

# **Elevating Rights and Choices for All:**

## **Guidance Note for Applying a Human Rights Based Approach to Programming**



# Acknowledgments

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# Abbreviations and acronyms

AAAAQ	Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability, Quality
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CESCR	Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
GBV	Gender-based violence
GEWE	Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment
HRBA	Human rights-based approach
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
LNOB	Leaving No One Behind
NHRI	National Human Rights Institutions
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights)
SRH	Sexual and reproductive health
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UNDS	United Nations development system
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UNSDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Group
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
VAW	Violence against women
WHO	World Health Organization

# Introduction

A powerful human rights-based framework for our work was set in place by the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and its Programme of Action, which recognized that sexual and reproductive health services must be guided by the human rights of individuals and couples. It thereby reframed population issues from an emphasis on population numbers to an emphasis on human rights.

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, has supported efforts to operationalize the human rights-based dimensions of the ICPD Programme of Action and to strengthen its normative framework. In these efforts, UNFPA has achieved a number of notable results and played a leadership role in translating international human rights norms into country-level action. This work has evolved over the years as research and knowledge in this area has grown, and also as the internal and external political context for this work has changed.

Within UNFPA, there has been a growing appreciation for the necessity of applying a human rights-based approach to the programming process. This understanding has been shaped by the increasing consensus, as reflected in the various ICPD reviews, that to achieve the full vision of the ICPD, countries must take actions beyond the health sector to change social norms, laws and policies to uphold human rights. Particularly important are reforms that promote gender equality and women's rights and contribute to women having greater control over their own bodies and lives.





The ICPD Beyond 2014 International Conference on Human Rights set out three key areas where action is needed in order to operationalize the human rights-based dimensions of the ICPD: Equality, Quality and Accountability.

The ICPD+25 Summit in Nairobi in November 2019 further emphasized the urgent need to address the unequal power dynamics and stigma that underpin discrimination and violence and that can be entrenched in law, policies and practice; the importance of championing inclusion in all forms, in particularly discrimination against women; and the need to ensure accountability for the right to sexual and reproductive health.

The present publication, *Guidance Note for Applying a Human Rights-Based Approach to Programming in UNFPA*, provides the organization with a clear and comprehensive direction for its human rights-based work to support efforts in elevating the centrality of rights and choices and accelerate the promise of the ICPD in the Decade of Action to deliver on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Taking its cue from the ICPD Beyond 2014 conference outcome document, the Guidance Note is built around three key components for action by countries with the support of UNFPA: Equality & Non-discrimination, Quality and Accountability.



# Rationale and purpose

In April 2020, the United Nations Secretary-General said that “people – and their rights – must be front and centre” of our response to COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> Since then the worsening pandemic has only served to underline the importance of human rights for shaping the response to this public health emergency and its broader impact on people’s lives and livelihoods.

The pandemic is taking place against a backdrop of rising violence and pushback against human rights, where hard-won gains in women’s rights, in particular sexual and reproductive rights, are increasingly contested. At the same time, States have legally binding obligations under international human rights law, and UNFPA has a responsibility to support States in meeting these obligations and promoting the norms and values of the UN Charter. Today’s complex context calls for UNFPA to have a deliberate, strategic and coherent approach to its human rights work.

Embedding human rights into the work of UNFPA is critical to ensuring that we achieve the full vision of the ICPD Programme of Action and the transformative ambition of the Sustainable Development Goals. In a context of growing inequalities, both within and across countries, it has been widely recognized<sup>2</sup> that it is only by addressing structural poverty, inequalities and violations of human rights that the gaps in meeting the vision of the ICPD will be closed. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is grounded in human rights and puts equality and non-discrimination at the centre of its efforts, provides a major opportunity to accelerate efforts to mainstream and promote human rights throughout UNFPA’s work.

The United Nations development system reform resolution recognizes that the United Nations’ presence is based on national priorities, which also include obligations of States under law. The United Nations’ norms and values provide UNFPA with an opportunity for partnership across United Nations agencies and for its strategic positioning within the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). Related guidance by the UN Sustainable Development Group includes “the human rights-based

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