

► TRIANGLE in ASEAN

Quarterly Briefing Note

ASEAN



April – June 2024

Main programme activities



2nd consultation on the ASEAN Declaration on Skills Mobility, Recognition and Development for Migrant Workers on 24-25 June 2024, Lao PDR

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This quarter involved two major activities to support the development of the **ASEAN Declaration on Skills Mobility, Recognition and Development for Migrant Workers** and its Checklist. Development of this important ASEAN Declaration is led by ASEAN Chair Lao People's Democratic Republic with technical support from the ASEAN Secretariat, ILO and IOM. TRIANGLE has been working closely with the ILO's Skills Specialists to provide technical leadership to this project.

The **1st consultation** on the development of the ASEAN Declaration on Skills Mobility, Recognition and Development for Migrant Workers was organized online on 29 April. The event was attended by about 110 persons in person and online, including government officials responsible for labour migration and skills development, employers' organizations, workers' organizations and civil society from ten ASEAN Member States and Timor Leste, along with representatives of the ASEAN Secretariat, IOM, ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) Committee and ASEAN TVET Council (ATC). The meeting agenda focused on discussing current opportunities and challenges in migrant workers' access to skills mobility, recognition and development in the ASEAN region and sharing good practices in facilitating migrant workers' access to skills mobility, recognition and development. It helped participants reach a common understanding of key concepts, and how they can be integrated in labour migration governance and processes. The meeting reviewed a draft outline for the ASEAN Declaration on Skills Mobility, Recognition and Development for Migrant Workers and provided feedback to guide drafting of the Declaration.

The **2nd consultation** on the ASEAN Declaration on Skills Mobility, Recognition and Development for Migrant Workers was successfully organized in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 24-25 June. The event was attended by 84 delegates (W:41; M:43) including government agencies responsible for labour, migration and skills development, employers' organizations, workers' organizations and civil society from all ASEAN Member States; regional organizations ASEAN Confederation of Employers, ASEAN Trade Union Council, Mekong Migration Network, Migrant Forum in Asia, Task Force On ASEAN Migrant

Workers; ASEAN Secretariat, ILO and IOM; as well as observers from Timor Leste, the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Global Affairs Canada. The discussion was lively and delegates from all sectors – government, employers, workers, civil society – expressed support to the Declaration. After the 1.5-day open consultation, the ASEAN Senior Labour Officials Meeting (SLOM) held a closed-door meeting to finalize the Declaration text.

The ASEAN Declaration and its Checklist are expected to be adopted at the 44th and 45th ASEAN Summit. TRIANGLE, ILO Skills team and IOM are currently finalizing a background paper on skills mobility, recognition and development for migrant workers for publishing around the time of the adoption of the ASEAN Declaration and Checklist.

The **112th ILO International Labour Conference** concluded on 14 June, with TRIANGLE input and participation in the **General Discussion on Decent Work in the Care Economy**. TRIANGLE had spent the previous few months capacitating a variety of ASEAN actors in preparation for this General Discussion, such as national preparatory meetings for workers in four ASEAN countries with the International Domestic Workers' Federation, and a care economy briefing for the Philippines tripartite group of government, employers and workers, as well as a briefing for a trade union-organized women workers forum in the Philippines. During the General Discussion process itself, TRIANGLE was able to technically backstop with inputs and details about migration, domestic work and this region generally. The [Draft Conclusions concretely state that:](#)

- Domestic workers are care workers.
- Migrant care workers often are not able to exercise fully the same rights as other workers.
- Many migrant care workers and domestic workers remain in the informal economy, low-paid and excluded, by law or in practice, from protections, including social and labour protection.
- Care should be mainstreamed into migration policies.
- Discrimination against migrant care workers should be addressed.
- Domestic workers and migrant care workers should be ensured effective access to labour protection and social security; should have voice and representation; and should be provided technical assistance.

On 3 June, TRIANGLE contributed to an **Asian Workers' Compensation Association (AWCA) online sharing session on Good Practices and Mechanisms of Social Protection for Migrant Workers in Asia-Pacific**. The event was hosted by Indonesia Social Security Administrator for Employment (BPJS Ketenagakerjaan) in its capacity as the chair of the AWCA Technical Commission on Migrant Workers. The webinar was attended by about 38 representatives from social security agencies in Cambodia, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, among others. TRIANGLE presented on current situation and challenges in migrant workers' access to social security in ASEAN and shared ILO's integrated approach to migrant workers' social protection.

On 11 June, the **5th Regional Migrant Women's Groups Network Meeting** was organized with at least 30 women attending. Our partner HomeNet introduced and answered many questions about the new Thai Ministerial Regulation No. 15 for Employment of Domestic Workers. Participants brainstormed how the participating six CSOs and 23 migrant women's groups can get this message out to domestic workers in Thailand and to those in Myanmar and Cambodia who might be headed to Thailand in the near future.

On 11-12 June, the World Bank, ILO (through TRIANGLE) and IOM co-organised a **Regional Labour Migration course and Conference**, bringing together 80 (W:29; M:51) stakeholders for the course, and 102 (W:45; M:57) stakeholders for the conference from East-Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific regions. Participants were largely government representatives of ministries of labour, ministries of interior and ministries of foreign affairs, but also representatives of trade unions and employer organizations. The conference discussed four structural challenges including uncertain globalization, technological change, aging populations and climate change and how these factors would impact migration trends in the region in the longer run. TRIANGLE spoke in a panel titled Challenges for managing labour migration: Enhancing regular pathways for labor migration.

On 13 June, TRIANGLE facilitated a **two-hour panel of domestic worker organization leaders from Southeast Asia and the Middle East at the Women Workers for Change Forum held by the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women**. National and migrant domestic worker leaders talked about how they create democratic associations, keep themselves safe, negotiate with governments and employers, and take legal cases for their members. They discussed forms of patriarchy in each country that continue to affect their work and personal lives.

► Upcoming activities and key dates (July – September 2024)

Date	Event	Location	Attendees	Purpose
20-21 August	ATUC-ILO Domestic Work Toolkit Dissemination Workshop	Vientiane, Lao PDR	ATUC trade union affiliates, ITUC-AP, ILO	To analyse and problem-solve about resistance within the trade union movement towards improving organizing domestic workers and improving their labour protection. To make plans for follow-up actions on organizing, providing services, and advocating for domestic workers' rights.
28-29 August	ACMW Workshop on Employers' Education on Fair Recruitment and Decent Employment of Migrant Workers	Online and Brunei Darussalam	ACMW representatives from all ASEAN Countries and Timor Leste, employers, workers, recruitment agency associations, DFAT, GAC	This Brunei Darussalam-led ACMW activity reviews best practices in recruitment and employment of migrant workers, discusses support services available for employers and recruiters, and prepares a checklist on fair recruitment and decent employment of migrant workers in ASEAN
24-25 September	17th meeting of the ASEAN Committee on Migrant Workers (ACMW)	Luang Prabang, Lao PDR	ACMW focal points, ASEAN Secretariat, DFAT, GAC	The annual meeting of the ACMW presents and discuss the support provided to the ACMW activities through TRIANGLE and other ILO programmes

► Media Coverage

Date	Title	Media Source
7 June	Brain drain whittles away at developing countries while policies fumble	The Nation
24 June	Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN Opens Key Consultation on Skills Mobility and Development for Migrant Workers in Vientiane	ASEAN

ASEAN at a glance

Population: ≈ 636 million

Labour Force: ≈ 344 million

Source: ILOSTAT, 2024.

Intra-ASEAN migration

Total: 7.1 million

Source: UNDESA, 2020.

Main countries of origin for intra-ASEAN migration

Myanmar: 2.22 million

(M: 1.26 million, W: 0.96 million)

Indonesia: 1.42 million

(M: 0.85 million, W: 0.57 million)

Malaysia: 1.19 million

(M: 0.5 million, W: 0.67 million)

Lao PDR: 0.95 million

(M: 0.42 million, W: 0.53 million)

Cambodia: 0.71 million

(M: 0.33 million, W: 0.38 million)

Source: UNDESA, 2020.

Main countries of destination for intra-ASEAN migration

Thailand: 3.49 million

(M: 1.74 million, W: 1.76 million)

Malaysia: 1.94 million

(M: 1.23 million, W: 0.71 million)

Singapore: 1.33 million

(M: 0.55 million, W: 0.78 million)

Brunei Darussalam: 0.09 million

(M: 0.049 million; W: 0.042 million)

Source: UNDESA, 2020.

Note: Undocumented migration is not fully captured in these statistics.

Background information

Labour migration is an established feature of labour markets in the ASEAN region, as evidenced by contractions in migrant-dominant sectors during COVID. UNDESA estimates in 2020 showed 23.5 million migrants (49.5 per cent women) originating from ASEAN countries. Of the total of 9.7 million international migrants living in ASEAN's net destination countries – Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand – 9 million are international migrants of working age, and 7.1 million are intra-ASEAN migrants from origin countries within the region. The number of intra-ASEAN migrants has risen dramatically, increasing from 3.2 million in 1990. Within ASEAN, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, the Philippines and Viet Nam are net-origin countries, while Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand are net-destination countries.

Government survey or administrative data pre-COVID from 2019 shows that the share of documented migrant workers in the total labour force was 35 per cent in Brunei Darussalam, 15 per cent in Malaysia and 8 per cent in Thailand. This does not include migrants in an irregular status. In countries of origin, migrant workers' remittances and skills upon return have important development impacts for their families, communities and nations alike through their positive impact on education and health spending, consumption, savings and investment. According to the World Bank (2021), remittances contribute to nine per cent of GDP in the Philippines, five per cent in Viet Nam, and one per cent in Indonesia. Given migrant workers' sizeable share of the labour force in key ASEAN destinations, full rights protections must be put in place to ensure inclusive economies and shared development outcomes for migrant workers and their communities.

The ASEAN Community has established initiatives towards regional integration built around three pillars: the ASEAN Political-Security Community, the ASEAN Economic Community, and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. ASEAN leaders have signed two instruments to establish a regional framework for cooperation on labour migration, namely the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers, 2007 (Cebu Declaration) and the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers, 2017. The key ASEAN body leading the implementation of these instruments is the ASEAN Committee on the Implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant

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Workers (ACMW). ACMW falls under the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. A range of regional stakeholders are involved in promoting the protection of migrant workers at the ASEAN level, including the ASEAN Confederation of Employers (ACE), the ASEAN Trade Union Council (ATUC), the Task Force on ASEAN Migrant Workers (TFAMW) and other regional CSO networks.

Despite steps taken to ensure the rights of migrant workers in ASEAN, they remain subject to exploitative conditions, including underpayment, unsafe workplaces, forced labour and human trafficking. Prior to migration, migrant workers can be at risk of recruitment-related abuses due to governance gaps and their weak bargaining position. During employment, many migrants work in sectors with inadequate labour protection and legislative enforcement. Domestic workers in private households and migrants working in agriculture, construction, fishing, manufacturing, services and other sectors fill jobs unattractive to nationals and are among the least protected and lowest paid.

The poor working conditions that migrant workers face are often further compounded for women migrant workers, where gender disparities in the labour market remain prevalent. Women migrant workers often have little choice but to migrate irregularly, in some cases due to government bans and restrictions on women's mobility in the region. Women migrant workers frequently are employed in occupations, like domestic work and the entertainment sector, which often remain outside legal protection mechanisms. It is likely that the number of women migrant workers is underestimated and that women migrant workers may be more susceptible to violation of their rights and to unfair and even harmful practices and abuse.

Key partners

- ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC)
- ASEAN Committee on the Implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (ACMW)
- ASEAN Trade Union Council (ATUC)
- ASEAN Confederation of Employers (ACE)
- Task Force on ASEAN Migrant Workers (TFAMW)
- International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF)
- Life Haven Center for Independent Living

Focal point

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TRIANGLE in ASEAN extends the cooperation between the **International Labour Organization (ILO)**, the **Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT)** and **Global Affairs Canada (GAC)** on protecting migrant workers and enhancing development opportunities. TRIANGLE aims to ensure that the benefits of labour migration are equally realized by men and women migrant workers, employers and governments. In shifting emphasis towards leveraging the development potential of migration, TRIANGLE aims to shape labour migration opportunities to support inclusive and sustainable growth in the ASEAN Economic Community. TRIANGLE engages institutionally with ASEAN and focuses on delivering in six countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam).



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