

# Preventing and Responding to Violence at the School Level in East Asia and Pacific

# Safe to Learn East Asia and Pacific Regional Roundtable #1

**Outcome Document** 





















In October 2022, the first in a series of Safe to Learn (STL) regional roundtables was held for East Asia and Pacific (EAP). The roundtable was co-convened by the Safe to Learn Secretariat in the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO), UNESCO Bangkok, Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (hereafter UNESCO Bangkok), the CSO Forum to End Violence against Children (CSO Forum), the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), UNESCO and UNICEF Headquarters in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh.

The roundtable aimed to explore effective, context-appropriate violence prevention and response solutions in EAP, with the goal of improving learning and ending violence against children in and through education. Participants focused on the second pillar of STL's Call to Action: the need to **strengthen violence prevention and response at the school level**. The event leveraged and shared country experiences on what works and how to overcome challenges in ending violence against children in and through schools in EAP.

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### Introduction

East Asia and Pacific (EAP) countries have shown their political commitment to ending violence in and around schools through various regional and national frameworks. These include the 2013 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Elimination of Violence Against Children (EVAC) in ASEAN, the 2016-2025 ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on EVAC, the Declaration on the Elimination of Bullying of Children in ASEAN (October 2021), the INSPIRE Conference (2021) and the Bangkok Statement 2022.

The Bangkok Statement, a roadmap for the region's education systems, was the culmination of the 2nd Asia-Pacific Regional Education Ministers' Conference (APREMC–II), in which Ministers of Education, high-level government officials and representatives of regional organizations, civil society organizations, teachers' organizations, United Nations agencies, development partners, youth, academia and the private sector committed to focusing on equity in transforming education systems. This, they agreed, requires targeted measures to overcome barriers to learning for the most vulnerable, including addressing gender-based violence and guaranteeing school safety.<sup>1</sup>

On 27 October 2022, six countries from the region held the first Safe to Learn (STL) regional roundtable for East Asia and Pacific, to discuss the second pillar of the STL Call to Action: strengthening prevention and response at the school level. The event grouped 70 delegates from Cambodia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam – including representatives from ministries of education and social affairs, practitioners from civil society and other partner organizations. UNICEF Mongolia and Timor Leste, as well as representatives from regional and headquarters offices of STL partners, attended as observers and supporters.

### 1. The Time is Now: Turning Challenges into Opportunities

The roundtable set the scene for a discussion and learning on violence, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) by presenting research evidence. Studies from the region show that when students are happy, their anxiety decreases, health improves and school attendance and performance increases. Experiencing and witnessing violence in childhood is particularly damaging to children's development, their mental well-being and ability to learn. It interferes with their ability to concentrate and participate in school activities and hinders their educational progress.<sup>2</sup>

The findings from the regional roundtable reflect an urgent need to accelerate efforts to eliminate violence against children from all settings, including in and through schools. Only five countries of the 11 Southeast Asian countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, the Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam) have prohibited corporal punishment in schools. Additional types of violence faced by children include – and are not limited to – physical and sexual violence, gender-based violence and online violence.

The Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics 2019 (SEA-PLM), a Southeast Asian regional learning assessment programme for grade 5 students, shows that, on average, 35 per cent of children surveyed reported experiencing some kind of violence, including bullying and harassment, at least once a month. Children who reported experiencing violence were more likely to perform worse in reading than their peers who did not report experiencing violence.<sup>5</sup>

Evidence shows that violence in school has devastating consequences on the child and wider social and economic implications. The 2021 World Bank and Global Partnership to End Violence against Children/Safe to Learn Investment Case on Ending Violence in School clearly demonstrates that violence against children negatively affects educational outcomes and undermines educational investments. Based on available data, the investment case provides global estimates on the cost of violence in schools and shows that ending violence is a smart economic investment.

The impact of COVID-19 in EAP has been devastating. Increased exposure to violence, including gender-based violence, and school closures have restricted children's access to learning and affected their mental health. In some countries, school closures equated to about one year of learning lost, with the most marginalized losing access to education altogether. Pandemic-related school closures have also increased the risk of children becoming victims of, or witnesses to, violence in their homes and communities.





School closures have been linked to drops in reporting to child protection authorities by school personnel, increased exposure to abusive online content and elevated risks of sexual exploitation. It is not surprising that school closures and the pandemic have negatively impacted the mental health of children, teachers and caregivers because of the tremendous stress created by confinement, lack of peer interaction, and the vital support that school settings provide.

Government participants, young people and their partners at the roundtable reemphasized their commitment to advancing the Safe to Learn agenda, stressing the importance of these challenges for learners.

H.E. Dr. Nath Bunroeun, Secretary of State, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport of the Kingdom of Cambodia-- a signatory of the STL Call to Action-- raised an urgent point on the urgency of the issue: "We cannot afford any forms of violence in our educational settings. We call for all government institutions, development partners, private sector and other relevant stakeholders to put an end to all forms of violence in school through the five principles of the Safe to Learn Call to Action."

Myo-Zin Nyunt, Deputy Regional Director, UNICEF EAPRO, called on each country "to prioritize ending violence and promoting positive mental health" to address the learning crisis, by using the STL Call to Action framework.

During the roundtable, youth advocates urged policy makers to understand the importance of safe schools. In a short video presentation, they emphasized the importance of promoting mental health as a priority regionally and globally. Mental health is a critical component in addressing the learning crisis in the region and working to achieve SDG 4 (quality education). This concern was echoed by partners, who noted that teachers cannot teach, and students cannot learn when living in fear of violence or battling mental health issues alone. Tran Quynh Giang from Viet Nam is calling for more support for mental health in the school system.

## 2. Promising Practices: Examples from Policy, Practice and Recommendations

The roundtable highlighted several promising approaches that have been successful in addressing violence and promoting MHPSS. The 'whole school approach' was emphasized as a promising approach. It is widely recognized, including by the STL Global Strategy, as one of the most effective approaches. It maximizes the possibility of synergy and sustainability by involving the whole institution, in an inclusive and interactive manner. Teachers play a vital role in ending violence and promoting mental health and psychosocial support. They are also more likely to engage and sustain their own transformation by simultaneously helping students and the larger school environment in bringing about positive change.

The whole school approach also amplifies students' voices in the efforts to end violence and promotes peer-to-peer psychosocial support (PSS). Enabling students to play both a critical and creative role in building safety and resiliency in the school solidifies their role as analysts and communicators and enables them to effectively mobilize to end violence and promote MHPSS in their schools, families and communities.

The Coalition for Good Schools presented recent experience from a review conducted on the prevention of violence against children in and through schools in the global South. It highlights and recommends the following:<sup>8</sup>

- Programs need to be tailored to the context and given enough time and resources to produce results.
- The development of successful interventions is an iterative learning process.
- Pathways to change are not linear.
- Partnerships with practitioners are critical for quality implementation, sustainability and scale-up.
- There is a need to target resources to adapt and scale up successful and promising programs.





**Cambodia** has endorsed the STL Call to Action and has taken significant strides towards implementing actions to end violence in school. This is reflected in several policies at the national level:

- 1. Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children (VAC) 2017-2021
- 2. National Social Protection Policy Framework 2016-2025
- 3. National Policy on Child Protection System 2019-2029

In its strategic objectives, the child protection policy includes raising the awareness of teachers, community members, and all relevant stakeholders on child protection issues. A national research conducted in 2013 on child protection indicated a high level of violence in schools, despite a well-structured child protection system. As a response to its findings, an action plan and the national child protection policy framework were developed, which include both the promotion of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and positive discipline. In addition to these, teachers are trained on the CRC and on how to eliminate violence in class. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) has developed, with support from UNICEF, in-service training courses for teachers and school directors focusing on positive discipline, MHPSS and gender-responsive pedagogy. Positive discipline education has proven effective in reducing violence against children at school in Cambodia. UNICEF has continued to support MoEYS to develop positive discipline training blended courses; and it has been rolled out aiming to reach more than 6,000 school directors and teachers by mid-2023.



At the school level, peer-to-peer activities and school-community events have proven successful in communicating, disseminating and promoting the new child protection policy. A child protection reporting mechanism and a manual on raising awareness against violence were recently approved by the Ministry of Education and launched for implementation for all schools in Cambodia.

A strong school communication system relies on principals, teachers, students, student council members, community members, local authorities, and social service providers, all working together to ensure the protection of children. "The key success to introduce child protection in school comes via the school communication. Because child protection is not just for schools to implement alone" said Dr. Nath Bunroeun, Secretary of State, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport of the Kingdom of Cambodia.





In **Indonesia**, 41 per cent of students aged 15 have experienced bullying at least a few times a month. Humiliating language, physical fights and harassment from other students are the most common factors students mention when characterizing their schools as unsafe. In response, an active monitoring system has been put in place to collect data on bullying, intolerance, and sexual violence at school. A national assessment, based on the monitoring findings, will be implemented annually for a more accurate picture of bullying and school violence and to facilitate tailored solutions.

Also, the Roots initiative, implemented with UNICEF support, engages students as change agents in student-led activities in which they communicate with peers about good behaviors, bullying prevention and sexual violence. The program uses many creative ways of communication (including social media, comics, and games) and is based on the social network theory. This program has been able to reduce up to 30 per cent of bullying incidents in intervention schools. Like other participants, Dr. Harris Iskandar from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology stressed that ending violence must come through the "active participation of stakeholders... School is not an empty space, it's part of society."

After parliament in **Papua New Guinea (PNG)** passed the "Lukautim Pikinini (Looking After Children) Act 2015", the Department of Justice and Attorney General launched the Juvenile Rehabilitation and Integration policy (2021-2031) to protect children at a national level. In parallel, the Department of Community Development established the Office of the Child and Family Services (OCSF) to handle protection and safety issues for vulnerable children, for which the Department of Education is a partner for implementation. The country's Behavior Management Policy (BMP) for the National Education System was reviewed in 2019 and launched in 2021, which outlines responsibilities to the child by all stakeholders.

PNG is developing curricular and extracurricular activities aimed at strengthening 'ethics, morals and behavior' to enhance violence prevention. An encouraging development has been the concerted focus on curriculum development for grades 1, 2 and 3; as well as on professional development for teachers and counselors on the use of national and sub-national Child Welfare Council mechanisms. PNG has also developed training modules in psychosocial support, disaster risk management and School Learning Improvement Plan. Pre- and in-service BMP teacher training manuals have been developed in partnership with UNICEF.







Additionally, to address the root causes of violence and discrimination against women and girls and gender inequality, curricular activities like Scouts, school clubs, student leadership training, peer education and religious camp, were established to create child friendly schools. Compulsory Teacher Training Course in Guidance, Counselling and Behaviour Management has been available for all teacher training institutions (14 primary school teachers' colleges and 3 universities). By the end of 2030, 50,000 student teachers will be trained in child welfare issues.

In the **Philippines**, a national child protection in school policy has been established with both prevention and response components. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the policy was adapted for online learning, to strengthen students' protection from online harm. As a result, the National Child Protection unit evolved from an ad-hoc committee to becoming part of the permanent structure of the Department of Education, emphasizing the importance of ending violence in school. A dedicated helpline, Tele-Safe, was also established to address reports of child abuse, providing a safe reporting mechanism that enhances the response to and prevention of violence and discrimination.

"The Department of Education has strongly advocated the protection of our children ... reiterating its zero-tolerance policy for any act of child abuse, exploitation, discrimination, bullying and other forms of abuse." said Atty. Suzette T. Gannaban-Medina, Officer-In-Charge, Director III of the Department of Education Child Protection Unit, the Philippines



In **Thailand**, The Ministry of Education established the National Safety Center for preventing violence against children. Its mission is to ensure students' emotional well-being and mental health, their safety from physical violence, from accidents and from rights violations. This is done by ensuring that key mechanisms to combat violence in and around school are deployed. The Safety Center has built three main mechanisms: the first works to prevent potential risks, the second is aimed at promoting life skills and survival skills in children and youths, while the third focuses on the response to violence in and around schools. A guidance book and an online book addressing protection and prevention is provided in every school.

"Schools can help prevent mental health issues by increasing students' resilience to daily demands and challenges, fostering self-confidence through goal-setting and mental health stability training, and cultivating positive thinking and the right mindset for change" said Dr. Thira Bhawangkanan Inspector-General at the Ministry of Education.

The Safety Center uses technology and an extensive reporting system via mobile phones, apps and contact centers, and is open to students and teachers alike. Emergency reports can be sent to the Safety Center via its website and app or the ministry's contact center at 0-2126-6565. Eight ministries and two agencies, including the Prime Minister's Office and the Royal Thai Police, collaborate with the Ministry of Education on the Safety Center.





**Viet Nam** has developed a national action plan to address violence against children (2020-2025), with a master project addressing school culture and codes of conduct from 2018-2025.

Mr. Nguyen Xuan An Viet, Deputy Director General, Political Education and Student Affairs Department, outlined the country's six-point plan to ensure a safe, healthy and friendly learning environment at the school level, which involves a wide range of stakeholders. The plan is focused on a large, multi-stakeholder communication system to ensure all learning environments are safe and to strengthen monitoring and accountability. The plan seeks the collaboration of school administrators, teachers, support staff, students, and community members for detecting, reporting, and responding to all school violence cases. Also, the Ministry is finalizing the tool to monitor cases of school violence and embed the data collection into the existing EMIS database. A coordinated inspection and supervision of the implementation of legal documents and protocols on building safe, healthy, friendly, and anti-violence learning environments is currently taking place in school settings. In addition, the promotion of the youth union addressing violence against students and raising awareness of negative norms that condone violence are a priority commitment.

The diversity of the initiatives demonstrates that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution to the complex problem of violence in and around schools. The shared desire to involve schools in ending violence generated a fruitful discussion and prompted calls for further collaboration among participants. To sum up, the moderator, Dr Bernadette Madrid, Executive Director of Child Protection Network Foundation, Inc. said 'We know that no program is perfect, and we are here today at this roundtable so that we can help each other refine further our programs and to learn from each other'.

#### 3. Conclusions

The last session of the roundtable, facilitated by Shamah Bulangi, Safe to Learn Advisory Board Member and Transform Education co-chair, saw participants proposing follow-up action at both the country and school levels. "Prevention of violence against children is not just a tool for us to achieve our educational goals.... the goal here is that no child should experience any type of violence. ...no one deserves to experience this type of violence, especially not in school" she said.

The following points summarize the conclusions that emerged from the discussions at the roundtable.

- 1. Ending violence against children and keeping child protection and well-being at the core of learning recovery efforts is critical for ending the learning crisis. Violence is a violation of children's rights and it has a significant negative impact on children's well-being and educational outcomes, with significant economic costs. Violence undermines educational investments in the region. In order to tackle the learning crisis and recover learning lost during the COVID-19 pandemic, every school needs to be a safe and healing space.
- 2. Education plays a critical role to prevent and respond to violence against children and ensure their mental health and well-being. The education sector can be a powerful platform for preventing and addressing all kinds of violence, including those that take place outside the school setting.

MHPSS professional development, within a whole school approach, can bring pedagogical institutions into the curriculum development and scaling-up process. A holistic and inclusive conception of life skills for addressing violence and MHPSS to pre- and in-service teacher professional development includes training not only for teachers, but also for all adults - principals, counselors, parents and district officers. This signals the importance of their support and legitimizes their roles in ending violence in and around the school.

Prioritizing ending violence and promoting MHPSS into daily teaching in every classroom, is among the best investments for students in East Asia and Pacific. Initial readiness on the part of stakeholders to discuss the integration of MHPSS components into their curriculum is a commitment that is likely to bring positive changes at both the national and classroom levels.

3. A multisectoral approach and inter-ministerial coordination are critical to end violence in and through schools and ending the learning crisis. Multisectoral collaboration between education, social welfare, justice, health and water and sanitation sectors is critical to address violence and support mental health





and well-being and ensure children who experience violence and mental health issues receive the help they need and deserve.

Increasingly, the incorporation of ending violence and MHPSS into responses and recovery programs under the aegis of the ministries of education, social affairs, health, and other relevant government agencies exemplifies a whole-government approach. The system-wide approach builds a culture that promotes ending violence and ensuring safety and resiliency at all levels.

- 4. To end violence in and through schools more countries need to commit to the Safe to Learn Call to Action and its five priority actions:
  - 1) Implement laws and policies;
  - 2) Strengthen violence prevention and response at the school level;
  - 3) Shift social norms and behaviour;
  - 4) Invest resources effectively;
  - 5) Generate and use evidence.

These high-level priorities are brought together in the Safe to Learn Call to Action. Countries are encouraged to endorse the Call to Action (see Annex 2), implement it and monitor country progress. Countries are also encouraged to use the STL Global Programmatic Framework and Benchmarking Tool to support their policies and programs and to undertake country diagnostics to identify where they stand in relation to the implementation of the Call to Action, identify gaps and good practices and recommendations for strengthening their interventions, establish baselines and assess progress. The STL Diagnostic Tool provides a series of checkpoints to track countries' progress in meeting the five priorities of the Call to Action at the national, sub-national, and school level. Together these recommendations can bring institutional, structural, and sustainable change towards ending violence in and around school and are key to its success.







# ANNEX 1 – Country feedback from Jamboard activity – Proposed next steps

COUNTRY	PROPOSED NEXT STEPS FOR ADVANCING STL CALL TO ACTION
CAMBODIA	1. Continue to ensure effective implementation of the child protection policy at school level by strengthening the communication system
	2. Build a strong link between child protection in school and the local system
INDONESIA	1. Child protection annual national assessment
	2. Build school policy related to bullying case protocol
	3. Build students', teachers', and principals' capacity to understand and stop bullying
PHILIPPINES	1. New child protection unit (prevention and response) part of Education Department
	2. A dedicated child protection helpline (Tele-Safe) to report, refer and address cases of violence
	3. Children and youth engagement child protection campaign
PAPUA NEW GUINEA	1. Full implementation of the Looking After Children Parliamentary Act (Lukautin Pikanini Act)
	2. Curriculum delivery and extracurricular activities in alignment with National Behavior Management Policy
VIET NAM	1. Annual school audit on child protection issues and case management with the leadership of local government and school administrators
	<ol><li>Promote the role of the youth union on raising awareness, addressing violence against students and negative norms towards violence</li></ol>
THAILAND	1. Invest in the national education system
	2. Support the effective functioning of the monitoring system of the Safety Center for prevention of violence

#### **ANNEX 2 - Safe to Learn**

Safe to Learn (STL) is a global initiative dedicated to ending all forms of violence against children in and through schools. It was established in response to a 2018 youth manifesto where young people demanded an end to violence in schools. Safe to Learn works to ensure all girls and boys, in all their diversity, and including the most vulnerable, have access to safe, inclusive learning environments and that schools become platforms to safer and inclusive societies.

Ending violence in and through schools means:

- Ending all violence that happens while at school, on and around school grounds, while getting to and from school, and in online activity linked to a student's school life.
- Using school as an entry point to reduce violence in other areas of children's lives (in the home, community, and online, as well as other places where interpersonal violence occurs).

The STL global initiative brings together education, child protection, health, and violence prevention sectors under a common vision and strategically builds on complementary strengths and expertise of its 14 members, including leaders from civil society, donors, global partnerships, the business sector, United Nations system, and the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children. STL work is rooted in the STL Call to Action which sets out, in high level terms based on global evidence, what needs to happen to end violence in and through schools.





#### Safe to Learn Call to Action

- Implement policy and legislation: national, regional and local governments develop, fund and enforce laws and policies that protect children from all forms of violence in and around schools, including online violence.
- Strengthen violence prevention and response at the school level: school staff, students and management committees provide safe and gender-sensitive learning environments for all children that promote positive discipline, child-centered teaching and protect and improve children's physical and mental well-being.
- Shift social norms and behavior change: parents, teachers, children, local government and
  community leaders recognize the devastating impact of violence in schools and take action to
  promote positive social norms and gender equality to ensure schools are safe spaces for learning.
- **Invest resources effectively:** Increased and better use of investments targeted at ending violence in schools.
- **Generate and use evidence:** countries and the international community generate and use evidence on how to effectively end violence in schools.

#### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup>Asia-Pacific Regional Education Minister's Conference, 2nd, Bangkok, 2022. Bangkok Statement 2022: towards an effective learning recovery for all and transforming edu cation in Asia-Pacific. UNESCO Bangkok, Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education

<sup>2</sup>UNICEF. 2022. What does SEA-PLM 2019 tell us about child well-being and learning in six Southeast Asian countries? UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office and UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti

<sup>3</sup>End Violence Against Children 2021. Global Policy Briefing. Key Messages. Make schools safe, non-violent and inclusive

<sup>4</sup>Safe to Learn, UNESCO, UNICEF. 2022. Ensuring all children are safe to learn in East Asia and Pacific. An imperative for the back to school and learning recovery agenda. Safe to Learn/Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children

<sup>5</sup>SEA-PLM 2019 UNICEF Main Regional Report

<sup>6</sup>Wodon, Q., C. Fèvre, C. Malé, A. Nayihouba, and H. Nguyen. 2021. Ending Violence in Schools: An Investment Case. Washington, DC: The World Bank and the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children

<sup>7</sup>Wodon, Q., C. Fèvre, C. Malé, A. Nayihouba, and H. Nguyen. 2021. Ending Violence in Schools: An Investment Case. Washington, DC: The World Bank and the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children

<sup>8</sup>Mathews S, Achyut P, October L & Makola L. 2021. Evidence Review: Prevention of violence against children through schools in the Global South. Raising Voices, Uganda and University of Cape Town, South Africa

<sup>9</sup>Nationally representative data on bullying in Indonesian schools from PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) 2018. For further details on Roots Indonesia see the case study on Roots Indonesia Student-led bullying prevention on p.49 of United Nations Children's Fund 2021. Action to end violence against children in schools. UNICEF review of progam interventions illustrating actions to address violence against children in and around schools 2018-2020. UNICEF. New York

<sup>10</sup>The cross-sectoral Safe to Learn Global Initiative members include: the Civil Society Forum to End Violence against Children, Global Affairs Canada, UK Government Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, World Bank, Education Cannot Wait, Global Partnership for Education, Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, Global Business Coalition for Education, Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, United Nations Children's Fund and World Health Organization. Safe to Learn is also supported by the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children







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