

Children Speak Out Against Violence during COVID-19 Urgent Call to Governments for Intervention to Protect Vulnerable Children

Bangkok, Thailand, 19 November 2020

More than 100 child participants across East Asia convened with government officials to discuss the increased instances of child violence experienced during COVID-19 at World Vision's **Asia Pacific Child Well-Being Learning Exchange** forum yesterday. The virtual event, organised in partnership with UNICEF East Asia and Pacific, was introduced to bring together government, UN agencies, donors, civil society organisations, corporates, academia, subject matter experts and thought leaders in the development sector, to throw light on pressing issues facing the world's most vulnerable children and their well-being in Asia Pacific.

"Let Our Voice be Heard" Event

The child-focused event also saw representation from the Government of Thailand, Laos PDR, Philippines, Myanmar and Indonesia, UNICEF and ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC).

Child leaders highlighted the disconcerting increase in violence towards children, wide gaps in access to essential services, especially child protection and appealed to the Asian leaders to fulfil their commitment to making sure every child has every right, as per the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#).

A qualitative interview-based child and youth consultation, [Act Now](#), conducted across 10 Asian countries further reveals that 44% of girls and boys reported an increase in violence at home, and one in two children interviewed shared an increase in child marriage in their communities¹. They also divulged that the lockdown makes it easier to keep- child marriages from the public eye.

According to the [Unmasking Report](#), a compilation of the COVID-19 early recovery assessment findings and recommendations by World Vision, loss of livelihood during COVID-19 has forced parents and caregivers to take desperate measures that are negatively impacting children's well-being, including inflicting violence on their wards. In addition, a higher proportion of girls revealed that they feel more unsafe during lockdowns². The report indicated, 10% of caregivers were sending their children to work and 9% of the households were sending children to beg or for high-risk jobs³. As per the COVID-19 country early assessment in Myanmar, over 15% of households reported having sent children to work and Key Informant Interviews (KII), also indicated an increase in physical and violence or abuse⁴. While over 20% of parents in Thailand, mete out physical and psychological punishment to discipline the children⁵, more than 61% of children surveyed in Indonesia experienced verbal abuse, and two out of three children lacked adult supervision when accessing the internet, thereby increasing the risk of exposure to inappropriate content⁶.

"We are seeing increased levels of violence and exploitation against children in our community that includes physical violence, child labour and child marriage. Growing numbers of children are working, carrying heavy goods, selling fruit in traditional markets, becoming driver assistants and resorting to begging. This is due to many parents losing their livelihood and increased stress at home, due to COVID-19. This must stop because children are the future. We want to feel safe, cared for and protected. Our voices matter and we need to be heard." said 17-year-old, Isak, a child activist from Indonesia.

¹ <https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/coronavirus-health-crisis/act-now-experiences-and-recommendations-girls-and>

² https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/WV%20AP%20Unmasking%20Report%20240820_final.pdf

³ https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/WV%20AP%20Unmasking%20Report%20240820_final.pdf

⁴ https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/Early%20Recovery%20Needs%20Assessment%20Report_Final.pdf

⁵ World Vision Foundation of Thailand | COVID-19 Rapid assessment, initial finding

⁶ [https://wahanavisi.org/userfiles/post/2007095F06D0B65666DA_LGEN.pdf](https://wahanavisi.org/userfiles/post/2007095F06D0B6566DA_LGEN.pdf)

The pandemic is also pushing children out of school, with girls being the more vulnerable group. In the region, 15 million girls were already out of school before the pandemic. An additional 1.2 million girls (from pre-primary to upper secondary) may not have access to school or drop out next year⁷.

Recommendations

During the event, child representatives were able to express their concerns freely⁸ amongst the leaders in audience. Girls and boys shared examples of best practices to stop the spread of COVID-19, how to navigate complex home environments, and help other vulnerable people in their communities. These included life skills to accept change and adapt to the 'New Normal' way of life to survive, self-defense training as protection from violence, and activities that extend help to other less fortunate people in the community. COVID-19 was a wake-up call to sensitise both children and their families about the importance of saving money and building resilience.

"We need to take all necessary measures to promote children's rights and eliminate violence against children, especially in the new normal. We need to continue empowering children to protect themselves and be actively involved in addressing issues that affect them so that they can reach their highest potentials," said Mr. Wanchai Roujanavong, Former ACWC Chair and Thailand's ACWC Representative for Children's Rights.

Some of the recommendations shared by children on child protection included providing social and educational assistance to school drop-outs and child labourers, providing skills training for teenagers from most vulnerable families, sensitising affected families on the crippling effects of child abuse, and encouraging children to become agents of child rights and protection.

The child representatives also expressed their strong desire to be part of their countries' COVID-19 recovery decision-making processes to ensure that child well-being aspirations are met.

The children also urged for governments, civil society and the private sector to take urgent action in addressing their concerns and scale-up social protection interventions that are child-sensitive, gender-responsive and accountable. Social protection measures should provide the most vulnerable families with immediate access to food, cash and voucher assistance, and livelihood opportunities through labour market interventions.

"Children and young people's rights to meaningful participation is an important cornerstone of any society, and is key to human capital development and social inclusion. In times of crisis, we all have to ensure that mitigating efforts do not exclude or diminish the space for young people to have access to correct information and knowledge, express their opinion and offer solutions to tackle the crisis," said Marcoluigi Corsi, Deputy Regional Director, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific.

"The voices and sentiments expressed by the children today is a clarion call for action to protect the safety, well-being and aspirations of our future generations, in the face of a complex crisis. As we rally to build socio-economic resilience of the affected communities and implement recovery plans for this global pandemic, let us remember the vulnerable children amongst us and work together to secure their future," said Terry Ferrari, Regional Leader East Asia Pacific, World Vision International.

Note to editor

ACT NOW, experiences and recommendations of girls and boys in the Asia Pacific region during COVID-19, is a compilation of survey data from children and youth, between the ages of 11 and 19, across 10 Asian countries including India, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Nepal, Myanmar, Laos, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Thailand.

⁷ <https://www.unicef.org/eap/stories/building-back-equal-girls-education>

⁸ <https://www.unicef.org/media/60981/file/convention-rights-child-text-child-friendly-version.pdf>

Read the full ACT NOW report version here:

<https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/coronavirus-health-crisis/act-now-experiences-and-recommendations-girls-and>

Event details can be found here:

<https://www.wvi.org/let-our-voice-be-heard>

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