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# Report of the Tripartite Seminar on Strengthening Social Protection in the ASEAN region

**Bangkok, Thailand**  
**17 – 18 November 2014**

**ILO/Japan Project on Promoting Income Security and Employment Services in ASEAN**  
**Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific**





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## 1. Introduction and opening remarks

The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), a single regional common market and production base, will become a reality in 2015 for the 600 million women and men of the ten ASEAN Member States. The ASEAN integration will impact the structure of economies, drive innovation and could double productivity in the coming decade. However, enhanced productivity may bring higher incomes for some, such as the high-skilled, but could also exacerbate inequality, leaving some workers, mainly among the lower skilled and migrant workers, off those economic gains. With such development ahead of the ASEAN integration, social protection will play a crucial role by compensating for the short-term loss of income and facilitating access to education and skills, with positive impacts on the overall productivity of the workforce and economic growth in the longer term. By adopting the **International Labour Organization (ILO)'s Recommendation on Social Protection Floors, 2012 (No. 202)** and more recently the **ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection, 2013**, the ASEAN Member States committed to take immediate actions for extending social protection to all in ASEAN.

During 17-18 November, at the **Tripartite seminar on strengthening social protection in ASEAN**, in Bangkok, Thailand, Ministries of Labour and Social Welfare together with social partners of the ASEAN Member States agreed upon common priority recommendations and concrete policy actions to extend social protection in preparation for ASEAN economic integration. More specifically, the recommendations will be submitted to the ASEAN inter-sectoral bodies consultation in December 2014, in Siem Reap, Cambodia, for inclusion in the ASEAN Plan of Action on Social Protection.

The seminar was sponsored by the *ILO/Japan-ASEAN Project on income security and employment services* and the Canadian funded *ILO-ASEAN Project Tripartite Action for the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers*, provided a forum for ASEAN.





**Mr. Nakorn Silpa-Archa, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Labour of Thailand**

The impact of the ASEAN economic integration on labour markets and social development is yet quite uncertain. Arguably, nationally-defined Social Protection Floors (SPFs) constitute fundamental tools for supporting inclusive economic growth. A variety of social protection approaches co-exist across the ASEAN Member States, however all ASEAN Member States share a common goal to promote social protection along with economic growth and trade-financial integration. He concluded that the Social Protection Floor Initiative played a vital role in the development and extension of different types of social security and social protection schemes, in particular for those unemployed and working in the informal economy in Thailand.

**Mr. Chinchai Cheecharoen, Technical Advisor on Social Development, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security of Thailand**

The seminar demonstrates the strong commitment shared by government officials, social partners, non-governmental organizations' representatives and international agencies in working together towards the creation and extension of social protection schemes. The ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection adopted at the 23<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN Summit in Brunei Darussalam, in 2013, is anchored on the universal human right to social security. This finds all its relevance in the ongoing process of economic integration, since universal protection ensures that vulnerable groups access opportunities for human development, social welfare and social justice. He also referred to challenges still faced by Thailand in ensuring universal social protection in Thailand.

**Ms. Thetis Mangahas, Deputy Director, ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific**

The ASEAN integration will change the structure of economies, drive innovation and could double productivity in the coming decade. However, these overall gains will not be distributed evenly; while some sectors will flourish, others are likely to see job losses. With this backdrop, social protection will play a crucial role by compensating for the short-term loss as well as promoting access to education and skills. Already a number of ASEAN Member States have started reforming their social security systems. Such commitment is shown by the adoption of the Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection by the ten ASEAN Leaders. Through active discussions among representatives of Ministries of Labour and Ministries of Social Welfare, representatives of workers' and employers' organizations, the seminar will build recommendations to give effect to the principles of the Recommendation No. 202 and the ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection. Effective implementation of the Declaration and SPFs means engaging beneficiaries of social protection, i.e. workers and their families, and their employers as core actors of the social and economic development of the ASEAN Member States.



***“ASEAN will be more interconnected. This transition will affect countries and people in ASEAN countries.”***

***Mr. Nakorn Silpa-Archa,  
Permanent Secretary, Ministry of  
Labour of Thailand***



***“Social protection is a basic human right enshrined in the Universal Human Right Declaration.”***

***Mr. Chinchai Cheecharoen,  
Technical Advisor on Social  
Development, Ministry of Social  
Development and Human Security***



***“The overall economic gains of ASEAN economic integration in 2015 will not benefit all people equally. Social protection will play a crucial role in supporting those affected by the economic changes, developing skills and promoting employment”.***

***Ms Thetis Mangahas, Deputy  
Director, ILO Regional Office for  
Asia and the Pacific (ROAP)***



*“The recommendations reflect challenges and views shared among governments, workers and employers, who are committed to turn the principles in the ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection and the ILO Recommendation No.202 into a reality for all.”*

**Ms Celine Peyron Bista,**  
Chief Technical Advisor on Social  
Protection, ILO ROAP



*“Everyone, especially those who are poor, at risk, persons with disabilities, older people, out-of-school youth, children, migrant workers, and other vulnerable groups, is entitled to have equitable access to social protection.”*

**Ms Mega Irena,**  
Head, Social Welfare, Women, Labour  
& Migrant Workers Division, ASEAN  
Secretariat

## 2. Extension of social protection, a recognized priority in ASEAN

### Ms Celine Peyron Bista, The social protection situation and strategies for its extension in ASEAN

In June 2012, with the adoption of the Recommendation No. 202 on SPF, the ILO Member States committed to the extension of social protection. The SPF aims to provide a minimum level of social benefits and services to all people in a country, guaranteeing at least access to essential healthcare services; education, care, nutrition for children; income security for the working age group; and income security for the elderly and people with disabilities.

Successful social protection strategies and programmes are anchored in the principles of social solidarity and risk pooling among the society; ensure equal treatment, equity and tend progressively towards universal coverage; build on effective engagement of social partners; rely on the State’s responsibility for guaranteeing funds’ sustainability, adequacy of benefits and quality of services. Finally, successful social protection programmes are those promoting employment and enhancing capabilities.

Although ASEAN Member States have committed to extend social protection, witnessed by the number of ongoing reforms of social security laws and new schemes being designed, effective coverage still remains low. The Assessment based National Dialogue (ABND) on social protection, led by the government and United Nations agencies, has proven to be a useful tool to address the extension of social protection holistically and improve coordination among all actors involved. To date, seven Member States, namely Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam have already completed or are conducting such assessments. These assessments define social protection floors in the ASEAN Member States and will serve as baseline information for measuring progress in extending social protection in ASEAN.

### Ms Mega Irena – The ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection and the process of developing its Plan of Action

Social protection, defined in the ASEAN Charter as *equitable access to opportunities for human development, social welfare and justice*, is the backbone of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint that calls for a *people-centred and socially responsible ASEAN Community, where the well-being, livelihood and welfare of the peoples are enhanced*. In this sense, the

ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection embeds the principles of non-discrimination, social justice, social solidarity, equity and accessibility in realizing the human right to social security. For the development of social protection systems, the Declaration recommends a participatory and inclusive approach, the gradual extension towards universal coverage based on a life-cycle approach, and adopting a diverse range of interventions combining social insurance, social assistance and social welfare, and provision of social services. Social protection strategies should be coordinated, holistic and consulted with social partners, other stakeholders and development partners. In this respect, implementing the ASEAN Declaration will require cooperating at the ASEAN level through the involvement of key ASEAN sectoral bodies, such as the Senior Labour Officials Meeting (SLOM), Senior Officials Meeting for Social Welfare and Development (SOMSWD), Senior Officials Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (SOMRDPE), ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW), Senior Officials Meeting on Health and Development (SOMHD), and the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM).

### 3. Workers' and Employers' organizations and the extension of social protection in ASEAN

#### Mr. Datuk Hj Shamsuddin Bardan, ASEAN Confederation of Employers (ACE)

Social protection can help by enhancing human capital and labour productivity, adapting to changes in the global economy, promoting labour market mobility, encouraging formalization of the workforce and economy, and stabilizing demand particularly during economic downturns. As such, the Employers' group recommended the following aspects to be included in the ASEAN Plan of Action for the implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection. Social protection interventions should encompass a variety of programmes, with different financing methods and calling for innovative measures, including with support from employers' and workers' organizations. Universal health coverage constitutes a particularly strategic goal, as a healthy workforce is usually a productive workforce. Implementation of regional and national social protection measures has to be progressive, in order to accommodate available fiscal space, institutional human resources and infrastructure that vary considerably across the ASEAN Member States. The implementation framework of the Declaration should allow for constant and regular reviews and improvements. While cooperation and coordination will be needed to promote social protection at the regional level, specific circumstances and comparative advantages of each ASEAN Member State should also be preserved. Tripartite social dialogue is a crucial point which must be part of the process of ASEAN integration and supported by the ASEAN secretariat.

#### Mr. Jovenal Lazaga, ASEAN Trade Union Council (ATUC)

The Workers' group acknowledged the initiative of ASEAN governments to give effect to the ILO Recommendation No. 202, notably by adopting the ASEAN Declaration for Strengthening Social Protection. However, immediate actions by the governments are necessary to ensure more participatory, transparent and effective consultations and engagement of workers' representatives in the design, implementation and monitoring of social protection at national and regional levels. The Workers' group recommended the following key actions to be included in the ASEAN Plan of Action: setting up time frames to develop and implement social protection policies; establishing inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms at national levels and single window service approaches at local levels for more efficient delivery of services and benefits; increasing public awareness of social protection, notably relying on workers' organizations for information dissemination campaigns; expanding social protection schemes in countries, including universal health coverage; and regularly assessing, monitoring and evaluating policies and implementation. **Mr. Chinnachot Saengsanka, representative of the workers' organizations of Thailand** reinforced ATUC's statement by exposing challenges and concerns shared among Thailand' workers organizations when contemplating the extension of social protection.



*“An effective, efficient and affordable social protection system can significantly contribute to enhancing labour productivity and sustaining economic growth in the ASEAN region.”*

*Mr. Datuk Hj Shamsuddin Bardan,  
ASEAN Confederation of Employers  
(ACE)*



*“The workers’ organizations support the initiative of the ASEAN governments to put into effect the ILO Recommendation No. 202 by adopting the ASEAN Declaration for Strengthening Social Protection.”*

*Mr. Jovenal Lazaga, ASEAN  
Trade Union Council (ATUC)*





*“All ASEAN Member States are committed to achieve at least the social protection floor guarantees including universal health coverage”*

**Ms. Cheng Boon Ong,**  
Social Protection Consultant for  
the ILO Regional Office for Asia  
and the Pacific

#### 4. Identification of common challenges and priority recommendations for the extension of social protection in ASEAN

Before the group discussion, **Ms. Cheng Boon Ong, international consultant for the ILO**, explained the methodology adopted for compiling the ASEAN report on social protection. The regional report is primarily based on the results derived from the assessment based national dialogues that have been, or are currently taking place, in seven ASEAN Member States (Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and the Philippines). Desk review is being conducted to assess the issue of social protection in the three remaining Member States (Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore). Preliminary results of the research identified the following common challenges for implementing social protection in ASEAN Member States: weak institutional capacity and lack of coordination in policy design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation; problems with identification or targeting without a sound information system at central and decentralized levels, low and instable revenues of the informal and rural economy workers, lack of awareness on social insurance schemes and poor compliance; and inadequate benefits.

**Group discussions: Identifying challenges to extend social protection floor guarantees (Health, Children, Working Age, Elderly) and common recommendations for improving social protection across ASEAN Member States.**





## 5. Adoption of the concrete tripartite actions and time frame for the effective implementation of the ASEAN Declaration

The tripartite seminar adopted recommendations committing to work together towards the establishment of, at least, social protection floors and the progressive extension of social security for all, including workers of the informal economy. The delegates agreed on a list of actions to expand social protection coverage, improve the governance of social protection schemes and coordination among ministries and with social partners

and international organizations, and develop a monitoring framework to measure progress in extending social protection in ASEAN. The seminar's recommendations will be submitted to the ASEAN inter-sectoral consultation on social protection, 8-9 December, in Siem Reap, Cambodia, for inclusion in the ASEAN Plan of Action for the effective implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection.

### Summary of the Recommendations of the Tripartite Seminar on Strengthening Social Protection in ASEAN 18 November 2014, Bangkok, Thailand

#### 1) Progressively extend social protection coverage:

- Develop national policies that embrace the principles of the ILO Recommendation No. 202
- Enhance advocacy, awareness raising and capacity building among beneficiaries and employers
- Strengthen efforts for the extension of coverage to informal economy and rural workers
- Ensure linkages with active labour market policies, including programmes for persons with disabilities
- Extend social protection to migrant workers
- Establish universal coverage gradually, notably universal health coverage

#### 2) Facilitate research, assessment and development of a monitoring framework:

- Conduct assessment based national dialogue exercises on social protection in all ASEAN Member States that will constitute the baseline information and regularly update it
- Prepare and regularly update an ASEAN report on social protection (tool for measuring progress)
- Establish and regularly report on targets, indicators and timelines for monitoring progress in extending social protection

#### 3) Ensure good governance, coordination and consultation with social partners:

- Conduct fiscal space analysis and financial capacity assessments
- Explore the single-window service approach for delivery of social services by improving availability, efficiency, integration, information systems and database and public-private partnership with service providers
- Establish national Inter-ministerial coordination bodies in charge of social protection
- Institutionalize social dialogue mechanisms
- Train social protection policy makers and officers
- Prepare a database of good practices to extend social protection
- Include Social Protection in the ASEAN post-2015 vision
- Link ASEAN economic and social integration
- Reinforce South-South exchange of expertise and explore possible bilateral social security agreements
- Reinforce the collaboration with the ASEAN Social Security Association, ILO and other UN agencies



## 6. Committing for the implementation of concrete actions for the proposed ASEAN Plan of Action on Social Protection.

The **United Nations** agencies present at the seminar, namely the ILO, the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), committed to provide technical support to the ASEAN Member States for the development of the assessment and monitoring framework. **Ms Aidi Hu, Senior Social Security Expert**, ILO, presented how the ASEAN assessment and monitoring framework will link with a global initiative on developing indicators to measure the implementation of social protection floors.

The **employers' representatives** recommended taking immediate actions for extending coverage to informal economy workers and small enterprises, and address the limited social protection coverage of the 6.5 million migrant workers within the ASEAN region.

For the **workers' groups**, effective implementation of universal social protection schemes requires concentrating efforts on raising awareness and enhancing understanding and capacities to develop social protection among governments' officials, and also beneficiaries.

The **government's representatives** called for closer cooperation among ASEAN Member States and with development partners on exchanging good practices and expertise, especially to address the needs of vulnerable workers. Despite the variety of policies and measures that can be put in place for extending social protection, an invariable element of success is social dialogue.

### Next steps:

7. ASEAN inter-sectoral bodies consultation, 8-9 December 2014, Siem Reap: The Ministry of Human Security and Social Development of Thailand will submit the tripartite recommendations for possible incorporation into the draft ASEAN Plan of Action for implementing the Declaration;
8. The draft ASEAN Plan of Action will circulate among the ASEAN bodies and ministries for revision and endorsement; the ASEAN Plan of Action is to be submitted for possible adoption to the ASEAN Heads of States at the 23<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN Summit in November 2015;
9. The ILO will finalize the report on the situation of social protection in ASEAN and present a possible monitoring framework of the implementation of the Declaration to the Tripartite seminar for enhancing social security in an economically integrated ASEAN, August 2015, in Indonesia.



**Aidi Hu,**  
*Senior Social Protection  
Specialist, Social Protection  
Department of the ILO*



**Mr. Datuk Hj Shamsuddin  
Bardan,** *ASEAN  
Confederation of Employers  
(ACE)*



**Ms. Phyo Soe,**  
*Youth committee Secretary,  
Federation of Trade Unions  
Myanmar.*



**Ms. Varatsuda Saradatta,**  
*Foreign Relations Officer,  
Ministry of Labour of  
Thailand*



The recommendations of the tripartite seminar on strengthening social protection in ASEAN can be viewed at:

<http://www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/ShowProjectRessource.do?ressourceId=48297&pid=2717>

More information on the ILO/Japan Project-ASEAN Promoting income security and employment services can be found at:

<http://www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/ShowProjectPage.do?pid=2717>

More information on the ILO-ASEAN Triangle Project can be found at:

[http://www.ilo.org/asia/whatwedo/projects/WCMS\\_193023/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/asia/whatwedo/projects/WCMS_193023/lang--en/index.htm)

For further information please contact:

Ms Celine Peyron Bista, ILO Chief Technical Advisor on Social Security,

Tel. +66 22 88 1740,

Email: [bista@ilo.org](mailto:bista@ilo.org)



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