Key issues in East Asia and the Pacific

Despite the considerable progress in improving access to safe drinking water and sanitation over recent decades in East Asia and the Pacific, around 519 million people in 2017 were still without access to at least basic sanitation, and more than 75 million people, mostly poor, still practiced open defecation. Indonesia has the third highest number of people defecating in the open in the world (32 million). Other countries in the region with more than 5 million people practicing open defecation are China (21 million), Cambodia (6 million) and the Philippines (6 million).¹ With regards to access to safe water supplies, 727 million people do not have access to piped water supplies and in 6 of the 12 East Asia countries, the urban-rural gap for access is higher than the global average of 15 per cent. In the Pacific sub-region, the gap (51 per cent) is higher than in any other UNICEF region and the situation has been stagnant over recent decades. Access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in schools is also a cause for concern, with sanitation coverage in the region lagging 8 percentage points behind the global average. Misconceptions and inadequate information about menstrual hygiene management negatively impacts upon the lives of many girls. Similarly, neonatal deaths, which are mostly preventable, are attributed to poor access to WASH in healthcare facilities.

Critical issues affecting the poorest and most vulnerable families across the region include: significant disparity in WASH coverage between and within countries; inequity between rich and poor, and rural and urban households in access to sustainable and safely managed water and sanitation in households, schools and healthcare facilities; and emerging issues related to water quality and the detrimental impact of climate change.

Driving results for children

Progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6\(^2\) requires the implementation of WASH-specific and context-specific interventions. UNICEF prioritizes support to: (1) achieving sustainable open defecation-free status and changes in social norms and behaviour regarding sanitation and hygiene; (2) increased prioritization of WASH in schools, in healthcare facilities and for the urban poor; and (3) sustainable and climate-resilient WASH services, including in emergencies.

Key programme strategies

**Systems and capacity**
- Strengthen WASH systems and programmes, including innovative approaches and establishing standards for WASH in schools, healthcare facilities and urban settings.
- Support development and testing of equitable and sustainable WASH services for ending open defecation at scale and improving the quality of sanitation services.
- Strengthen national WASH monitoring systems and data analysis, including support for improved regional platforms for tracking country progress, and contribute to regional and global results SDG 6 results.
- Support joint nutrition-WASH action contributing to addressing stunting.
- Adopt and roll-out Climate Resilient WASH Framework and risk-informed programming, and support child- and climate-resilient risk approaches.
- Strengthen emergency preparedness and response capacity and resilience for safe management of WASH services.

**Data, evidence and knowledge**
- Conduct assessment of WASH in healthcare facilities and assess the key drivers of access to sustainable WASH services for the urban poor.
- Systematically document and use evidence-based case studies of equitable WASH approaches and innovation.
- Facilitate South-South learning exchange and knowledge management, particularly around innovative approaches to WASH challenges.
- Assess the effectiveness and efficiency of key WASH programmes and multi-sectoral approaches.

**Governance, policy and budget**
- Provide technical support to strengthen the enabling environment including joint sector reviews, evidence-based national WASH strategies and policies reflecting community needs and priorities, promoting prioritization of WASH in schools, in healthcare facilities and in workplaces.
- Advocate for access to WASH for the poorest households is considered in social protection systems, particularly in emergency response.
- Provide technical support to budget analysis and promote increased public and innovative WASH financing.
- Strengthen cross-sectoral coordination with education, health, nutrition, emergency and public finance management for synergy and integration.

**Partnerships and alliances**
- Extend advocacy and technical support to global/regional inter-governmental institutions, including the Sanitation and Water for All Political Forum and ASEAN, to increase political focus on and prioritization of WASH.
- Collaborate with Singapore Water Academy for quality training and capacity building initiatives in WASH.
- Engage with international financial institutions to advocate for and promote increased external and domestic financing for WASH, including exploring joint climate-resilient WASH action and WASH for the urban poor and vulnerable.
- Coordinate joint action with UN agencies for policy advocacy, standard setting, technical support and strengthening SDG WASH monitoring.
- Establish partnerships with private sector and non-governmental organizations to identify and test innovative WASH approaches and models.

**Behaviour change**
- Promote hygiene and sanitation behaviour change as part of the Community-Led Total Sanitation and comprehensive joint nutrition-WASH behaviour and care practices strategy for promoting family care and hygiene practices.
- Support national behaviour change strategies and campaigns such as Global Handwashing Day and World Toilet Day to encourage change in social norms.
- Integrate behaviour change for health, nutrition, early childhood, sanitation and hygiene to challenge existing social norms around water safety, menstrual hygiene management and other key sanitation and hygiene behaviours and practices in the development and humanitarian contexts.

---

\(^2\) “Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.”