

CONCLUSIONS

Young people in Asia and the Pacific live in diverse socio-cultural contexts, yet they share important challenges and opportunities related to their SRH. In all countries, increasing access to media, urbanisation and globalisation are contributing to changing sexual values, norms and behaviours of young people, often in conflict with the traditional, conservative socio-cultural attitudes towards adolescent sexuality. These factors contribute to significant barriers that limit young people's access to the information and services that they need to make a healthy transition into adulthood.

A significant proportion of young people in the region are sexually active, and while for many the onset of sexual activity is associated with marriage, an increasing number are initiating sex before marriage. The available information indicates that most are under-prepared for this transition, having inadequate knowledge and life-skills to negotiate safe and consensual relationships, and facing considerable barriers to accessing quality services and commodities needed to avoid unsafe sex and its consequences. As a result, both married and unmarried young people are at risk of poor outcomes such as early and unintended pregnancy, unsafe abortion, and STIs.

Important progress has been made in some areas: the prevalence of traditional child marriage and adolescent childbearing has declined significantly in South Asia, and the demand for family planning satisfied by modern methods in married women is high in some countries. But significant challenges remain. Adolescent fertility rates have remained stagnant or are increasing in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, a substantial number of girls experience intimate partner or sexual violence, and almost 27 million young women were married before the age of 18 years. Young people with diverse SOGI/E, and young key populations, continue to face enormous stigma and discrimination, and experience a high burden of preventable poor SRH.

The majority of countries in the region have introduced legislation, policies and programmes to address key priorities such as child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, comprehensive sexuality education, and adolescent-responsive health care. However, implementation and quality assurance remain challenging in many settings. Weak systems and poor integration across sectors, entrenched gender inequality, and stigmatization of adolescent sexuality outside of marriage continue to deny young people access to essential SRH information and services, and limits their agency with respect to their own SRH. Services need to be tailored for both rural and urban youth, with a particular focus on reaching marginalized young people. The full and meaningful participation of young people in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes is critical if SRH and rights are to be realised for all young people in Asia and the Pacific.

The data in this report reflects the status of SRH of young people in the region before COVID-19, and therefore can be used as a baseline to measure the pandemic's effect

on the already limited access of young people to SRH services.

BOX 13. KEY ACTIONS TO ADVANCE YOUNG PEOPLE'S SRH AND RIGHTS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

- Ensure the full and meaningful participation of young people in the development, implementation and evaluation of SRH policies and programmes
- **Supportive legislation:**
 - o Prohibit forced marriage before the age of 18 years for girls and boys
 - o Prohibit sexual violence, including within marriage
 - o Prohibit child sexual abuse and exploitation
 - o Decriminalise consensual same-sex sexual activity and transgender persons
 - o Decriminalise consensual sex between young people close in age (<3 years)
 - o Decriminalise premarital sex
 - o Remove age, marital status, and mandatory parental consent requirements to access SRH services and commodities
 - o Ensure legal protection against discrimination on the basis of gender identity, sexual orientation, disability
- **Strengthen the quality and coverage of comprehensive sexuality education:**
 - o Develop comprehensive curricula that meet international standards, in particular rights-based approaches that include content related to gender, relationships, positive sexuality, violence, and diversity
 - o Introduce CSE from early primary school
 - o Improve teacher training and support
 - o Strengthen the delivery and evaluation of approaches to reach out-of-school and marginalised adolescents
 - o Monitor and evaluate the implementation of CSE
- **Strengthen adolescent-responsive SRH services**
 - o Include a specific focus on adolescents and adolescent SRH in universal health coverage policy, plans and financing mechanisms
 - o Remove policies and regulations that require minimum age, mandatory parental or spousal consent, and other regulatory barriers that limit access for unmarried, migrant, or displaced young people
 - o Ensure provision of a comprehensive package of SRH services including contraception, maternity care, comprehensive abortion care (to the fullest extent of the law), prevention and management of STIs and HIV, prevention of cervical cancer, menstrual health, sexual and gender-based violence
 - o Tailor services for rural and urban youth, with a particular focus on reaching marginalised adolescents and youth
 - o Provide competency-based training of providers in non-judgmental counselling and services for adolescents, and improve supportive supervision
 - o Monitor and evaluate national AFPHS standards
- **Address community attitudes, norms and barriers:**
 - o Educate and mobilise families, communities and leaders to address harmful cultural, religious and gender norms that promote non-consensual early marriage, gender-based violence, stigmatise adolescent sexuality, and stigmatise young people with diverse SOGI/E
 - o Build community support for CSE and adolescent SRH services, including contraception
 - o Engage parents to improve support for adolescent SRH and increase parent-adolescent communication
 - o Engage boys and men to address harmful gender norms that limit girls' agency and contribute to sexual violence and coercion
- Research to better understand the influence of digital media on young people's SRH, and effective approaches to improve SRH using these platforms
- **Strengthen data and research to inform policies and programmes, including data for unmarried sexually active adolescents, young people with diverse SOGI/E, young key populations, young people with disability, and other marginalised adolescents**