

**Commission on Population and Development**  
**Fifty-sixth session**  
**10 – 14 April 2023**  
*Population, education and sustainable development*

**Oral Statement submitted by the Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW).**

Thank you, Chair. I am Sai Jyothirmai Racherla from the Asian Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW). We welcome the Commission on Population and Development, 56th Session theme on “Population, Education and Sustainable Development”.

It has been three years since the COVID-19 pandemic. While the pandemic has affected us all in different ways, it is clear that the most vulnerable have been hit the most with deeper and longer lasting impact including in education.

According to UNESCO estimates, about 12 million children from pre-primary to university level will drop out from school in South and West Asia as a result of the pandemic, with pre-primary affected most profoundly. In the East Asia and Pacific region, almost 1.2 million girls are at risk of not returning to school. In Asia and the Pacific region as well as globally, the pandemic has heavily disrupted education and deepened the learning crisis.

More than one academic year has been lost for many children, adolescents and young people, with life changing negative consequences, including an increase in gender-based violence and harmful traditional practices such as child marriages, especially among marginalised communities. Evidence in the region shows that the majority of adolescents lack the comprehensive sexuality education required to make decisions concerning their sexuality, health and well-being leaving them vulnerable to coercion, sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancy. These negative sexual and reproductive health outcomes have an impact on continuing education and their sustainable development and well-being especially for vulnerable and marginalized girls, including persons with disabilities.

Overall, Dear Chair,

It is more important than ever now, to reaffirm our commitment to education, with focus on comprehensive sexuality education, as a fundamental human right, and reaffirm our commitment to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 on quality and holistic education.

There is an urgent need to reimagine and transform education and its systems to become more equitable, inclusive, relevant, flexible, and resilient, and address the current learning crisis, build more peaceful, inclusive, and sustainable societies, and realise Sustainable Development Goal 4 with meaningful youth participation. (APREMC, 2022).

With this we urge Member States to:

- Urgently transform education and its systems to become resilient and prepared for future shocks, address inequalities and the learning crisis, and contribute to peaceful, inclusive, equitable and sustainable futures for humanity and the planet.
- Eliminate barriers to accessing education and learning for persons with disabilities, ethnic and linguistic minorities, girls, and children living in extreme poverty and/or in remote locations and those from refugee and migrant families.
- Re-design curricula to provide learners with foundational, digital, 21st century and socioemotional competencies, and the delivery of education for sustainable development, global citizenship and comprehensive sexuality education . As agreed in the Mid-Term Review of the 6th Asian and Pacific Population Conference in 2018, expand investments in CSE.
- Promote rights-based laws and regulate data privacy to ensure digital security for young people of all ages (APFSD Youth Call to Action 2022).
- Prioritise and protect financing of public education in national budgets and progressively increase financing of education to adhere to the minimum benchmark of 4-6% of the Gross Domestic Product and/or 15%-20% of total public expenditure according to the country context.
- Enhance cross-sectoral collaboration between health, education and other relevant ministries, local governments, communities, and parents to ensure inclusive and protective learning environments in and around schools, delivering adequate services and preparing for future risks, including climate change and other humanitarian disasters.