SEXUAL VIOLENCE: A GLOBAL ICRC PRIORITY

ASIA-PACIFIC IN FOCUS

REGIONAL FEATURE

ICRC

ANYONE CAN COMMIT ACTS OF SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE.

WHAT IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) defines sexual violence according to the international legal definition as, "acts of sexual nature committed against any person by force, threat of force or coercion. It includes rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy and enforced sterilization or any other act of a sexual nature of comparable gravity."[1] Forced nudity or forcing a person to commit or watch an act of sexual violence are also forms of sexual violence. It is prohibited by international humanitarian law (IHL) during armed conflicts and by international human rights law (IHRL) at all times.

Despite clear legal prohibitions, sexual violence remains widespread and prevalent at all times, but especially during armed conflicts, in other situations of violence and in detention. It has multiple harmful consequences for the victims/survivors and their communities.

Although there is a growing acknowledgement of the issue and its consequences, many barriers and challenges remain that prevent victims/survivors from accessing services in a timely and safe way, hinder their full reintegration into community life and adversely affect their chances of reaching their full potential. Certain groups of people, such as migrants, internally displaced people (IDPs) or refugees, female heads of households, children, those who identify as LGBTQI+ and people deprived of their liberty, may be particularly vulnerable to sexual violence.

1 ICRC Strategy on Sexual Violence 2018–22, p.1. Domestic implementation of IHL prohibiting SV: checklist, p. 7,8.

WHAT THE REPORTS SAY

ESTIMATES INDICATE THAT IN THE **ASIA-PACIFIC REGION**, **15** TO **65%** OF **WOMEN** HAVE **EXPERIENCED PHYSICAL** OR **SEXUAL VIOLENCE** BY AN **INTIMATE PARTNER** AND **3** TO **30%** OF WOMEN HAVE EXPERIENCED SEXUAL VIOLENCE BY A **NON-INTIMATE PARTNER** (UNFPA 2020).

ACCORDING TO THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL ON CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE, **3,293 CASES** OF **CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE** WERE REPORTED IN 2021 (UNITED NATIONS-VERIFIED) IN THE **18 COUNTRIES** COVERED BY THE REPORT. THESE INCLUDE **FOUR COUNTRIES** FROM THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION – **AFGHANISTAN, MYANMAR, SRI LANKA AND NEPAL.**

EXTERNAL FACTORS LIKE **MIGRATION, PANDEMICS** AND **CLIMATE CHANGE EXACERBATE SEXUAL** AND **GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIVIDUALS** AND IN **COMMUNITIES,** BOTH IN SITUATIONS OF **ARMED CONFLICT** AND **VIOLENCE** OR OTHERWISE. IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED AREAS, THE PANDEMIC HAS WORSENED AN ALREADY CHALLENGING SITUATION WITH AN INCREASE IN INCIDENTS OF SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND A **DECREASE** IN THE **AVAILABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICES.**

OUR UNIQUE POSITION IN ADDRESSING SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The ICRC is a neutral and independent humanitarian organization that works to provide protection and assistance for victims of armed conflict and other violence. Sexual violence is all too common in these situations, where increased impunity, combined with a proliferation of light weapons and the destruction of community ties, increases the risk of it occurring.

Our humanitarian mandate, experience and access to people in conflict zones means we are uniquely placed to address the needs of people affected by sexual violence during armed conflict and violence and in places of detention. We also work to promote respect for IHL and its implementation in domestic law.

OUR APPROACH - WORLDWIDE AND IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

The ICRC has a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to addressing sexual violence, keeping the victim/survivor at the centre of its activities. It aims at preventing sexual violence from occurring, reducing people's exposure to risk and responding to the multifaceted needs of those affected.

While all ICRC delegations worldwide address sexual violence according to their specific contexts, 18 delegations have been identified for a funding appeal to specifically develop multidisciplinary work on the issue. In Asia-Pacific, these include the delegation in Bangladesh, the regional delegation in Malaysia (for activities in Malaysia and the bordering region), the delegation in the Philippines and the regional delegation in Fiji (for activities in Papua New Guinea). A regional adviser based in Bangkok, Thailand, and a team at the ICRC's headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, support these and other delegations in the region.

NON-DISCRIMINATION:

PROVIDE EQUAL AND FAIR TREATMENT TO ANYONE IN NEED OF SUPPORT.

HOW DOES THE ICRC ADDRESS SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

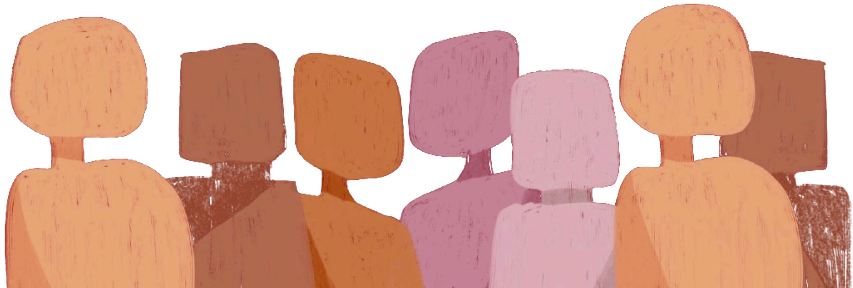
We tailor our activities to address sexual violence depending on the contexts. Some of the main areas of action in the Asia-Pacific region are:

Supporting the provision of appropriate health care, including mental health and psychological support and enhancing the capacities of local service providers (for instance in the Philippines, Papua New Guinea and Bangladesh).

Promoting efforts to prevent sexual violence through confidential dialogue with weapon bearers and authorities. This is done by integrating messages on prevention, awareness and response in the pre-departure briefings for peacekeepers, awareness programmes and training sessions for national armed forces and law enforcement agencies (for example in Sri Lanka, Viet Nam, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Malaysia).

Promoting awareness of sexual violence, its consequences, legal prohibition and prevention among representatives of the academia, media, civil society organizations and religious circles (for example in Pakistan and Malaysia).

Promoting communication and awareness campaigns jointly with other organizations active on the issue, for instance for International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict (19 June) and the 16 days of action on sexual and gender-based violence.



A SNAPSHOT OF OUR ACTIVITIES IN PRIORITY CONTEXTS IN ASIA-PACIFIC

Papua New Guinea: We help to improve mental health and psychosocial support by building local capacities and promote dialogue with local authorities, police forces and fighters to improve prevention and response to sexual violence.

Philippines: The ICRC supports health facilities providing care to victims of sexual and gender-based violence, builds the capacity of mental health practitioners and integrates discussion on sexual violence risk with communities to adapt our response.

Bangladesh: We help to raise awareness and provide technical guidance to health facilities, communities and the National Society.

Malaysia: We organize sessions for police forces on prevention of and response to sexual violence. We also engage with academia and the Malaysian Red Crescent Society on the issue.

(For more information about our activities and budget please check ICRC Special Appeal 2022 – Addressing Sexual Violence.)

GLOBAL ICRC TOOLS TO ADDRESS SEXUAL VIOLENCE

We have been developing tools and material to enhance our internal capacity and also access to services.

- **Checklist on addressing sexual violence in domestic law:** Developed in 2019 to support national authorities to ensure more systematic and global approaches and support the legal protection of victims/survivors.
- **Specific internal guidance:** Developed to support internal integration of sexual violence risk into operational work.

SOME TOOLS DEVELOPED IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

Video on the importance of access to services within the first 72 hours of a sexual violence incident. Translated into nine languages, the video recently won the silver Anthem award under the category of "awareness".

A series of graphics with key messages on how to react to disclosure and support victims/survivors of sexual violence when safe referral is not possible.

MORE RESOURCES

Here are some resources to integrate sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response when affected by additional challenges such as migration, climate change or pandemics, especially in contexts that are already affected by conflict and violence:

- guidance on ensuring prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence in COVID-19 quarantine centres (2020)
- awareness material on the impact of climate change on sexual and gender-based violence in settings that are already affected by violence and conflict (for instance, public conversation during the 16 days of action on gender-based violence).

RESEARCH ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE

These will help prevention and response within the organization and also be useful for orienting authorities on specific concerns or challenges:

- humanitarian research report exploring the humanitarian impacts of mandatory reporting on access to health care for victims/survivors of sexual violence in armed conflicts and other emergencies
- report on sexual and gender-based violence against men, boys and/including LGBTQI+ people
- study conducted in the Central African Republic (CAR) and South Sudan that explores what men and their communities understand by "sexual violence" and how it can be prevented.

LOOKING AHEAD

The ICRC continues to strengthen its efforts to ensure that addressing sexual violence is integrated into its operational and prevention activities and humanitarian diplomacy. In the Asia-Pacific region, efforts will be particularly focused on:

- enhancing internal capacities and training, including on response to disclosure
- promoting the fight against stigma, improving access to services for victims and developing tools and mechanisms for referral
- participating in the broader regional conversation (such as the one on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and the impact of climate change on sexual and gender-based violence) and strengthening coordination within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

SAFETY :

MAKE THE SAFETY OF THE SURVIVOR THE NUMBER ONE PRIORITY.

We help people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything we can to protect their lives and dignity and to relieve their suffering, often with our Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. We also seek to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles.

Regional Communication Centre, Delhi (Asia-Pacific)
International Committee of the Red Cross
A-49, Vasant Marg, Vasant Vihar
New Delhi - 110057
T +91 11 4221 1000
www.icrc.org
© ICRC, July 2022

1876/002 07.2022 Illustrations: ICRC