

Event Press Release

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PRESS RELEASE

Regional Youth-Led Networks Launch Strategic Plan for Young Key Populations in Asia-Pacific



Bangkok, 15 July 2025 — Youth LEAD[1], Youth Voices Count (YVC)[2], and Y-PEER Asia Pacific[3] have officially launched the Asia-Pacific Regional Strategic Plan for Young Key Populations (YKPs) 2025–2030, presenting a unified and transformative vision to advance health, rights, and leadership among young people most affected by HIV and social injustice across the region.

Despite progress made, HIV is far from over, especially for young key populations (YKPs). According to UNAIDS 2024 data, over 4,000 young people (aged 15–24) become infected with HIV every week, with adolescent girls, young women, and young people from key populations disproportionately affected. In Asia and the Pacific, up to 95% of new infections among young people occur within key populations, including young gay and bisexual men, young people who use drugs, young sex workers, and young transgender people. This is not just a health issue, it's a human rights crisis fueled by stigma, criminalization, gender inequality, and lack of youth-friendly services.

These numbers are a stark reminder that we need more than just sustained efforts, we need renewed political commitment, stronger intergenerational partnerships, and truly intersectional approaches that address the broader structural and social determinants of health. Ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 will not be possible without putting YKPs at the center of the response.

1. Youth LEAD was founded in early 2010 under the Coalition of Asia-Pacific Regional Networks on HIV and AIDS (7 Sisters), with financial support from UNFPA, aiming to empower young key populations with advocacy skills and tools. It later received support from UNICEF, UNAIDS, and UNESCO. In 2014, with assistance from the Robert Carr Fund and UN partners, Youth LEAD became a legally registered organization in Thailand. <https://www.youthleadap.org>

2. Youth Voices Count (YVC) was established in 2010 by 40 young people from 19 countries as a network of young men who have sex with men and young transgender women in East Asia and the Pacific, with a focus on improving sexual health. It was formally registered in the Philippines in 2019. YVC has historically focused on advocating for youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services and addressing self-stigma and age-related barriers to access. <https://yvc-asiapacific.org>

3. Y-PEER Asia Pacific, initiated in 2009, is a youth-based organization working in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights through peer education in Asia and the Pacific region. With the mission to empower young people to lead healthy lifestyles and actively participate in their communities through peer-to-peer education, Y-PEER Asia Pacific aims to foster youths who can make informed decisions in the Asia and Pacific region with regards to their sexual and reproductive health and rights. <https://ypeerap.org/>

Press Release

21 July 2025

The strategic plan, developed through an inclusive and participatory process with young leaders, civil society, and allied partners, outlines a comprehensive five-year framework for regional action. It builds on over a decade of youth-led advocacy and responds to both persistent and emerging challenges, including shrinking civic space, funding constraints, digital risks, anti-rights movements, and the growing impacts of climate change across the region.

The strategic plan is structured around six core priorities:

- **Diverse Funding Sources**

The first priority focuses on diversifying funding sources to ensure the financial sustainability of youth-led organizations. With many groups facing uncertainty due to restricted and short-term grants, the plan calls for increased investment from a broader mix of donors and organizations. This includes international development partners, national governments and social contracting, the private sector, community philanthropy and other innovative model of financing.

- **Digital Health Advocacy**

The second priority emphasizes digital health advocacy, recognizing the critical role of AI technology in reaching young people with accurate, rights-based health information. The strategy includes developing tools and guidance for safe digital engagement, building youth capacity to navigate digital health platforms, and advocating for privacy, ethics, and inclusion in digital health policy at both national and international levels.

- **Enabling Environments**

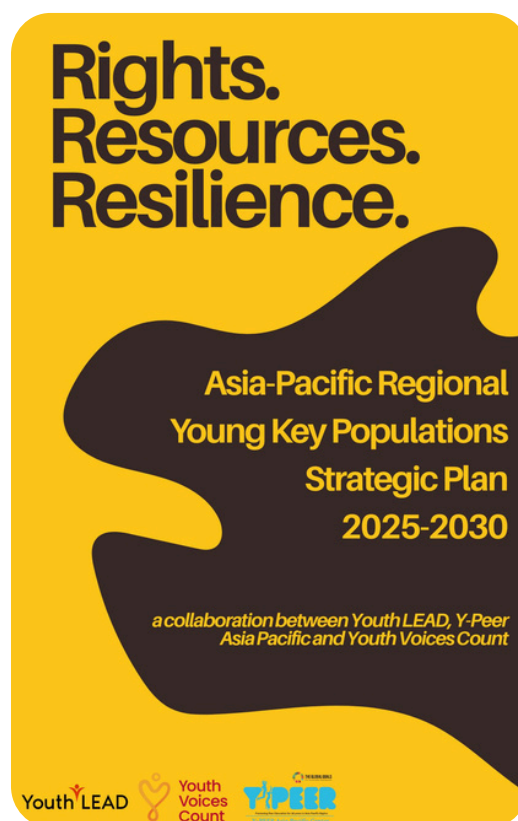
The third strategic priority seeks to strengthen enabling environments where the human rights of young people are secured and promoted. Young people must be able to access services and assert their rights without fear of stigma, discrimination, or legal repercussions. The plan strategizes legal and policy reform, human rights training for youth defenders, and the creation of support systems to monitor and respond to rights violations affecting young key populations.

- **Youth Leadership**

The fourth area centers on youth leadership. Investing in new generations of youth leaders is essential for long-term impact. The plan aims to expand leadership development programs that integrate issues such as HIV, climate justice, and gender equity. It also promotes intergenerational collaboration, mentorship, and the creation of regional platforms for cross-learning and resource sharing.

- **Access to health and HIV Services**

The fifth strategic priority is improving access to health and HIV services. The plan calls for scaling up for new and existing youth-friendly services in HIV, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and mental health. It advocates for comprehensive, gender-sensitive sexuality education, both in and out of school settings, and supports the development of peer networks to facilitate service referrals and reduce stigma.



Press Release

21 July 2025

- **Organizational Capacity**

The sixth and final priority focuses on strengthening organizational capacity of youth-led networks. Recognizing the dynamic nature of youth organizations and the frequent transition of leadership, the plan highlights the importance of robust internal systems, governance structures, and clear documentation practices. It also encourages greater coordination and knowledge exchange across networks to ensure continuity, accountability, and resilience.

WAY FORWARD

With the launch of this strategic plan, the regional youth networks are now entering a critical implementation phase. Over the coming months, Youth LEAD, YVC, and Y-PEER Asia Pacific Center will work closely with national partners to localize the strategy, mobilize resources, and build country-level action plans.

A comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework will guide progress, ensure accountability, and document lessons learned. Annual regional dialogues will serve as key platforms for reflection, peer learning, and course correction.

As the networks move forward, collaboration remains essential. The youth-led movement calls on governments, donors, UN agencies, and civil society actors to align efforts and actively invest in youth leadership. Strategic partnerships will be pivotal in transforming this vision into action and ensuring that young key populations across Asia-Pacific are supported, protected, and empowered.