

United Nations agencies convene over 100 government and civil society partners from 12 countries for a landmark meeting in Bangkok to respond to gender-based violence

Bangkok, June 28, 2017 – Governments, civil society and the United Nations in Asia and the Pacific are strengthening the roll-out and implementation of a multi-sectoral response to urgently address gender-based violence against women and girls across this diverse region.

More than 100 delegates representing a range of government and civil society partners from a dozen countries are attending a three-day meeting in Bangkok this week, convened by the Asia-Pacific regional offices of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

A collaborative and coordinated response is needed in every country, which brings together several key sectors, including the police, the legal and justice system, social services and health. To that end, a Joint UN Programme was established last year on Essential Services for Women and Girls Subject to Violence, with the participation of UNFPA, UN Women, UNODC, and WHO.

The Essential Services Package for Women and Girls Subject to Violence sets out concrete guidance for services that should be available to every survivor, no matter where she lives or who she is. It builds on existing standards and applies to the health, social services, police, and justice sectors, as well as to overall governance and coordination.

The Essential Services Package facilitates the implementation of several global and regional commitments made by Member States to address violence against women and girls, including the Sustainable Development Goals, the 2016 WHO global plan of action on health systems' response to violence against women and girls, and the 2013 Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women.

“This package of services emphasizes more than ever the critical importance of coordinated approaches that place the survivor at the center of response and referral, prioritizing her safety

and well-being,” said Miwa Kato, UN Women Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific.

Sobering statistics

WHO estimates that globally one in three women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence, mostly by an intimate partner. According to UNFPA’s 2016 Regional Snapshot on prevalence of violence against women in the Asia-Pacific region between 15 percent to 68 percent of women have reported experiencing physical or sexual violence, or both, by an intimate partner in their lifetime.

“Violence against women and girls is a significant public health concern and human rights violation in our region,” noted Yoriko Yasukawa, UNFPA Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific. “It takes a huge toll on the health and socioeconomic well-being of those who experience it, often hindering their ability to fulfil their true potential and role in their communities and societies.”

“Violence has multiple impacts on the lives of women and girls including their physical and mental health,” said Dr Mahmoud Fikri, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. “The health sector is a key entry point for women and girls who experience violence, and should have the capacity to provide them with the appropriate health services that they need. It is paramount that this is integrated into efforts to attain health-related and other Sustainable Development Goals and to ensure that no one is left behind.”

“Countries in our region are committed to addressing gender-based violence. As mandated by the World Health Assembly resolution on the global plan of action on violence against women and girls, the health sector, in coordination with other sectors, is stepping up its efforts to provide survivor-centered care by training health care providers and improving access to services,” said Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, WHO Regional Director for South-East Asia Region. “This initiative provides an important avenue for scaling up health services in line with WHO guidelines as part of a multisectoral response.”

A coordinated approach

This week’s Bangkok meeting draws participants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Indonesia, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Timor-Leste.

It follows a similar meeting last November, also convened by the UN, in which 10 other Asia-Pacific countries participated: Cambodia, China, Fiji, Kiribati, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, the Solomon Islands and Viet Nam.

“We’ve developed guidance and assisted countries to provide essential services through the programme,” explained Jeremy Douglas, Regional Representative of UNODC for Southeast Asia and the Pacific. “The package provides a range of tools and helps strengthen the capacity of police, justice and health service providers to work together, and to address violence against women from different perspectives.” The package is being piloted in up to ten low- to middle-income countries from 2016 through 2018.

In Asia-Pacific, the pilot countries are Cambodia, Kiribati, Pakistan, Viet Nam and the Solomon Islands.

Leaving no one behind

“Implementing the essential services package helps fill the gap between agreements UN Member States have made at the international level to address violence against women and girls and the actual work done at country level to put in place quality services and responses,” said UN Women’s Miwa Kato. “This ensures that theory is translated into practice, to protect, benefit and ultimately empower millions of women and girls across the region.”

“The SDGs at heart are about building more caring, equal and democratic societies,” concluded UNFPA’s Yoriko Yasukawa. “Taking aim at gender-based violence with a view to ending it, and ensuring that all women and girls everywhere are treated with dignity and respect, forms the foundation of that endeavor for all the UN and all its partners involved in implementing the Essential Services Package”.

Resources

[Essential Services Package for Women and Girls Subject to Violence](#)

[WHO global plan of action on health systems response to violence against women and girls](#)

[Gender-based Violence: An overview](#)

[Say NO – UNiTE to End Violence against Women](#)

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