatens security. As per Asia and the Pacific SDG progress report 2017, published by the UN ESCAP, SDG10 and 16 are the only two goals where the region has not made any progress but also regressed, in comparison to 2000 and 2015.

Hence there is an immediate need to address existing shortfalls for promoting peaceful and resilient societies. Across the region, young people are demonstrating their leadership in preventing violence, post-conflict peacebuilding, sustaining peace as well as building resilience in humanitarian contexts. It is crucial to recognize their pivotal role and open avenues for young people's participation at all levels. Young people bridge the silos of development, human rights, humanitarian and peace and security.

- Environmental issues

Asia-Pacific still has a long way to go to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for youth and other groups. Around 1.7 billion people in Asia do not have access to clean water and sanitation, with 780 million practicing open defecation and 80 per cent of wastewater being discharged untreated into waterways. The problem is particularly endemic in rural areas, where only 46 per cent of the population has access to improved sanitation, compared with 75 per cent of those in urban areas. Female youth face significant sanitation challenges, with a lack of menstrual hygiene management and hygiene promotion, particularly in South Asia.

- Tobacco consumption of young people

Tobacco is the only commercial product which, when used exactly as intended, kills half its users. That's 6 million deaths globally every year, approximately 30% of which occur in the World Health Organization (WHO) Western Pacific Region. Most smokers start using tobacco at a young age, almost a quarter of these individuals begins using tobacco before the age of 10, and then continue using it throughout adulthood. Eventually, a significant proportion will experience tobacco-related illness and death. While many new forms of tobacco products are emerging in the market, such as e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products, which creates another risk among youth to start smoking, empowering youth to say no to tobacco and tobacco smoke is in urgent

need if we are to reduce the increasing global burden of non- communicable diseases (NCDs) and to achieve SDG by 2030.

- Youth political participation

Engaging youth as active citizens is integral to promoting and preserving peaceful and prosperous societies. Accordingly, since in the region many youths distrust the political process, there is a need for greater efforts to foster the faith of youth in political systems and promote full and meaningful participation in improving governance and building democratic institutions. This requires dismantling existing barriers to political participation, in particular in the environment that civil society participation is restricted. In this regard, there is a role for public leaders, politicians and policymakers across political parties, and civil society organizations to engage with youth.

YOUTH SOLUTIONS AND ACTIONS

(What are youth doing to address the current situation and leverage opportunities? And what are some of the most transformative solutions?)

In Asia and the Pacific region, young people are already taking actions to make the SDGs a reality in the region. Even though Asia and Pacific is a very diverse region, with countries having very different culture background, in the society, we noticed that young people are always flight in the frontline to advocate for changes. For example, on the issue of gender equality, young people are promoting gender equality social norms actively, leading on campaigns to fight against gender based violence and conduct educational peer education programs to provide knowledge and information on gender equality. Besides that, Youth networks in the region is well connected, in particular in ASEAN countries where platforms are provided to facilitate discussions focusing on key social and economic development issues.

It is worth to note that young people in Asia and Pacific showcased how young people should not be only job seekers but also job creators, taking advantage of the new technology and booming innovation industry. In many countries, young entrepreneurs are already starting their own business on the internet that created large business market and job market. Many of the business initiated by young people has strong focus on social development component.

LOOKING TO THE HORIZON

What can the UN and youth do together to make sure young people's contributions have a deeper and wider impact, and that they are be better served and engaged by member states?

Firstly, the UN and young people should advocate member states to institutionalize youth participation mechanism. In some countries, youth participation is still at the tokenism level. Even though they are consulted in some cases, their voices are not heard by the key policy

makers and they are selectively being invited to speak up. Therefore, it is UN's role to advocate that youth participation should not be limited to minor policies, but all policies that matters to young people, and at national level a sustainable platform should be established to protect young people's participation and ensure that their voices can be heard by policy makers.

Secondly, inequality among young people should be resolved among young people. In Asia and Pacific region, it is recognized that even though the economic development is very fast, the inequality among young people is increasing. Young people from vulnerable background, such as LGBT, young people with disabilities and ethnic minorities are being left behind. In order for young people to better engage with member states, we need to ensure no one is left behind, including young people from vulnerable background. UN in the field needs to implement relevant programs to specifically focus on the development of young people from vulnerable background.

Finally, the UN as the largest international organization should convene dialogues and meetings like ECOSOC Youth Forum, to bring young people and government officials from different countries, so that they could exchange experience and knowledge.