

International Labour Organization in collaboration with the Philippines Embassy in Singapore

First Capacity Building Workshop on Strengthening the Role of ASEAN Labour Attachés in Singapore

26 April 2016
Orchard Hotel, Singapore

Meeting Report

1. Background

The ILO ASEAN TRIANGLE Project (ATP) aims to significantly reduce the exploitation of labour migrants in the region through increased legal and safe migration and improved labour protection. ATP promotes both bilateral and regional approaches to deal with shared concerns, make regionalism more effective, and enhance the capacity of institutions in ASEAN.

The appointment of labour attachés or consular officials to major countries of destination is one important measure for migrant sending countries to strengthen the protection of their migrant workforce. Labour Attachés perform a vital role in the protection of migrant workers and in the development of effective labour migration policies. For countries that do not have labour attachés, the protection and promotion of migrants' rights in countries of destination is the responsibility of consular officials. These officers work on the frontline of protection: vetting would-be employers and contracts, responding to and resolving grievances and, where necessary, facilitating repatriation of their citizens.

Recommendation 13 from the 6th ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour (AFML)¹ in 2013 stated that ASEAN Member States should “Ensure and strengthen the roles of labour attachés, embassies, and consular officials to include support services on availing of complaint mechanisms for migrant workers.” Similarly, earlier recommendations were adopted at the 5th AFML in 2012 stating that “Member States should enhance the functions of labour attachés and consular officials in ASEAN Member States to verify information of job offers and employment contracts, as feasible, in receiving countries...” and from the 3rd AFML indicating “the need to: strengthen

¹ The ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour (AFML) is a regional migration forum in ASEAN that gathers annually representatives from governments, workers, employers and civil society in ASEAN to discuss, share experiences, build consensus on the protection of migrant workers as a means to pursue the provisions of the Cebu Declaration. AFML, which started in 2006, is supported by the ILO, IOM, UN Women and the ASEAN Secretariat.

[the role] and raise the visibility of labour attachés and consular staff in collecting and providing information, and responding to rights violations against women and men migrant workers...through close engagement with the migrant community and employers, and in cooperation with authorities of the host countries.”

In 2013 in Malaysia, the ILO GMS TRIANGLE Project, in collaboration with the ATP, partnered with the Malaysian Bar Council to support the regular consultations with labour attachés and embassy officials from sending countries posted in Malaysia.

In Thailand, the ASEAN TRIANGLE Project (ATP) partnered with the Thai Ministry of Labour (MOL) to support the quarterly consultation for labour attachés and embassy officials from Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar now posted in Bangkok starting in 2015. The activity was designed to strengthen dialogue between Thai MOL and the labour attachés and consular officials from CLM countries. The fourth consultation took place on February 26, 2016 in Bangkok.

These consultation meetings with labour attachés are part of the over-all Capacity Building Programme for CLM-V countries adopted in 2014 with ATP.

In Singapore, the first consultation workshop for labour attachés and embassy officials from Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Viet Nam posted in Singapore was convened on the 26 April 2016 at the Orchard Hotel in Singapore. This first Workshop introduced the work of the ILO ASEAN TRIANGLE Project with regards to labour attachés in strengthening their capacity as a means of enhancing the services and protection for their migrant workers. The Workshop also allowed ASEAN labour attachés and consular officials in Singapore to have better familiarization of functions they each perform and their services to migrant workers. This Workshop was organized by the ILO ASEAN TRIANGLE Project (ATP) in collaboration with the Philippines Overseas Labour Office of the Embassy of the Philippines in Singapore and the support of the Singapore Ministry of Manpower.

Proceedings

The Workshop opened with brief welcome statements from H.E. Ambassador Antonio Morales, Philippine Ambassador to Singapore and Mr. Manuel Imson, Senior Programme Officer and Project Coordinator of the ASEAN TRIANGLE Project, who spoke in behalf of the ILO.

In his statement, Ambassador Morales expressed appreciation for the timely convening of the

Workshop taking into consideration the developments that are taking place in the ASEAN, particularly on issued affective the labour sector and migrant workers He mentioned that the Philippine Embassy was honored to be part of the process of building the capacity of ASEAN labour attachés that has already been implemented in Malaysia and Thailand. Ambassador Morales expressed his hopes that this first Workshop in Singapore would lead to a deeper and better understanding of the relevant international standards on labour and the policy and practical measures undertaken by ASEAN governments, both sending and receiving countries, to better provide support services to their migrant workers.

On his part, Mr. Imson, thanked the Government of the Philippines and the Singapore Ministry of Manpower for their collaboration in making the first Workshop in Singapore possible. He cited the over-all goal of the ILO in strengthening the capacity of labour attachés in ASEAN. Mr. Imson also cited the importance of this consultation workshop in the light of recent development in ASEAN notably on the newly adopted ASEAN Community Vision 2020, the growth and dynamics of labour migration in ASEAN and critical role of labour attachés as recognized under the Cebu Declaration and the AFML.

Session 1: Current trends on labour migration in ASEAN

This Session, with presentation by Mr. Imson, covered a range of topics, including an overview of recent trends in migration in ASEAN, international instruments and standards for the protection of migrant workers, updates on the Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030), the ASEAN Labour Ministers and ACMW Work Programmes (2016-2020) and ILO capacity building programme for ASEAN labour attachés.

In the discussion, Mr. Imson also informed the participants on the ILO programme on Financial Education in Singapore that was first initiated in 2014 and completed last year. The programme, which was implemented in partnership with leading CSOs in Singapore and with the support of the Embassies of the Philippines, Indonesia and Myanmar, benefited migrant workers from Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and the Philippines. He said that the programme concluded with the forging of the a Memorandum of Commitment among CSOs and their implementing partners and witnessed by officials from the embassies of the Philippines, Indonesia and Myanmar.

Session 2: Country presentations on services to migrant workers

This session familiarized labour attachés and consular officials on data and profile of migrant workers in Singapore from Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. Labour Attachés from these countries also provided information on the services and programmes they offer to their migrant workers and identified key issues and challenges faced by their Embassies with regard to migrant workers.

Indonesia

Mr Faisal Rachman, Third Secretary of the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, stated that there are currently 200,000 migrant workers from Indonesia now in Singapore. Of this number, about 120,000 are employed as domestic workers. He also said that the Embassy runs a capacity building programme for Indonesian domestic workers in Singapore that provides formal training such as higher education courses and informal training, i.e. workshops concerned with self-improvement of skills, motivation and business knowledge. Since 2013, more than 6,000 domestic workers have taken part in the formal training modules. In addition, the Embassy offers services and protection to its migrant workers by providing the services of a lawyer/law advocacy; acting as a mediator; promoting interactive dialogues; maintaining a 24 hours hotline; providing shelter facilities; conducting orientation on socialization policy and law in Singapore; and maintaining consular booths.

Malaysia

Mr Nai Mung Kun, Labour Attaché of Malaysia in Singapore, stated that Malaysia currently maintains labour attachés in four countries --- Geneva, Indonesia, India and Singapore. He introduced participants to the:

1) Roles and functions on the Malaysian Labour Attaché in Singapore:

- Protection of workers' welfare;
- Promotion – Employment and job opportunities;
- Assist the development of labour policies;
- Promote and establish good relation within the mission, relevant agencies of host government, NGO's and other embassies.

2) Scenario for Malaysian workers in Singapore:

- Estimated – 500,000 (32%) working in Singapore: 130,000 professionals, 370,000-work permit holders, and 81,000 commuting on daily basis;
- 75% - semi-skilled or unskilled workers working in various sectors. Mainly services, manufacturing, construction, and maritime.

3) Issues and problems:

- Passport confiscation;
- Late payment of wages / non-payment of wages / high salary deduction;
- Inadequate living conditions;
- Job mismatching;
- Contract terms differ on what had been previously agreed;
- Long working hours;
- Verbal abuse by agent or employers.

4) Implementation mechanisms:

- Malaysian Oversea Employment Management Centre (MOEMC);
- Enforcement;
- Awareness Programme;
- Collaboration.

5) Challenges:

- Lack of data /statistics of Malaysians abroad;
- Workers ill-advised about job offers in Singapore;
- Lack of funds to assist workers;
- Provide a shelter for workers while waiting to complete travel documents or have cases pending for investigation by the Singapore authorities.

Philippines

Philippines Labour Attaché, Ramon T. Tionloc Jr., introduced participants to the work of the Philippine Overseas Labour Office (POLO) at the Embassy of the Philippines in Singapore. According to the Embassy estimates, there are 176,500 Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Singapore: 65,000 professionals; 20,500 highly skilled; 19,500 semi-skilled; and 71,500 domestic workers.

The Embassy is now implementing the following development and training programmes for migrant workers:

- Dress making/Tailoring;
- Basic computer;
- Cooking/Baking;
- Food preparation;
- Therapeutic massage;
- Fashion jewelry making;

- Crocheting/ Knitting;
- Automotive/ Auto Repair.

In terms of welfare services, the Embassy offers the following:

- Counseling;
- Referral to authorities;
- Hospital visits;
- Jail visits;
- Medical assistance;
- Repatriation assistance;
- Temporary shelter to domestic workers.

In addition, the Embassy provides:

- Assistance to seafarers;
- Contract verification services;
- Services for vacationing OFWs;
- Post-arrival orientation seminar on safety and awareness in coordination with the Singapore Police Force.

The key issues and challenges the POLO office faces in Singapore are the following:

a) Employment contracts

- Illegal termination of contracts of domestic workers by employer;
- No off days for domestic workers;
- Physical and verbal abuse committed by employers on domestic workers;
- Sexual harassment/ molestation;
- Non-payment of salaries.

b) Recruitment violations

- Excessive collection of placement fees;
- Effects of no visa policy on entry of workers.

Session 3: Moving forward

In the final session, participants discussed the implementation of future workshops and themes and agreed on the following conclusions and recommendations:

1. Acknowledged the importance of labour migration in ASEAN.
2. Welcomed the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda, which

reaffirms the need to respect, protect and promote fundamental freedoms for all and recognizes the positive contribution of migrants to inclusive growth and sustainable development.

3. Acknowledged the important role of labour attachés and relevant consular officials in extending protection and support programmes to migrant workers.
4. Reaffirmed the value of regular meetings among ASEAN labour attachés and related consular officials in Singapore as a means of promoting better and more coherent understanding about labour migration, including issues relating to the services and protection of migrant workers.
5. Agreed to consider the following modalities for their future meetings:
 - a. Regularly holding the meeting at least once a year. The next meeting to be convened in the first quarter of 2017;
 - b. Designating a coordinator for each meeting from among its members;²
 - c. Continued technical support by ILO and, where necessary, other relevant agencies;
 - d. Adoption of the following themes for the next meeting:
 - i. Protection of migrant workers.
 - ii. Issue of minimum wage.

Meeting participants expressed appreciation to the ILO ASEAN TRIANGLE Project, funded by the Government of Canada, and the Philippine Overseas Labour Office of the Embassy of the Philippines in Singapore for co-organizing this Workshop.

The Workshop ended with closing remarks from the co-chairs of the Workshop.

² The Workshop agreed to adopt the suggestion of Deputy Ambassador of Lao PDR, that future Coordinators for these meetings should follow the ASEAN Chairmanship. In this regard, considering that Lao is currently chairing ASEAN, it was agreed that the 2017 meeting be co-chaired by Lao PDR and the Philippines (incoming ASEAN Chairs) subject to final confirmation from both sides.

Annex I: Agenda

International Labour Organization (ILO) and Embassy of the Philippines in Singapore First Capacity Building Workshop on Strengthening the Role of Labour Attachés in Singapore

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AGENDA




Time	Agenda Item
08.30-09.00	Registration
09.00-09.30	Opening session Moderator: Labour Attaché Ramon T. Tionloc Jr., Philippines <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr Manuel Imson, Senior Programme Officer and Project Coordinator, ASEAN TRIANGLE Project, International Labour Organization - H.E. Antonio A. Morales, Philippine Ambassador to Singapore Group photo
09.30-10.00	Introduction of Participants Moderator: Ms Maria Dolores Picot, Consultant, ILO <p>Session 1: Current trends on labour migration in ASEAN <i>This session will provide an overview of recent developments in migration in ASEAN and updates on ILO regional training programme for ASEAN labour attachés.</i></p> <p>Mr Manuel Imson, Senior Programme Officer and Project Coordinator, ASEAN TRIANGLE Project, International Labour Organization.</p> Q&A
10.00-10.15	Coffee and tea break
10.15-11.45	Session 2: Country presentations on services to migrant workers Moderator: Mr Manuel Imson, ILO <p><i>In this session, each of the countries' representatives will provide updates on their current activities, programmes and services to migrant workers --- Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Philippines.</i></p> Q&A
11.45-12.15	Session 3: Moving forward <i>This session will discuss the implementation of future workshops and themes.</i>
12.15-12.30	Closing by co-chairs: Philippine Embassy, ILO.
12.30-14.00	Lunch



Annex II: List of Participants

International Labour Organization and the Embassy of the Philippines in Singapore First Capacity Building Workshop on Strengthening the Role of ASEAN Labour Attachés in Singapore

26th April 2016
Orchard Hotel
Singapore

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<p>3. Mr Sholahudin Labor Affair Officer Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia 7 Chatsworth Rd 249761 Singapore Tel: +65 6737 7422 Fax: +65 6737 5037 Email: sholahudin@indonesianembassy.sg</p>	<p>4. Mr Didit Parlambang Counsellor Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia 7 Chatsworth Rd 249761 Singapore Tel: +65 6737 7422 Fax: +65 6737 5037 Email: diditparlambang@indonesianembassy.sg</p>
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