



### **UNFPA statement for Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (19 - 22 September 2022 in Brisbane, Australia)**

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency, would like to begin by expressing our sincere gratitude to the Government of Australia and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) for co-hosting the 2022 Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (APMCDRR) in Brisbane, Australia. As the first regional platform since the COVID-19 pandemic, we are both honored and excited to be a part of this important forum.

The Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction is a key opportunity for the wider DRR community to celebrate progress made to date and to pave the way for accelerated action on unfinished agendas. [The Asia Pacific Action Plan](#) calls for us to protect and promote the rights of marginalized groups and to support universal access to sexual and reproductive health, including the right to live free of violence. Yet, women and girls continue to face adversity in accessing sexual and reproductive health services, experience increased risk of exposure to gender based violence and harmful practices, and lack leadership and decision-making opportunities in disaster risk management.

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by disasters. The impacts of disasters often reflect and reinforce gender inequalities due to underlying and pre-existing gender dynamics that are magnified in crisis settings. Studies have consistently shown that women experience more fatalities and morbidities than men in disasters, in countries where women have lower socioeconomic status. The COVID-19 pandemic is no exception, compounding deep-rooted forms of gender discrimination and inequalities, and increasing harm and risks for women, girls, and gender diverse people both in their homes and in their communities.

We must also consider the increasing impact of the climate crisis on our region. In Asia and the Pacific, already the most disaster prone region in the world, we are witnessing an increase in both the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. In 2022 alone, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan have experienced the worst monsoon floods in decades, leaving millions displaced and without access to basic services and supplies. The intensification of storms due to global warming is also affecting countries like the Philippines, which sees an average of 20 storms and typhoons a year and is being hit with more destructive super typhoons such as Super Typhoon Rai, which made landfall at the end of 2021.

Since 2015, UNFPA manages a '[Regional Prepositioning Initiative](#)' in partnership with the Government of Australia, a flagship program to strengthen preparedness and build resilience across Asia and the Pacific. The Initiative ensures that prepositioned supplies can be immediately distributed, frontline workers are capacitated and that the policy environment and physical infrastructure support continued access to quality lifesaving sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence response services following an emergency.



The Initiative has been transformative in supporting faster and more effective responses and for setting a new standard for inclusive and accountable responses to leave no one behind. Through employing a gender responsive approach, the Initiative has improved the accountability and quality of disaster risk management strategies. Through consultations with affected populations, content of supplies has been customised for women and girls with disabilities; transgender communities; older men and women; adolescent girls and boys; as well as pregnant and new mothers. Engagement with Organizations of People with Disabilities and enabling them to take ownership over disaster risk management have been critical to meet the actual needs of women and girls with disabilities. Through meaningful engagement with affected communities, in all their diversity, where they are part of customizing the content of supplies, developing distribution strategies and contributing to disaster risk reduction strategies, UNFPA and partners are demonstrating our collective commitment to accountability to affected populations.

The shifting humanitarian landscape within the Asia Pacific region is also creating opportunities for development and humanitarian actors to work together across the triple nexus, and for local and national actors, particularly women and youth-led organizations, to innovate, adapt and lead community-based solutions to respond to critical issues magnified by crises, such as the increase in risk of exposure to gender-based violence and harmful practices. The importance of providing integrated support for women's health and wellbeing- particularly in relation to their sexual and reproductive health and rights- cannot be understated. Recognizing the gendered dimensions of disaster impacts can help to inform tailored strategies to reduce disaster risks and build resilience for different vulnerable populations.

UNFPA has been supporting various regional and country-level initiatives to ensure that national disaster risk reduction, preparedness and climate adaptation strategies prioritize sexual and reproductive health and rights, and prevention and response to gender based violence. Since 2018, UNFPA, in partnership with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), has provided technical leadership to ensure the quality and availability of Common Operational Datasets- Population Statistics (COD-PS) through identification of the best available sex and age disaggregated datasets for each country. Reliable high quality population data is critical for identifying and estimating the needs of different populations affected by a crisis- such as women of reproductive age, pregnant women, adolescents and youth, people living with disabilities and older persons- and informs preparedness, disaster risk management, recovery and post-recovery planning. In 2022, UNFPA produced nine COD-PS updates for countries in Asia and the Pacific, including Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

In the Asia Pacific region, it is estimated that there are over 650 million persons with disabilities. However, without accurate, timely and disaggregated data, countries are unable to develop effective policies and programmes, monitor the wellbeing of persons with disabilities and evaluate the equity and impact of both development and humanitarian efforts. This endangers country commitments to 'leave no one behind' and undermines their obligations to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. UNFPA Asia and the Pacific has partnered with CBM Global, the Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities, the International Disability Alliance, and other key regional stakeholders to develop and implement the *Disability Data Advocacy Training Package* for Organizations of Persons with Disabilities, and provides training and



support to build awareness and technical capacity of national statistics offices, NGOs, donors, and related UN entities on disability data in the region.

As one of the Executive Partners of The Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative (CADRI), UNFPA is committed to continue building capacity of governments and national partners to ensure that national disaster risk reduction efforts are not only inclusive and take into account the unique needs of women and girls and other vulnerable groups, but are also gender transformative. In light of this, UNFPA is currently leading a capacity building initiative with 14 government representatives in the region to strengthen the capacity for coordination of gender-based violence response in disaster context.

We must collectively ensure that disaster risk reduction is gender transformative, builds resilience not just of our infrastructure and economies, but also of our communities and people, particularly women and girls, and advances their rights and health. Women and girls and their meaningful participation in leadership and decision-making are essential in this process. The cost of inaction will be the most vulnerable, especially women and girls, being even further left behind. Ensuring resilient, equitable, sustainable and climate-sensitive societies not only is critical to protect sustainable development gains, but is also a necessity for all of us to thrive.