



The in-country Training Programme on Gender-Mainstreaming Small Arms Control in Lao PDR

Hybrid training

Report

Background

From 14 to 16 July 2021, the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific (UNRCPD) in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) of Lao PDR, conducted a three-day training on gender mainstreaming small arms control, targeting government officials. Due to the COVID-19 related restrictions on travelling, the training was conducted in a hybrid format: participants gathered in person at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Vientiane, while UNRCPD trainers, as well as other invited experts, joined via webex and delivered presentations virtually.

The event was organized in the framework of the In-Country Training Programme (ICTP) on Gender mainstreaming small arms control, which is part of a [global project](#) in support of gender mainstreamed policies, programmes and actions in the fight against small arms and light weapons (SALW) trafficking and misuse, in line with the Women, Peace and Security agenda, with funding from the European Union¹.

UNRCPD developed the methodology and the materials, which were followed and presented during the training, and provided administrative and logistical support. In Laos, the preparation and conduction of the training was supported by the MoFA team composed of five representatives led by the ICTP focal point, who also coordinated the selection of the national participants and advised on the training methodology and topics throughout the preparatory stage and the event.

Training participants

In total, thirty-two government officials (**17 women, 15 men**) took part in the training, representing the following agencies and unions: Customs, Defense, Education & Sport, Finance, Foreign Affairs, Industry & Commerce, Justice, National Assembly, Prime Minister Office, Public Security, Small Arms Import / Export Agency, Women Union, Youth Union.

Opening and closing remarks were provided in-person by the Ambassador of the European Union delegation to Lao PDR, Ms. Ina Marčiulionytė, and the Director-General of the International Organizations Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Maythong Thammavongsa. Dr. Yuriy Kryvonos, Director of UNRCPD, delivered opening remarks virtually. Presentations on key issues in focus were delivered by Dr. Yuriy Kryvonos, UNRCPD, Ms. Sisouvanh Vorabouth, UNFPA Lao PDR, Ms. Gaelle Demolis, UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, and Ms. Melissa Jardine, international expert on women in law enforcement in Asia-Pacific.

Training methodology

The training took place in a hybrid format. The morning sessions consisted of virtual power point presentations by the trainer and experts, while the afternoon sessions focused on practical exercises,

¹ [European Union Council Decision \(CFSP\) 2018/2011 of 17 December 2018](#).

conducted under the lead of the MoFA facilitators. The exercises' results were presented in plenary on the following day by the participants and the MoFA training facilitators. Simultaneous translation from English to Laotian was provided throughout the three-day training. Participants were given a digital dossier (via Dropbox) consolidating project background information, material and key resources of each session, as well as guidelines for the practical exercises. Training material, including power point presentations and exercises-related handouts were translated in Laotian language and distributed to the participants ahead of the training. Participants undertook a gender capacity assessment survey at the beginning of the training aimed at understanding the level of knowledge of the training topics by the trainees and generating baseline information on possible gaps and opportunities to gender mainstream SALW control at the national level. The main outcomes of the survey are presented in the following figures.

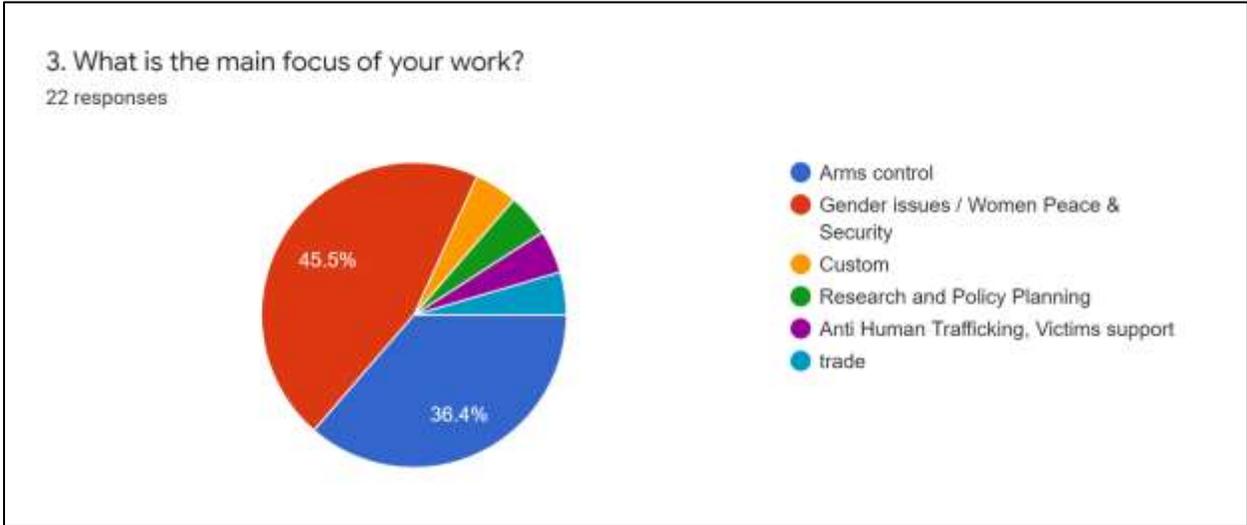


Figure 1: Summary of the answers to question n.3 of the gender capacity assessment survey: "What is the main focus of your work?".

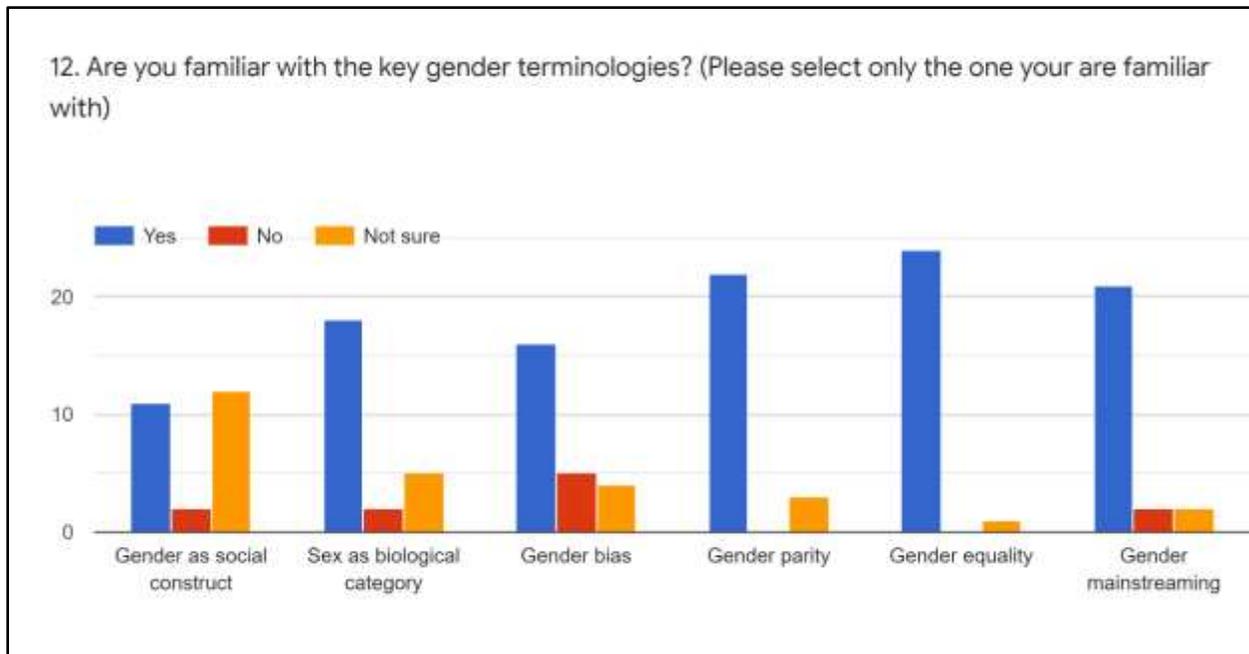


Figure 2: Summary of the answers to question n.12 of the gender capacity assessment survey: “Are you familiar with the key gender terminologies (gender as social construct; sex as biological category; gender bias; gender parity; gender equality; gender mainstreaming)?”.

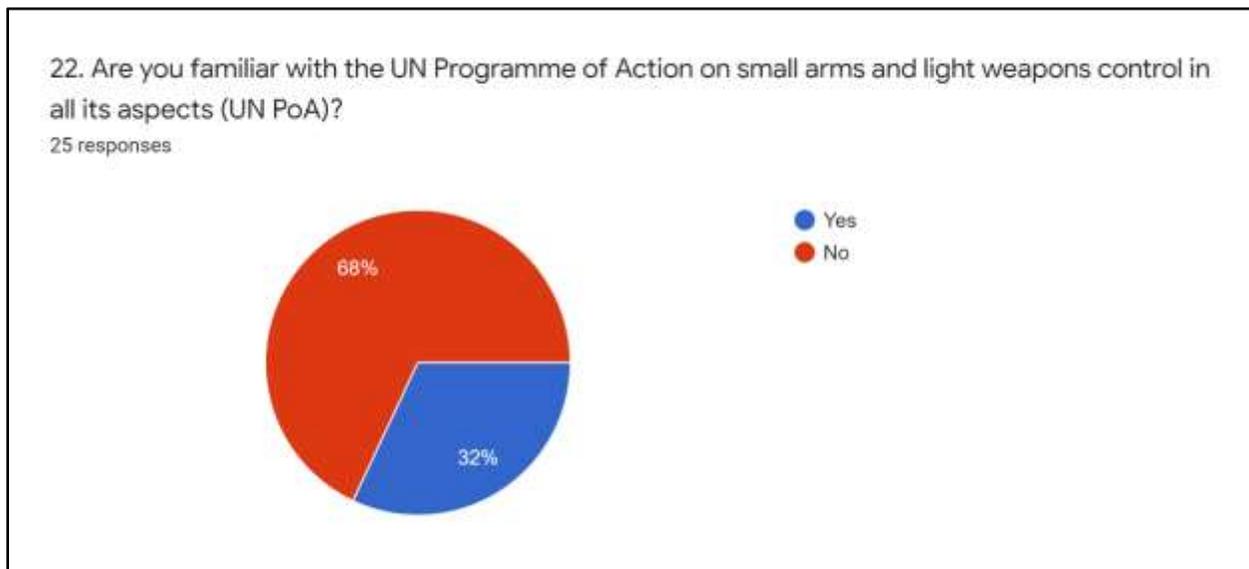


Figure 3: Summary of the answers to question n.22 of the gender capacity assessment survey: “Are you familiar with the UN Programme of Action on SALW?”.

A summary of all questions and the answers collected under the Gender Capacity Questionnaire is available on the following link: <https://forms.gle/CYUjYxmgQtFdAXrZ8>.

Summary of the training sessions

- During the training, presenters and experts covered topics on gender and small arms concepts; gender-based violence and links with small arms proliferation and misuse; gender

analysis and sex- and age disaggregated data collection; gender-responsive small arms control at the policy, legislation / regulatory and operational levels.

- In-depth presentations focused on:
 - Converging agenda: SALW control, the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, Sustainable Development (with focus on Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 16).
 - Gender-based violence and gender equality data in Lao PDR.
 - Global instruments on SALW control, such as the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons, the Arms Trade Treaty and the Firearms Protocol.
 - National reports on the UN PoA and The Seventh Biennial Meeting of States (BMS7) on the UN Programme of Action (PoA) to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.
 - [Women in law enforcement in the ASEAN region](#) and Lao PDR.
 - Global standards and tools, such as [the Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium \(MOSAIC\)](#).
 - Engaging with parliamentarians, women's organizations and the Women, Peace and Security community for gender-transformative approaches in SALW control.

Practical exercises

In total, participants engaged in five exercises, as follows:

1. Gender as social construct
Participants were asked to reflect on expectations and roles linked with being a woman or a man in Lao PDR and the flexibility between gender roles over time, with a focus on the relation to SALW possession and use as well as women's role in security and defense forces.
2. Understanding data as evidence base and analysis of a model survey
Participants worked in small groups to review graphs and data on SALW and gender issues in Lao PDR and analyze a [model SALW survey](#) inclusive of gender responsive indicators, developed by UNDP-SEESAC.
3. Self-assessment questions on the normative framework
Through a questionnaire, participants were asked to identify relevant normative framework and synergies among existing policies and laws, as well as gaps with regard to SALW control and gender related issues at the regulatory level.
4. Exercise on the preparation of the national report on the UN Programme of Action on SALW
Participants worked in small groups to fill in the reporting template, shared with the audience ahead of the training for data collection purposes. Each group was assigned to specific sections of the report, depending on the areas of responsibility of the group's members.
5. Wrapping-up exercises: drafting an action plan on gender mainstreaming arms control
Participants were asked to draft inputs to a strategy for gender mainstreaming small arms control in Lao PDR. Particularly, participants were divided in groups, each assigned to fill a matrix outlining the functional areas of SALW control and related gaps and opportunities for a gender responsive framework. The matrix drew on the National Action Plan template of [Module 4.10 of MOSAIC](#).

Summary of the main sessions, discussions and practical exercises' results

- During activity 1, participants introduced the concept of gender as a social construct and highlighted examples about the evolution of gender roles over time, with reference to the role of women and men in the security and defense sector, and their equal authorization to carry weapons while on duty. It has emerged that while traditional norms for women and man are

still embedded in the society, the last decades have seen a great flexibility and interchangeability of women and men roles and expectations. In addition, the government of Lao PDR has taken important steps to enhance women's meaningful participation and representation in the security and defense sector, as testified by the increasing number of women joining the police forces. As reported during the training, among the ASEAN countries, Laos has the highest percentage of women officers (20%)².

- In Lao PDR, the status of women has been elevated through government mechanisms and legislation which compel their inclusion in decision-making bodies. For example, women are encouraged to “participate and be a force in national defense and development” (8th Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2016-2020). Notwithstanding, women remain under-represented, particularly in the field of SALW control. In this regard a number of recommendations to cover the gender gaps were discussed by the participants and experts from UN Women, aimed at promoting enabling factors concerning human resources policies, deployments' facilities, recruitment campaign and processes, capacity building opportunities.
- Participants highlighted the benefits of increasing women's participation in operational roles, such as improved responses to sexual and gender-based violence and crimes, increased trust with communities, increased national forces' accountability.
- Participants identified several entry points for improving the collection of sex and age disaggregated data and gender analysis in SALW context. For instance, the Ministry of Public Security issued a law in 2017 to collect data on guns possession aimed at understanding the scale of small arms proliferation among civilian as the results of the legacy from the civilian war and possession by former uniformed officials.
- Available data on gender-based violence do not include reference to the use of small arms.
- From the SALW infrastructure perspective, Lao PDR does not have a national coordination mechanism on SALW, nor a National Action Plan. Firearms are regulated by the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of Defense.
- Lao PDR has a restrictive firearm regulation: civilians cannot possess or acquire small arms. National laws and policies on small arms control do not link to gender issues. Likewise, relevant policies and laws such as the National Plan of Action on Prevention and Elimination of Violence Against Women and Children (2021-2025) or National law on the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (Women, Peace and Security) do not include provisions on small arms control. Participants discussed in working groups on action points to increase coordination among key government departments and promote synergies among converging frameworks.

Main outcomes of the training

- The training expanded the participants' understanding of SALW control and its gender dimensions.
- By bringing together government officials working on different agendas, the training promoted coordination among different actors who identified cross-cutting issues in their respective areas of responsibility and entry points for improving coordination. In this regard,

² For more information on the topic, see: [Women in Law Enforcement in the ASEAN Region](#), report by UNODC, UN Women and INTERPOL, 2020.

the training was perceived as an opportunity to further encourage the establishment of a national coordination mechanism on SALW control.

- The training served to identify best practices and existing frameworks on gender equality in complementary areas and their application to SALW control.
- The training methodology encouraged the continuous engagement of participants, while support materials such as training modules, power point presentations, sessions' recording, case studies, glossaries for terminology on gender and SALW, were distributed via the digital dossier. The support materials are also available in Laotian language.
- Participants gained a greater knowledge of SALW control global instruments and guidelines. The training served as the opportunity for the government to work and finalize the first national report to the UN Programme of Action and to encourage the nomination of a focal point on its implementation.
- The training concluded with the identification of gaps and opportunities to strengthen the national infrastructure on SALW control and action points for the development of a gender responsive framework. In the context of the concluding activity, the following needs have been identified for the development of the follow-up activity of the In-Country Training Programme on gender mainstreaming small arms control:
 - The development of a gender -responsive National Action Plan on SALW control.
 - The establishment of a national coordination mechanism on SALW control, which should include the participation of key stakeholders, including the Women Union.
 - The improvement of data collection systems in SALW control, with emphasis on sex-and-age disaggregated data and their inclusion in policies and measures countering SALW illicit possession and trafficking.
 - The development of awareness raising campaign and activities aimed at sensitizing the communities on the gendered impact of SALW.

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ANNEX I LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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ANNEX II PHOTOS



Opening session. The Ambassador of the European Union delegation to Lao PDR, H.E. Ms. Ina Marčiulionytė and Director-General of the International Organizations Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Maythong Thammavongsa, delivered opening remarks at the conference venue.



Participants filling in the gender capacity assessment survey



Q&A session



UNRCPD interacting with the audience in video conference via webex



Participants working on the practical exercises in the afternoon sessions



Participants working on the practical exercises in the afternoon sessions



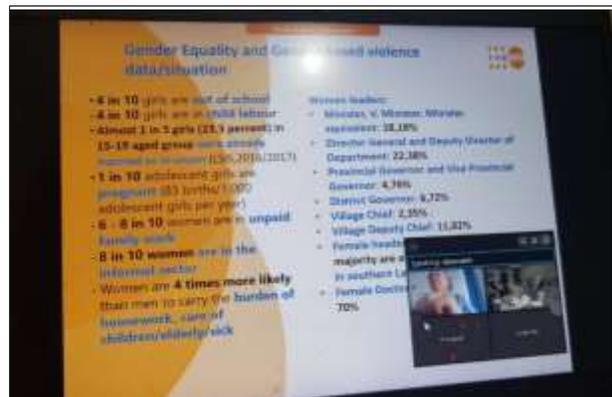
Participants working on the practical exercises in the afternoon sessions



Participants presenting in plenary the exercises' results



Participants presenting in plenary the exercises' results



Ms. Gaelle Demolis, Governance, Peace and Security Programme Specialist and Officer in Charge for the Philippine Programme Presence Office, UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, and Dr. Melissa Jardine, International Expert, discussed with the participants on challenges and opportunities for increased women's participation in law enforcement and operational roles.

Presentation on data and initiatives on Gender Equality, Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women in Lao PDR— by Ms. Sisouvanh Vorabouth, Gender Team Leader, UNFPA Lao PDR.



Dr Yuriy Kryvonos, Director of UNRCPD, explained how the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons supports the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.



Group discussion



Ms. Venephet Philathong, the UN Political and Security Affairs Officer at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lao PDR, serving as the ICTP focal point, presented the results of the exercises conducted in the afternoon session of Day 2, namely on the relevant normative framework and the finalization of the first national report on the UN PoA. Simultaneous interpretation from Laotian to English was provided during her presentation.

