



**World Health
Organization**

Western Pacific

WHO and EU join together to support COVID-19 response and systems strengthening in Asia

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This week, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Union (EU) agreed to join forces to support eight South East Asian countries in their response to COVID-19 and to strengthen preparedness for future pandemics.

The EU is providing €20 million for a South East Asia pandemic response and preparedness programme. WHO will use the funds to continue supporting the governments of Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam.

"These countries have spent more than a decade preparing for events with pandemic potential, by strengthening their health systems in anticipation of an event like the COVID19 pandemic. This support from the EU will help to build on this work, so that countries across South East Asia are prepared for the next pandemic or health emergency event," said Dr Takeshi Kasai, WHO's Regional Director for the Western Pacific.

In line with the Global Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan and guided by the Asia Pacific strategy for emerging diseases and public health emergencies (APSED III), the programme aims to strengthen health systems and to support the COVID-19 response in the eight South East Asian countries, with a particular focus on reaching the unreached. The funds will be used to:

- Mobilize all sectors and communities to ensure participation in prevention, preparedness and response activities;
- Control sporadic cases, clusters and community transmission;
- Suppress community transmission; and
- Reduce deaths from COVID-19.

The programme represents a joint effort between the EU and WHO's Regional Offices for South-East Asia (which includes Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand) and the Western Pacific (which includes Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, the Philippines and Viet Nam). To ensure that the interventions in each country will be in line with national priorities as outlined in the national response plans, each WHO Region is working closely with the governments of those countries and other stakeholders, including civil society organizations.

In addition, WHO will use the opportunity provided by the EU funding to engage with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) which includes all eight countries in the programme, to enhance coordination among ASEAN Member States and promote a regional approach for responding to COVID-19, where similar challenges are faced.

"The European Union is one of WHO's major partners, particularly in emergency response. This partnership will go a long way in ensuring that the South-East Asian Region builds back better during and after the COVID-19 pandemic and is stronger and more resilient in the years ahead," said Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, WHO's Regional Director for South-East Asia.

The contribution of the European Union is critical to WHO's efforts to support countries in responding to the ongoing pandemic in South East Asia, and demonstrates its solidarity as well as its continued commitment to global health.