GLOBAL WORKING GROUP TO END SCHOOL-RELATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
ASIA PACIFIC LEARNING SYMPOSIUM
25-27 April 2023
Bangkok, Thailand

I. BACKGROUND:
School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV) is defined as acts or threats of sexual, physical or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes, and enforced by unequal power dynamics. It can take place inside or outside of the classroom, around schools, on the way to or from school, as well as in online and other digital environments.

Children and adolescents from minority backgrounds, those who have a disability, or those who identify (or are perceived) as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or intersex (LGBTQI+) are especially at-risk of violence. School violence may be perpetrated by other students, teachers and other school staff. The underlying causes of school violence and bullying include gender and social norms and wider contextual factors. It is deeply rooted in patriarchy and impacts children of all genders. Much school violence and bullying are related to gender, where girls are disproportionately affected.

The Global Working Group to End School-Related Gender-Based Violence (hereafter SRGBV Working Group), established in 2014 by 35 organisations, provides a platform for over 50 civil society organisations, bilateral and multilateral donors, the UN, academia, and education unions working on gender, health, education, child protection, and violence against women and girls. Co-chaired by the UN Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI) and UNESCO, the SRGBV Working Group has raised awareness about the reality of SRGBV; advanced evidence-based global normative standards; facilitated knowledge exchange; and, brought attention to promising practices in addressing SRGBV. Noting that the most effective approach to preventing and addressing SRGBV is a holistic one, using multiple entry points and working with a range of different stakeholders at school, in communities and in society are critical.

In the last few years there has been global leadership in advancing responses to SRGBV. In 2021 Generation Equality was launched at the Generation Equality Forum hosted in Mexico City and Paris. The Forum launched

1 UNESCO. 2022. The Role of Teachers in ending school violence and bullying
2 UNESCO. 2017. School Violence and Bullying: A global status report
a 5-year action agenda encapsulated in a Global Acceleration Plan for gender equality, which defines the most critical actions necessary to accelerate progress in the next 5 years. The Forum also launched six Action Coalitions one of which focuses on Gender Based Violence and actions to address it which include ownership at country level to ratify commitments and enforce laws and policy; implementation of strategies and guidance around addressing GBV; enabling of supportive services for survivors of GBV as well as sustainable financing to respond to GBV.

The 2022 Transforming Education Summit (TES) was convened in response to a global crisis in education – one of equity and inclusion, quality and relevance. The summit prioritised five thematic action tracks, of which action track one called for Inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy schools. Inclusive, transformative education must ensure that all learners have unhindered access to and participation in education, that they are safe and healthy, free from violence and discrimination, and are supported with comprehensive care services within school settings. The UN Secretary-General’s Vision Statement on Transforming Education in the wake of the Summit, calls for ensuring a learning environment that supports the development of all learners, where the schools of the future must evolve to become more inclusive, safe, healthy and stimulating learning places against the fact that violence, harassment and bullying are all too commonplace.

The Vision Statement also underlines that curricula and learning materials should promote equality, respect for diversity, and confront harmful gender stereotypes, norms, attitudes, and practices.

The TES Call to Action, ‘Advancing gender equality and girls’ and women’s empowerment in and through education’ calls on governments to ‘Ensure safe, gender-transformative and inclusive learning spaces, with water, sanitation and menstrual hygiene management facilities, measures to prevent and respond to SRGBV (...).’ Furthermore, the Youth Declaration on Transforming Education urges decision-makers to build a safe learning environment for all, including online, devoid of bullying, harassment, physical, sexual, psychological, and gender-based violence, discrimination, racism, sexism, xenophobia, ableism, and ageism.

In the Asia Pacific region (Asia Pacific), while there is lack of consistent data and evidence at the regional and country levels on SRGBV, available data on drivers of SRGBV point to significant challenges. For example, analyses from the South-East Asia Primary Learning Metrics SEA-PLM 2019 data confirms that learning outcomes are negatively associated with exposure to violence at school. In the Asia Pacific region, girls are more likely to face social exclusion, sexual and psychological violence while boys are more likely to experience corporal punishment, bullying and other forms of physical violence. Violence experienced by transgender students is not well documented.4 Notwithstanding the gaps in available data and evidence on SRGBV, there is visibly increased momentum around political commitments on safe and enabling learning environments, as demonstrated in the Bangkok Statement emerging from the June 2002, second Asia Pacific Regional Education Ministers’ Conference, wherein Ministers of Education of the Asia-Pacific region, together with partners, commit to protecting the right to education of women and girls and overcoming barriers to learning for the most vulnerable, including guaranteeing school safety and addressing gender-based violence5.

Most recently, at a Safe to Learn (STL) regional, virtual roundtable for East Asia and Pacific organized in October 2022 that brought together 70 delegates from six East Asia and Pacific countries to explore effective, context-appropriate violence prevention and response solutions in East Asia and Pacific with the goal of improving learning and ending violence against children in and through education, participants focused on

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4 Safe to Learn, UNICEF and UNESCO. 2022. Ending Violence Against Children and promoting mental health and well-being: An imperative for the back to school and learning recovery agenda in East Asia and Pacific.

the second pillar of STL’s Call to Action: the need to strengthen violence prevention and response at the school level.

Equally of note in the region is heightened attention by the education sector and its partners to the intersections of school violence with learners’ mental health and psychosocial well-being. These intersections were explored at the Second Regional Conference to Strengthen Implementation of the INSPIRE Strategies, East Asia and Pacific, Virtual Meeting, 1-5 November 2021 that brought together more than 1700 delegates online, and where amongst the numerous key messages that emerged was the recognition that schools must be a platform for promoting zero tolerance for violence and abuse and that teachers and schools must be equipped to promote a violence-free school environment, promote positive social norms and mental well-being, and be ready to identify and refer children needing support.

Further policy-advocacy and programme implementation that accelerates actions for addressing SRGBV in Asia Pacific schools and learning settings should thus be strategically rooted in these numerous and complementary frameworks, commitments and partnership platforms.

II. LEARNING SYMPOSIUM

The SRGBV Working Group’s aim is to collaborate on joint advocacy, build a knowledge base, share resources and best practices of authentic voices and foster a coordinated and cohesive response to SRGBV by bringing together diverse policy and programming expertise and solid presence at global, regional, and national levels, to regional learning and sharing symposia bi-annually. Following the last three successful symposia held Latin America in 2021 (virtually), East and Southern Africa in 2019 (in person) and West and Central Africa in 2017 (in person), the Working Group intends to host the next Learning Symposium (in person) in the Asia and Pacific Region in Bangkok, Thailand.

III. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The 2023 SRGBV Learning Symposium intends to further the aforementioned work based on the global, regional and national policy frameworks and commitments with a focus on the Asia and Pacific region and aims to respond to emerging themes and priorities in the region on school violence and learners’ health and psychosocial well-being, with a robust gender lens and rights-based approach.

The objectives of the Asia and Pacific Learning Symposium are to:

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The following points summarize the conclusions that emerged from the discussions at the October 2022 STL regional roundtable for East Asia and Pacific:
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.
2. Education plays a critical role to prevent and respond to violence against children and ensure their mental health and well-being.
3. A multisectoral approach and inter-ministerial coordination are critical to end violence in and through schools and ending the learning crisis.
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: i) Implement laws and policies; ii) Strengthen violence prevention and response at the school level; iii) Shift social norms and behaviour; iv) Invest resources effectively and v) Generate and use evidence.

Equally of note is heightened attention by the education sector and its partners to the phenomenon of school violence and its intersections with learners’ mental health and psychosocial well-being.

● Facilitate experience-sharing on programming and policy-advocacy on SRGBV as an issue affecting gender equality, education, mental health and psychosocial well-being, highlighting strategic entry points for stronger integration of SRGBV within (among others): gender equality in and through education, broader school violence prevention programming and the creation of safe, inclusive and health-promoting schools, with a human rights-based approach;

● Promote new and emerging practical tools and resources to support education systems to advance their prevention and response approaches to SRGBV, in line with available global guidance and policy frameworks,

● Strengthen knowledge of promising and transformative practices at national and school levels to address SRGBV, being carried out by diverse education actors, with particular attention to whole-school approaches⁸;

● Promote recent evidence and research and identify evidence gaps and opportunities with regards to monitoring and measuring SRGBV prevalence and the effectiveness of response efforts, including evidence and research around online SRGBV;

● Amplify the voices of women, young people and vulnerable groups in the region for ending SRGBV.

Key messages emerging from the Learning Symposium will be documented and disseminated for reference, use and amplification by the participating education sector representatives and other key sectors and partners working to address school violence, including SRGBV. Technical or knowledge/communication products documenting good practices, actions and capturing case studies from the region will be developed.

IV. FORMAT

The overall format of the two- and half-day Learning Symposium will be highly interactive and participatory, fostering informal exchanges, networking and solidarity in a safe and welcoming space. A marketplace is envisioned to showcase materials, including region-specific resources, adaptations and lessons learnt and further deepen the sharing and learning exchange.

The Learning Symposium’s programme design is based on recommendations from the Global Guidance on Addressing School-related Gender-based Violence (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016). The Guidance document recommends six practical thematic action areas for a holistic local, national and global response to SRGBV⁹. The Learning Symposium’s programme therefore will therefore be built around these six actions areas through the lens of a whole-school approach¹⁰, which is an evidence-based approach to preventing and responding to SRGBV, and also reflects evidence developed to address school bullying¹¹.

The design of the learning symposium is based on the responses to an online survey that invited key stakeholders, including the members of the SRGBV Working Group, the Safe to Learn partnership, the Asia Pacific UNiTE working group, as well as other regional partners working in the Asia and Pacific region to participate and prioritise the themes relevant to the region.

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⁸ Whole school approach entails the involvement of various stakeholders at the school level, as well as in the local community and government, in a range of different activities with the aim of making schools safer, more child-friendly and a better environment for children to learn.

⁹ (i) Leadership: Laws, policies and education reform; (ii) Environment: Ensuring schools are safe and supportive; (iii) Prevention: Curriculum, teaching and learning; (iv) Responses: In and around schools; (v) Partnerships: Collaborating with and engaging key stakeholders; and, (vi) Evidence: Monitoring and evaluation of SRGBV.


IV. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Overall, the expected outcome of the Learning Symposium is to raise awareness of promising good practices in the region or globally. Specifically, the Asia and Pacific Learning Symposium’s expected outcomes are:

- Strengthened partnerships for further traction in the prevention of, and response to SRGBV in the Asia Pacific Region;
- Strategies identified that could lead to broader implementation of SRGBV interventions, including strategies to address emerging issues such as online/technology facilitated GBV, violence against children (VAC), and learners’ mental health and psychosocial well-being;
- Promotion of the use of evidence-based resources for scaling up of SRGBV interventions in the region;
- Key messages documented and disseminated emerging from the practitioner community, for reference and use by the participating country policy officials in education and other key sectors working to address school violence, including SRGBV.

As a cross cutting outcome, the Learning Symposium will promote youth leadership and student engagement for ending SRGBV.

VI. CONVENERS

The Learning Symposium will be jointly convened by UNGEI Secretariat and UNESCO HQs (under the overall aegis of the SRGBV Working Group), together with UNESCO Bangkok, Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO), UNFPA Asia-Pacific Regional Office (APRO), Safe to Learn and Transform Education.

VII. PARTICIPANTS

Diversity, active and meaningful participation and sharing are core principles of each symposium. Around sixty participants will be invited to the symposium with a diversity of partners representing government – with focus on education sector personnel, civil society including organizations of persons with disabilities working on SRGBV, bilateral partners, UN and other multilateral agencies, young activists and programme implementers, research institutions and education unions. The symposium will also aim to ensure that minorities and vulnerable groups will be represented.