

COUNTRY YOUTH

CALL TO ACTION 2025

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Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science and evidence based solutions for the 2030 agenda and its SDGs for leaving no young person behind in Asia and the Pacific



PHILIPPINES

Situational Analysis

The Philippines has crafted legislation that aligns with relevant SDG targets. As it faces systemic gaps in implementation, it may strengthen capacities to improve the provision of social services and include marginalized, excluded, and vulnerable groups (MEVs) in decision-making.

SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being

In terms of Target 3.8, the Philippines passed the Universal Health Care Act of 2019 to include all Filipinos under PhilHealth's National Health Insurance Program (Section 5). Sections 19 and 41 also mandate streamlining LGUs health systems with provincial and city-wide ones. However, two root causes impede most LGUs from undergoing the preparatory phase. For one, they lack access to primary healthcare facilities that curb outbreaks of communicable diseases like tuberculosis, leptospirosis, & dengue (3.3), prevent non-communicable ones like coronary heart disease & stroke (3.4), and uplift mental well-being. Moreover, the lack of opportunities to subsidize services and humanize working conditions in public hospitals compels at least 120,000 medical workforces to migrate outside. As such, this crisis precipitates a shortage of human resources, which are key to carrying out the facilities previously cited (3.c).

SDG 5: Gender Equality

The Philippines has spearheaded the region's mainstreaming of gender equality (5.c) through the Magna Carta of Women of 2009. Such law honors the rights of women and strives to curb gender-based violence and other forms of discrimination. However, the country

dropped by 9 places from 16th (2023) to 25th (2024) in the Global Gender Gap Index. The report mainly attributed this to stalled efforts for the political empowerment of women and other gender identity groups. For one, the lack of consensus in recognizing the differential realities of the LGBTQIA+ community – apart from binary divisions – stalls the passage of SB No. 689 Anti-Discrimination or SOGIE Bill for meaningful participation (5.5). In parallel, widespread stigma against sexual and reproductive health (5.6) hinders laws aiming to prevent adolescent pregnancy and comprehensive sexuality education (CSE). Without such safeguards, everyone remains prone to crackdowns and other gender-essentialist and state-led forms of repression.

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

The World Bank lauds the Philippines as a “dynamic” emerging economy for growing its GDP (8.1) by 6 to 7 percent since this decade. The country propels growth by receiving remittances from OFWs and foreign direct investments for development projects. However, its outward-driven approach may fail to consider three local working conditions that are key to continuing industrialization. First, transitioning from education to the labor market remains challenging for youth. They face barriers to securing decent employment and opportunities, including the significant skills gap, skills shortages, and skills mismatch. No wonder youth unemployment (8.5) scored a whopping 90.9% in 2024 despite the K-12 education's promises to enhance skills for work. MSMEs and informal sectors likewise need stimuli packages to provide locally manufactured products that diversify revenue sources apart from raw material & labor

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exports. Above all, labor rights violations (8.8) are rampant despite the Labor Code's commitment to due diligence and amendment for tripartite relations. Women have income, maternity leave, and promotion gaps, and trade unions are underrepresented in collective bargaining for minimum wage and humane working hours.

SDG 14: Life Below Water

As part of the Coral Triangle, the country houses 70-80% of the world's coral reefs, mangroves, and other forms of marine biodiversity. However, three practices may stall its potential to harness its sovereign-owned resources for economic growth and cultural heritage. First, it imports plastic waste dumped by states vested with fossil fuel and/or petrochemical industries. While the Extended Producer Responsibility Act of 2022 raised corporate accountability, local manufacturers need capacity for circular packaging designs to decrease waste dumping (14.1). Likewise, overlaps in mandates between national coastal guards and local governments under the Fisheries Codes of 1998 impede monitoring of illegal, unreported, and unregistered fishing (14.4). Finally, state consent to foreign, extractive activity like reclamation, mangrove logging, and deep seabed mining drives the destruction of habitats for marine life. Especially in the West Philippine Sea, wherein the 2016 Hague Ruling favored the country's sovereignty over its exclusive economic zone (14.c).

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

The UNESCAP's 2024 Philippines Profile reaffirms SDG 8's role of remittances and investments in funding partnerships. Digitizing government platforms also expands networks for whole-of-government collaboration. However, debts stall the mobilization of resources for joint projects (17.1). No wonder, as of 2023, its debt stood at USD 252 billion – with 24 (9.5%) and 4.5 (1.75%) settled in domestic and foreign banks, respectively. The suspension of foreign benefactors like USAID magnifies the local sectors' lack of capacity for projects like the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program. Finally, overlaps in mandates among local and national authorities create bureaucratic inertia in deciding responsibilities for project execution and coordination with other stakeholders (17.14).

Recommendations

We call upon the Philippine government, civil society organizations (CSOs), and other stakeholders to adopt the following recommendations.

SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being

- Allocate sufficient funding for public hospitals and quality healthcare services nationwide.
- Implement integrated, evidence-based initiatives to curb adolescent pregnancies, prevent noncommunicable diseases, and combat HIV through age-appropriate, gender-sensitive, and science-based comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), accessible healthcare, and community engagement.
- Foster decent and safe working conditions and provide livable wages and social protection services for health workers.
- Expand access to prenatal, postnatal, and newborn care, particularly in rural and remote communities.
- Implement comprehensive mental health programs, psychological first aid, counseling services, and other support in public healthcare, as well as schools and educational institutions.
- Capacitate LGUs for the preparatory phase in the Universal Health Care.

SDG 5: Gender Equality

- Adopt and implement the SB No. 1979 or Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy Act of 2023.
- Strengthen RA No. 10354 or Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012
- Respect the right to sexual and reproductive health (SRHR) and self-determination, including the decriminalization of abortion.
- Enact HB 9349 Absolute Divorce Act and SB No. 689 Anti-Discrimination or SOGIE Bill.
- Invest in Gender and Development (GAD) initiatives like promoting women's economic leadership and safeguarding the rights of women activists and advocates.
- Develop gender-transformative education systems and integrate an age-appropriate, gender-sensitive, and science-based CSE into the curricula in both formal and non-formal education settings.



SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

- Boost sustainable employment by channeling investments into green jobs, renewable energy, and innovative job creation initiatives to combat high unemployment rates.
- Implement a standardized livable wage nationwide and enforce workforce skills through educational and vocational training.
- Invest in and improve access to flexible learning strategies for quality formal and non-formal education, technical and vocational education and training, and skills development for decent work and livelihood.
- Promote inclusive economic growth and national industrialization through strategic investments in MSMEs and local manufacturers.
- Strengthen labor rights and social protections by ensuring fair wages, safe conditions, and legal safeguards for trade unionists.

SDG 14: Life Below Water

- Adopt indigenous peoples' knowledge and practices for sustainable aquaculture.
- Consider a local-based moratorium on extractive activities with marine harm and other illegal, unreported, and unregulated practices such as dynamite fishing.
- Strengthen the implementation of RA 9003 Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000, RA 11898 Extended Producer Responsibility Law, and localization of the Philippines' National Plan of Action on Marine Litter, Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas (eNIPAS) marine protected Sanctuaries in Coastal Communities including the enforcement and update of fishery legislation and ordinances in LGUs
- Uphold the Hague Ruling awarded by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016 on the West Philippine Sea.
- Expand blue economy initiatives and adopt climate-resilient marine infrastructure.

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

- Create and sustain mechanisms and an ecosystem of support for youth's active and meaningful engagement, including MEVs, in decision-making processes.
- Establish a Peoples' Council to ensure the participation of CSOs in the development and implementation of PPAs, as well as in developing policies to ensure inclusivity and representation, especially among MEVs.
- Improved data integration, transparency and implement monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning mechanisms to assess the progress and manage joint projects and programs effectively.
- Increase domestic resource mobilization through progressive taxation to increase public spending on essential services, such as healthcare, education, and social protection.
- Invest in research and development, particularly in Filipino analysts, researchers, and scientists, as well as local capacities.

The APFSD country and sub-regional briefs were developed through collective discussions and engagements between youth advocates at the APFSD Youth Forum in Bangkok on 19-21 February, 2025. The Philippines drafting team consisted of Christianne Kelsey Roque Hadjirul, Carl Joel Tilos, Angelika Faye T. Algo, Cresencio Bacolod, Rhea Jean Bucaling Barquez, Neil Dominic Dasallas Careo, Arianne Joy Fabregas, Cathleen Rotas Ponce, Raffiela Lae Santiago, and James Marcellin Tolosa,. Overall supervision was provided by the ARROW Call To Action team.

