

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

ARAB STATES 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 the Arab States region**



INTRODUCTION

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

The Sixth Assessment Report of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) highlights the Arab States as one of the regions most vulnerable to climate change impacts globally. The region contains 14 of the world's 20 most water-stressed countries. The Arab States are also a hotspot for many of the world's conflicts and crises, hosting both internally and externally displaced persons. In 2020, Arab countries hosted around 41.4 million migrants and refugees, representing almost 15 per cent of international migrants and refugees worldwide. In addition, the Middle East and North Africa region hosted 15.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), 26 per cent of the global total. These numbers are expected to grow owing to the strong links between the causes of conflict, food insecurity and vulnerability to climate impacts. The Arab States continue to experience one of the worst protracted drought cycles in history, the impacts of which converge with the impacts of global food insecurity and fuel and financial crises. Income levels in the Arab States vary widely, with a mix of economies and both high and low rankings on the Human Development Index (HDI). The region is home to several of the world's poorest nations, which lack the financial resources required to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Climate change directly and indirectly impacts women and girls and their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

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 one of the regions most prone to climate-related water stress, food insecurity and droughts, there is a need for context-specific interventions in the Arab States region 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 Arab States Regional Office covers 20 countries; however, only 15 were included in the review, as Algeria, Djibouti, Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen

did not have an NDC or an NDC update published in or after 2020 at the time of completion of the analysis in August 2022.

Above left photo: © UNFPA/Karam Al-Masri • Above right photo: © UNFPA Yemen

FINDINGS

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

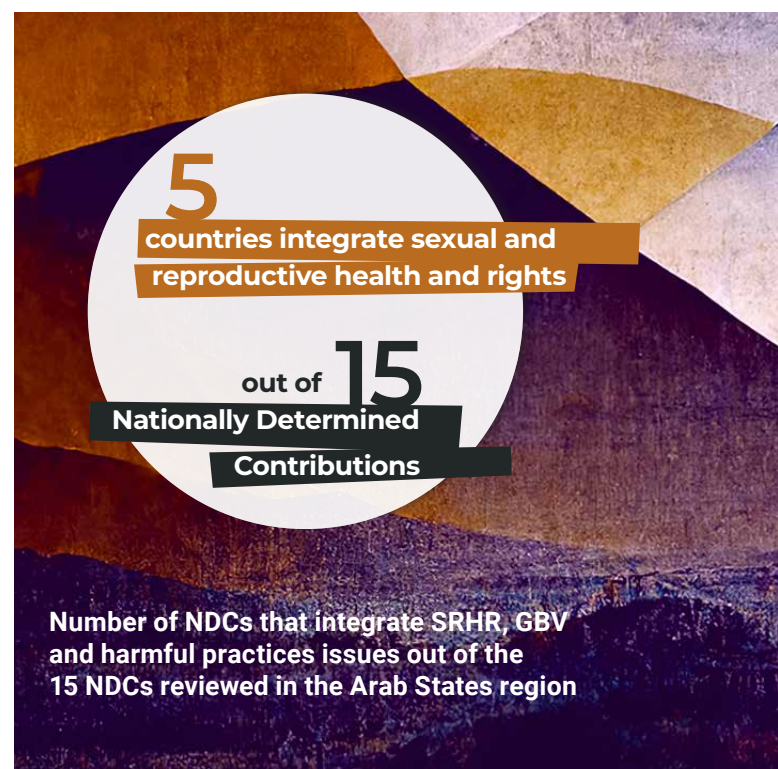
The review of the NDCs shows that five out of the 15 NDCs reviewed include issues related to SRHR and GBV. While most of these references acknowledge the impacts of climate change on SRHR and GBV, only a few outline specific interventions and/or initiatives to strengthen resilience to climate change through SRHR or GBV services. There are three references to maternal health, specifically family health, and three references to GBV. One reference highlights the importance of SRHR information and awareness. Tunisia references more than one of these issues in its NDC, while none of the NDCs reviewed references harmful practices. The way SRHR and GBV issues are addressed in these NDCs varies, with some NDCs acknowledging the impacts of climate change on SRHR and GBV, while others also include adaptation measures to address these impacts.

Examples of best practices include the following:

- Jordan includes a measure in its NDC that focuses on women who have experienced some forms of abuse. The intervention covers the most vulnerable groups in the country. It aims “to strengthen social protection systems to cope with climate change consequences and include poor, orphans, elderly, abused women and children” (Jordan NDC, 2021: p. 53).



- The Sudan highlights SRHR in a measure focusing on strengthening health systems to support family and school health programmes (the Sudan interim NDC, 2021: p. 8).
- Tunisia includes an intervention targeting SRHR with a measure to improve women’s health and health services through educational promotion, capacity-building of the health professionals involved in awareness campaigns for the reproductive health of women and preventing and supporting women experiencing domestic violence and GBV (Tunisia NDC, 2021: p. 66).



Health

All of the NDCs make references to health, with all 15 countries referring to extreme weather events and/or disasters; however, only five countries specifically reference SRHR. Water insecurity (14 NDCs) and food insecurity (12 NDCs) are prominent health-related themes, and most countries include measures to increase water and/or food security. Of the 15 NDCs, 11 reference climate-related diseases, five describe increased mortality due to climate change and two recognize the need for further climate-related health research.

Gender

Eleven countries mention gender in their NDCs, but the details vary considerably. The most significant references to gender are as follows: nine NDCs include an element of gender mainstreaming and/or sensitivity, eight describe women's participation, seven recognize the disproportionate impacts of climate change on women and six describe women and agriculture.

Population dynamics, human mobility and urbanization

Thirteen NDCs describe the national population or aspects of its dynamics, of which nine describe migration, urbanization or human displacement.

Youth

Of the 15 countries, 11 reference youth, with seven acknowledging the disproportionate impacts of climate change on young people, six describing youth participation and four including empowerment and capacity-building measures.

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

The majority (11) of the NDCs include vulnerable groups as an important consideration in developing the NDC. Nearly all (14) of the NDCs mention the participation of the population in climate policy and/or NDC development. Although most describe the development process as participatory, far fewer give details on the actual process. Eleven countries describe various participatory initiatives in natural resource management, such as coral reef and mangrove restoration, fisheries and forestry, and three NDCs refer to human rights.



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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.



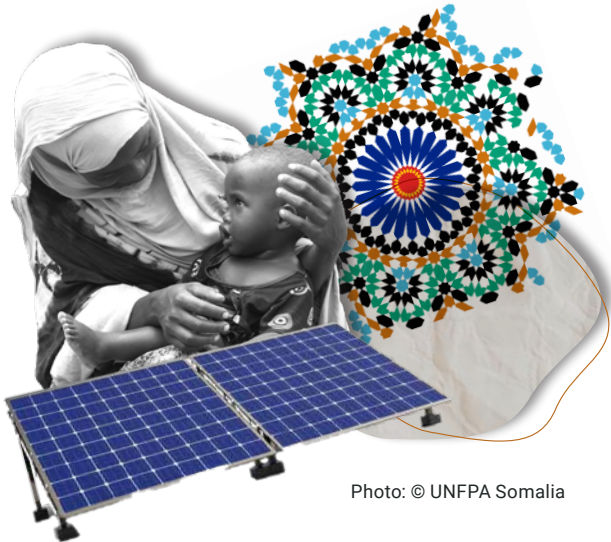


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Financing and accountability

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' groups, youth-led organizations and front-line responders.
8. **Ensure inclusion and a minimum standard of representation in the development and implementation of climate policy at multiple levels.** This includes women, people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), youth, Indigenous peoples, older people, persons with disabilities and others as relevant.





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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.

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.

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. 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.



13. 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. 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

14. Bring wider and more meaningful recognition of the impacts of climate change on SRHR, GBV and harmful practices to national climate policies across the Arab States region. While there are some references to SRHR and GBV in NDCs from the region, there are few details, no indicators and no costing or mechanisms for tangible implementation and action. There are also no mentions of harmful practices.

15. Strengthen the gender responsiveness of the NDCs and commit to meaningful action to support women and girls. Across the global review, the Arab States had the fewest references to gender, and most references were not supported with meaningful descriptions of action. Many references reflected the language from the Paris Agreement but were not followed through with country-level inclusion.

16. Increase gender responsiveness in climate action related to water and food security. Food and water insecurity is highlighted as a challenge for the region, but the differentiated impacts on groups with increased vulnerabilities, such as women and children, are not considered.

17. Protect the rights of displaced persons. Although three countries refer to conflict-induced human displacement and many consider refugees a vulnerable population, only Somalia provides measures to increase the resilience of internally displaced persons. NDCs should increase their recognition and commitment to protect the rights of persons displaced due to conflict. This includes providing – and ensuring access to – high-quality SRHR and GBV services.



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