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► Ship to Shore Rights South-East Asia: Gender equality, diversity and inclusion strategy



Funded by
the European Union

- ▶ **Ship to Shore Rights South-East Asia: Gender equality, diversity and inclusion strategy**

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First published 2026.



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ISBN: 9789220437667 (print); 9789220437674 (web PDF)
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54394/00034904>

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Printed in Thailand



Migrant woman working at the fishing port in Songkhla, Thailand. © Worapon Rattanawarawong/ILO.

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Acknowledgement

This strategy was prepared by Imogen Howells on behalf of the ILO Ship to Shore Rights South-East Asia programme, under the technical supervision of Benjamin Harkins.

The review of the strategy was completed by Nilim Baruah, Deepa Bharati, Mi Zhou, Benjamin Harkins, Phumphet Chetiyononth, Worapon Rattanawarawong, Hkun Sa Mun Htoi, Anyamanee Tabtimsri, Hussein Macarambon, Albert Y. Bonasahat, Florida Sandanasamy, Sambo Sok and Angela Lentisco. The administrative arrangements were managed by Nobharindra Vejanukroh. The copyediting and design of the publication were completed by John Maloy and Nattapat Hengviriyapanich.

The ILO would like to sincerely express its thanks to all of its implementing partners in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Thailand for their valuable contributions to this report.

The development of this strategy was funded by the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

Acronyms and abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	civil society organization
DAC	OECD Development Assistance Committee
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
EU	European Union
GEDSI	gender equality, disability and social inclusion
GLP	Good Labour Practice
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KP2MI	Kementerian Pelindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia (<i>Ministry for the Protection of Indonesian Migrants</i>)
LGBTQI+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and more
MRC	Migrant Worker Resource Centres
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPD	organizations of persons with disabilities
OSH	Occupational safety and health
S2SR	Ship to Shore Rights South-East Asia
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SOGIESC	sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics
UN	United Nations

Executive summary

Migrant workers are central to South-East Asia's blue economy. Migrants from Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Thailand – including women, persons with disabilities, ethnic and national minorities and LGBTQI+ individuals – move within and beyond the region to work in fishing, seafood processing and aquaculture. Yet many experience overlapping forms of discrimination that limit access to safe migration and decent work, reducing the benefits of migration for the migrants themselves as well as their communities at home and in their countries of destination.

Migrant workers are concentrated in low-paid, physically demanding and often informal jobs in blue economy value chains. Workers who already face discrimination in countries of origin – for example, on the basis of gender, disability, ethnicity, caste, language, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity – are typically exposed to similar discrimination and barriers to opportunity throughout their migration experience. This affects the process and outcomes of work for everyone in the blue economy. Legal frameworks, recruitment practices and workplace norms rarely recognize intersectional disadvantage, and legal gaps around equality of opportunity and non-discrimination can reproduce – and, in some cases, amplify – the effects of social discrimination. For LGBTQI+ individuals in countries where same-sex relations are criminalized, visibility can mean imprisonment, flogging or fines. For persons with disabilities, pre-migration medical checkups can lead to exclusion from regular migration routes. Due to stigma and sanction against certain identities or characteristics, many choose not to disclose them, leading to invisibility in data and inability to access social protection and service systems where they exist.

Labour migration patterns in the fishing, seafood processing and aquaculture sectors are strongly gendered. Migrant women are concentrated in seafood processing and aquaculture, most often in factories, aquaculture farms and pier-based or home-based settings where employment is informal and labour protections are weak. Men dominate work on board fishing vessels, and are often allocated to logistical, supervisory and heavy lifting roles in the seafood processing sector. Across all sectors, migrants with limited literacy, those who do not speak national languages and workers with learning disabilities face particular barriers to understanding contracts, rates of pay, occupational safety and health (OSH) procedures, and grievance and claims mechanisms.

The result is a layered pattern of risk and disadvantage. Migrant men in fishing face hazardous working conditions compounded by strongly masculine norms and pressure to be breadwinners, which increases risk taking and discourages the reporting of abuse. Women migrant workers encounter lower access to trade unions and leadership roles, barriers to career progression, lower pay, pregnancy discrimination, inadequate maternity protection, and violence and harassment. LGBTQI+ migrant workers can face criminal and social sanctions or workplace harassment if their identity becomes known. Workers with disabilities – who are rarely identified in official data – are often barred from regular migration channels by medical checks screening for “fitness for work”, face higher rates of violence and harassment in the workplace, and struggle with a disability pay gap. Ethnic minority and irregular migrants can face additional hurdles compared to their migrant peers in accessing support services.

However, the Ship to Shore Rights South-East Asia (S2SR) programme has demonstrated that progress in overcoming some of these entrenched challenges is possible. Capacity building and pre-departure training reached over 8,000 stakeholders, of whom almost two thirds were women; private sector practices were strengthened for over 77,000 workers now employed by companies under the Seafood Good Labour Practice programme; and access to grievance mechanisms and compliance through labour inspection have been strengthened.

Strategy development

This document sets out the Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for the S2SR programme, an initiative of the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN) implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The purpose of this Strategy is to optimize how the programme advances equality, diversity and social inclusion while pursuing its objectives to strengthen labour standards, protect rights and empower migrant workers in a sustainable blue economy. The Strategy provides guidance on how to promote inclusion in the course of implementing activities.

The Strategy is grounded in a gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) analysis of fishing, seafood processing and aquaculture and of the wider labour migration systems that feed into them. It draws on the proposal, strategy documents and evaluations of the S2SR programme, as well as interviews with stakeholders from governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations, civil society organizations (CSOs), and organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), focus group discussions with current and return migrant workers, and a review of relevant literature. On this basis it sets out a vision, framework and practical recommendations for activities to embed an intersectional approach to gender, diversity and inclusion throughout programme implementation.

The Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy is intended for use by regional and national S2SR staff, implementing partners and tripartite plus constituents in the programme’s six implementing countries.¹ It is also designed to contribute knowledge to other UN and international organizations, regional bodies and civil society coalitions working on labour migration, decent work and human rights in the blue economy.

Key findings of the gender, diversity and inclusion analysis

In the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region, patriarchal gender norms, ableism, racism and heteronormativity can intersect with class and migration status to influence who migrates, under what conditions and with what protections. Women, LGBTQI+ individuals and workers with disabilities often face restrictive social expectations or legal barriers that limit their options for regular migration. In some contexts, women and persons with disabilities are discouraged from or formally restricted from migrating for certain types of work, which can push them towards irregular channels. In Cambodia, where formal recruitment of men to migrate into fishing work has been banned, recruiters have extended these protectionist measures to women, limiting their use of regular migration channels to seek employment in seafood processing jobs in Thailand. Migrants from ethnic or linguistic minority communities may confront additional language barriers at each stage of the migration cycle, leading to lower awareness of rights and higher exposure to deception and abuse.

¹ Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Thailand.

Tasks within the value chains of the blue economy are segmented not only by gender but also by nationality, ethnicity and migration status. Women are over-represented in processing and service roles perceived as “low-skilled”; while work on fishing vessels, as well as logistical, supervisory and heavy lifting roles in the seafood processing sector are predominantly done by men. Anecdotal evidence from interviews suggests genderized role allocation in seafood processing factories can be extended to LGBTQI+ individuals, with reports of lesbian women being given “masculine” jobs alongside men.² Persons with disabilities are invisible in the data: sectoral level labour force data on disability is scarce in the region, and participant countries with labour force surveys that collect disability data only do so at the aggregate level and not the sectoral level. Similarly, the nationality of migrants is recorded but do not identify ethnicity or minority status.

Very limited official data exists on the participation of persons with disabilities in fishing, seafood processing, and aquaculture. Interviews conducted for the development of the Strategy indicate that workers with physical, sensory and learning disabilities are nonetheless present in these sectors. Although some do not disclose their status for fear of discrimination or job loss, anecdotal evidence was provided of migrant colleagues receiving support following workplace accidents that resulted in permanent disabilities. Several cases were noted where employers in seafood factories assisted workers to transition to more accessible roles, such as facilities cleaner. However, it was noted that this support primarily related to migrants who acquired minor functional limitations rather than more severe disabilities.³ Low-cost opportunities to further improve workplace accessibility and inclusion of persons with disabilities are available – such as clearer and more visual instructions, task checklists, ramp access or simple workstation adjustments – but employers often lack the awareness, tools and incentives to adopt these measures.

Migrants from ethnic and linguistic minority communities are sometimes exposed to racism and exclusion in their countries of origin or have fled conflict situations, which can be push factors driving their migration. Prejudice and discrimination can carryover within migrant populations from country to country, leading to further isolation of minority groups within migrant communities. Migrants with lower fluency levels in national languages face additional barriers to participating in training, accessing grievance procedures and signing written contracts, which can lead to limitations in understanding of their rights and obligations. Language barriers also reduce participation in trade unions, associations and multi-stakeholder platforms. However, for some ethnic minorities, linguistic proximity to the national language in the country of destination can have benefits at work, as in the case of Myanmar migrant workers from Mon and Shan states in Thailand, who can learn Thai more easily and are reported to have better opportunities at work.⁴

Evidence on LGBTQI+ migrants in the blue economy remains scarce but the available research and interviews conducted in preparing this report suggest that some migrate in search of anonymity or greater freedom of expression, while others conceal their identities due to fear of criminalization, harassment or loss of employment. In countries where same-sex relations are criminalized or heavily stigmatized, identification as LGBTQI+ can increase vulnerability to extortion, violence and exclusion from services.

Workers who face intersectional discrimination are markedly under-represented in trade unions and formal social dialogue. Leadership structures in these spaces remain dominated by men without apparent disabilities. For many migrants there are fears around grievance mechanisms being unsafe or ineffective due to concerns around repercussions or retaliation (loss of overtime, dismissal) for making complaints, with added risks of stigma, criminal cases or deportation for irregular migrants, LGBTQI+ persons and workers with disabilities.

Strategic approach

The Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for the S2SR programme adopts a twin-track approach:

Track 1. Mainstreaming inclusion, non-discrimination and equality of treatment across all programme activities.

All programme activities will integrate inclusive and human rights-based non-discrimination principles. As such, equality and inclusion will be promoted at all opportunities throughout the programme, even when these are not the main objective of the activity.

² Interview with the Labour Rights Foundation (LRF), 23 November 2025.

³ Interview with LRF, 23 November 2025.

⁴ Interview with LRF and focus group discussion with migrant workers in Thailand.

Track 2. Specific activities to empower marginalized groups.

Certain activities will be designed to specifically address the inclusion and empowerment of particular marginalized groups, including women, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities and LGBTQI+ individuals.

Together, these tracks guide both the framing and the implementation of activities. First, activity design will systematically ask which groups are affected, how power and resources are distributed among them, and how activities can be structured to reduce – rather than reproduce – inequality. Second, once activities are agreed, the programme will seek ways to maximize their contribution to gender equality, diversity and inclusion – for example, through inclusive participation processes, accessible communications, targeted outreach and partnerships with specialized organizations.

The Strategy takes an inclusive approach to diversity. It builds on the S2SR's Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy (ILO 2022a) and maintains a strong focus on gender equality. In addition, the Strategy makes clear that equality encompasses equity and non-discrimination for all migrant workers, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity, disability status, ethnicity, nationality or migration status.

Acknowledging that not all stakeholders will be able to address every aspect of gender, diversity and inclusion in their work, the S2SR programme will adopt a pragmatic approach, working with each partner to identify feasible entry points while upholding and promoting fundamental rights for all migrant groups.

► Strategic vision

Ship to Shore Rights will work with diverse women and men stakeholders to make visible the intersectional inequalities faced by women and men, persons with disabilities, ethnic and national minorities, LGBTQI+ individuals, and migrant workers with irregular status. The programme will adopt an intersectional, transformative approach based on human and labour rights. It will employ the following specific strategies:

1. **Focus on the most excluded segments of the blue economy** by prioritizing informal and semi-formal nodes such as pier work, small-scale seafood processing and aquaculture sites.
2. **Address discriminatory practices towards women, LGBTQI+ individuals, ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities** by supporting efforts to end discrimination in recruitment and hiring practices; wages and pay; routine pregnancy testing; unfair dismissals; and access to grievance procedures.
3. **Support women's reproductive autonomy** through maternity and paternity protection, childcare provision and the promotion of flexible, parent-friendly work arrangements in the formal sector.
4. **Promote inclusive working conditions and reasonable accommodation** by expanding access to decent work; building capacity in relation to the provision of accessible information, reasonable workplace accommodation, and inclusive OSH and training systems; and enabling the participation of migrant workers with disabilities and workers with varied language, literacy and learning needs.
5. **Strengthen the organizing, representation and leadership of marginalized workers** by supporting the membership and meaningful participation of women migrant workers, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ workers and ethnic minorities in trade unions and worker associations and by supporting them to take up leadership and decision-making roles.
6. **Ensure inclusive, safe and effective grievance mechanisms** by promoting systems that are confidential, accessible, linguistically inclusive and responsive to violence and harassment, bullying, discrimination and exploitation.
7. **Generate new knowledge on intersectionality, vulnerability and resilience** by producing new research on how gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics affect migrant workers in the blue economy. The knowledge produced will include a focus on masculinities, ableism, racism, heteronormativity and exclusionary labour structures.
8. **Promote inclusive leadership and accountability across institutions** through work with governments, employers' organizations, trade unions, migrant workers' associations, CSOs and community networks to mainstream GEDSI principles, build accountability for labour rights violations and strengthen norms that enable equality in the blue economy.



Migrant crew supervisor who lost his arm in a winch in Samut Sakhon, Thailand. © ILO.

▶ 1

Introduction

1.1. Programme background

The Ship to Shore Rights South-East Asia (S2SR) programme is promoting safe labour migration and decent work for a sustainable fish and seafood supply chain in South-East Asia. The programme is being implemented at both the regional level in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and in the individual target countries of Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Thailand from 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2028.

The S2SR programme is an initiative of the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN) and is being implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO), in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The programme is aligned with EU priorities under the Regional Multi-annual Indicative Programme for Asia and the Pacific (2021–2027), and will contribute to Priority Area 3: “Migration, forced displacement and mobility.”

The intersectionality of workers’ individual characteristics in the blue economy – such as migration status, gender identity and sexuality, disability, ethnicity, caste, class and age – can have profound impacts on their experiences, including their ability to access their labour rights. Gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) issues are fundamental to addressing persistent decent work deficits in these industries, as women, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities and LGBTQI+ persons remain underrepresented, under-protected and underserved across all stages of migration and employment.

To ensure that the benefits of the S2SR programme are equitably shared, it is important to have an awareness of these impacts and to take action to address them. Building on earlier ILO experience and lessons from the Ship to Shore Rights South-East Asia and SEA Fisheries projects, the development of a Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Strategy will ensure the programme addresses the barriers faced by all migrant workers and delivers transformative and inclusive opportunities and outcomes.

The S2SR programme delivers technical assistance to promote safe labour migration and decent work for a sustainable fish and seafood supply chain, including primary production (capture fishers and aquaculture) and post-harvest processing, in South-East Asia. The programme works with regional organizations, governments, employers' and workers' organizations, and civil society organizations to achieve four specific objectives:

1. To increase ASEAN and subregional connectivity and cooperation on safe labour migration and decent work in the fish and seafood supply chain.
2. To support national authorities to design, implement and enforce stronger legal and policy frameworks on labour migration, labour protection and sustainable fisheries.
3. To promote a culture of accountability, sustainable corporate practices, due diligence and responsible fishing practices among employers and enterprises, including promoting promising practices and exchanging knowledge.
4. To promote social dialogue, increase freedom of association and collective bargaining, and empower migrant workers, their families and communities to protect and assert their human and labour rights.

The programme takes a normative and human-rights based approach to mainstream the following cross-cutting issues:

- workers' voice and agency;
- broad engagement of stakeholders and promotion of social dialogue;
- trafficking in persons and other transnational crimes;
- marine resource conservation and sustainability; and
- gender equality, diversity and inclusion.

To guide the implementation of the programme, this document outlines the S2SR strategy for comprehensively mainstreaming gender equality, diversity and inclusion into its interventions.

1.2. Relevant international standards and principles

This Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy reflects the foundational commitments made by the ILO to gender equality, diversity and inclusion. The ILO Constitution states: "All human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and opportunity."

In addition, all ILO Member States have committed to applying fundamental principles and rights at work, encompassing:

- freedom of association and collective bargaining;
- elimination of forced labour;
- abolition of child labour;
- elimination of discrimination; and
- safe and healthy working environments.

Member States are obliged to uphold these rights regardless of whether they have ratified the related international labour Conventions.

1.2.1. International standards and principles on migration and the blue economy

To promote safe migration and decent work in the blue economy, a key set of ILO standards underline the S2SR programme, namely:

- Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) and Protocol of 2014;
- Migration for Employment Convention (Revised) (No. 97) and Recommendation (Revised) (No. 86), 1949;
- Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143), and Migrant Workers Recommendation, 1975 (No. 151);
- Work in Fishing Convention (No. 188) and Recommendation (No. 199), 2007;
- Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181);
- Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190);

- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111); and
- Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102).⁵

The ILO's mandate in relation to gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) linked to labour migration is strengthened by a range of international instruments that draw from and build on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These include the 2003 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and their Families, which upholds the principle of equal treatment for migrant workers in terms of remuneration and conditions of work (Article 25) and, where they meet requirements, in relation accessing social security (Article 27).

The ILO's Fair Recruitment Initiative holds that workers should experience a recruitment cycle founded on international standards, and should not bear the cost of recruitment, a principle established under international standards. In practice, recruitment fees and related costs continue to be borne by many workers, including migrant workers in the blue economy. Relevant standards here include:

- Convention No. 97, which requires that services provided by public employment agencies should be free for migrant workers (Article 7(2), Article 4 of Annex I, and Article 4(1) of Annex II);
- Convention No. 188, which calls upon Members to require that no fees or other charges for recruitment or placement of fishers be borne directly or indirectly, in whole or in part, by the fisher (Article 22(3)(b)); and
- Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended (MLC, 2006), which is specific seafarers, and calls upon Members to require that no fees or other charges for seafarer recruitment or placement or for providing employment to seafarers are borne directly or indirectly, in whole or in part, by the seafarer, other than the cost of the seafarer obtaining a national statutory medical certificate, the national seafarer's book and a passport or similar personal travel documents, not including, however, the cost of visas, which shall be borne by the shipowner (Regulation A 1.4, paragraph 5(b)).

In 2025, the ILO adopted the Guidelines for Fair Labour Market Services for Migrant Fishers, which are designed to assist States of recruitment, States of origin, flag States, port States, coastal States, labour recruiters, fishing vessel owners, and migrant fishers and their representatives in ensuring fair recruitment and employment practices that protect migrant fishers' rights and enable employers to recruit and retain skilled and motivated crews efficiently and lawfully. The Guidelines reflect the particular risks faced by migrant fishers, who are often at risk of forced labour and serious decent work deficits, such as:

- abusive and fraudulent recruitment and placement practices;
- child labour;
- isolation and abuse of vulnerability;
- abandonment;
- absence of a written fisher's work agreement;
- underpayment and withholding of wages;
- retention of identity documents;
- blacklisting when asserting rights;
- violence and intimidation;
- illegal transfer at sea;
- excessive working hours; and
- other abusive working and living conditions.

The Guidelines are accompanied by a set of eight tools to facilitate implementation and offer further guidance to strengthen data collection on migrant fishers.

⁵ It should be noted that fishers are not covered by Convention No. 102, and instead the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188), serves as the major Convention outlining their social security rights. However, Convention No. 102 does apply to blue economy workers engaged in seafood processing and aquaculture. In addition, Convention No. 102 does raise social security standards overall and fishers can benefit based on the principle of equivalency.

1.2.2. International standards and principles on gender equality, diversity and inclusion

During the 114th International Labour Conference in June 2026, a resolution was adopted concerning the ILO transformative agenda for gender equality in the world of work, which noted that “gender inequalities in the world of work persist, underpinned by deeply rooted structural barriers including gender stereotypes and discriminatory social norms, as well as institutional and legal barriers.” The agenda promotes “comprehensive, integrated, cross-sectoral and evidence-based approaches combining equality frameworks, economic and labour market policies, social protection policies, care systems, skills policies, measures to build institutional capacity and enforcement mechanisms” (ILO 2026).

The elimination of discrimination and the promotion of inclusive workplaces are key to equitable labour market and migratory outcomes. ILO instruments related to gender equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace include the:

- Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100);
- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111);
- Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention (No. 159) and Recommendation (No. 168), 1983;
- Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156);
- Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183);
- Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190);
- Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189); and
- Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169).

Equality and non-discrimination are core human rights. The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) upholds the principle of equality of men and women, and seeks to eliminate discrimination against women (Article 1). States parties to CEDAW commit to (among others):

- ensuring equal employment opportunities, equal pay for work of equal value, and the provision of social security and safe and health working conditions to women (Article 11); and
- addressing particular problems faced by women living in rural areas – for example, ensuring access to training and education, supporting the organization of self-help groups and cooperatives, offering access to agricultural credit and loans, as well as equal treatment in agrarian reform (Article 14).

The 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities maintains the right of persons with disabilities to:

- equality and non-discrimination (Article 5);
- accessibility measures enabling autonomy and full participation in all aspects of life (Article 9);
- freedom of movement (Article 18);
- work and employment (Article 27); and
- an adequate standard of living and social protection (Article 28).

The 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination reiterates the right to free choice of employment and equal pay for work of equal value (Article 5), and States parties commit to prohibiting racial discrimination (Article 2).

Gender equality, diversity and inclusion are central to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as reflected across all of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and particularly in relation to:

- **SDG 5:** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
 - **Target 5.1:** End all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere.
 - **Target 5.2:** Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.
- **SDG 8:** Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
 - **Target 8.5:** By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.

- **Target 8.8:** Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrant workers, and those in precarious employment.
- **SDG 10:** Reduce inequality within and among countries.
 - **Target 10.2:** By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.
 - **Target 10.3:** Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard.

The UN's Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration similarly enshrines gender-responsive, inclusive and non-discriminatory approaches as cross-cutting principles in the implementation of its 23 commitments, based on a body of international human rights law.

1.3. The EU's commitments to inclusion and diversity

The European Union (EU) places diversity, equality and inclusion at the centre of its external action. The EU's Gender Action Plan III (2021–2025) commits that 85 per cent of new external actions must have gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as a significant or principal objective, requiring the adoption of gender-transformative, intersectional and human rights-based approaches (European Commission 2020).

To operationalize these commitments, the EU applies the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Gender Equality Policy Marker, which donors, including the EU, use to track financing towards gender equality objectives. Alongside this, the OECD-DAC has introduced an additional policy marker on the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities (approved in 2018; handbook issued 2020), enabling donors to track disability-inclusive finance using the same scoring logic adopted in the gender marker.

The OECD-DAC frameworks require that, among others:

- A gender and social inclusion analysis is conducted to inform programme design and implementation.
- Findings from the analysis inform programme design and ensure a “do no harm” approach.
- At least one explicit equality or inclusion objective is identified and linked to measurable indicators.
- Data is disaggregated by sex and other relevant characteristics (age, disability, ethnicity and so on).
- Monitoring and evaluation systems track equality outcomes throughout the programme cycle (OECD 2020; OECD 2024).

The EU also situates inclusion within its Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI), which highlights resilience and inclusivity as guiding principles.⁶ In the blue economy specifically, two EU pillars are relevant:

- **EU Sustainable Blue Economy Strategy:** The Strategy charts a shift from “blue growth” to a sustainable blue economy aligned with the European Green Deal, emphasizing decarbonization, circularity, skills, research, innovation and stakeholder engagement. Crucially, the Strategy includes an external dimension to “support non-EU countries in advancing and diversifying their sustainable, inclusive and equitable blue economies”, as well as a requirement to engage stakeholders “in a fair and equitable way”.⁷
- **EU Blue Economy Report 2025:** The 2025 edition provides updated socio-economic indicators and trends for EU blue economy sectors and is intended to guide policymakers towards sustainable, resilient and competitive maritime economies (European Commission 2025). While the report is EU-focused, its emphasis on sustainability, skills and fair labour signals the EU's expectations and policy direction, which inform its approach to external cooperation.

⁶ See *Regulation (EU) 2021/947 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI)*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32021R0947>.

⁷ See European Commission Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and the Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU Transforming the EU's Blue Economy for a Sustainable Future, COM/2021/240. <https://www.ipex.eu/IPEXL-WEB/document/COM-2021-0240>.

For the Ship to Shore Rights South-East Asia (S2SR) programme, these commitments mean that gender equality, diversity and inclusion must be mainstreamed as cross-cutting principles, while also being pursued through targeted measures to empower groups facing systemic disadvantage. This twin-track approach is consistent with EU and OECD-DAC guidance; combining mainstreaming with specific interventions ensures that inclusion is visible, measurable and transformative.

Embedding this framework in the S2SR programme supports the EU's broader objectives of strengthening migration governance, corporate accountability and rights-based labour systems across fishing, aquaculture and seafood processing value chains.

1.4. Overview of strategy development

The S2SR programme recruited an independent consultant to develop a comprehensive Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy that will guide implementation, ensuring the meaningful inclusion and empowerment of women, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ individuals and other marginalized migrant populations. The Strategy will be complemented by a socialization process to build buy-in, align stakeholder understanding and support integration into national and regional programming and monitoring frameworks.

An analysis of gender, diversity and inclusion in South-East Asia's blue economy was conducted by the consultant, based on evidence collected through a desk-based review and in close consultation with S2SR programme staff, partner organizations and stakeholders in the fishing and aquaculture sectors. The findings were then used to develop the Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

A series of 17 online in-depth interviews were held between 8 October and 23 November 2025 with:

- ILO, IOM and FAO S2SR project staff;
- government officials;
- employers' organizations;
- workers' organizations; and
- civil society organizations.

In addition, two focus group discussions were held: one with six returning migrant workers in Myanmar (five women and one man); and one with ten migrant workers based in Thailand (five women and men).

The partners identified covered the entire geographic scope of the project, with organizations from Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Thailand included among the interviewees. To ensure representation of the interests of women, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities and LGBTQI+ persons, key informant interviews with 4 specialized CSO service providers were organized. In addition, focus group discussions were held with 10 women migrant workers, as well as some who identify as ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities and LGBTQI+ persons. Data from the interviews, together with information from the desk review, informed the preparation of the Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. The draft Strategy was presented at the programme's Steering Committee meeting on 27 October 2025 to validate the draft and to discuss its real-world application.

▶ 2

Situational analysis

To date, the role of women migrant workers in the blue economy has been investigated to a lesser extent than men; while even more limited attention has been paid to LGBTQI+, ethnic minority and disabled migrant workers in these sectors. In addition, very little is understood about how the highly masculine working environment in the fishing industry impacts the working conditions for migrant men.

Gender inequality remains deeply embedded across the blue economy. Women are overrepresented in low-wage, insecure processing roles but are underrepresented in supervisory, managerial and trade union leadership positions. Discrimination during pregnancy, the persistence of gender pay gaps and limited access to maternity protection and family-friendly policies all constrain women's ability to participate equally and progress in their careers within these sectors (ILO 2022b).

LGBTQI+ workers face additional, often unacknowledged, forms of exclusion. Very few partner organizations currently have LGBTQI+ inclusive policies in place or offer targeted support or training for LGBTQI+ workers. There are anecdotal reports of LGBTQI+ persons experiencing violence and harassment in the fishing industry, and many LGBTQI+ individuals experience workplace stigma, lack of legal recognition and limited access to safe complaint mechanisms (ILO 2022c).

Persons with disabilities frequently face barriers to equal participation in labour markets and in relation to accessing the potential benefits of labour migration. Barriers include discrimination with respect to recruitment, employment and training opportunities; inaccessible services; and exclusion from leadership and decision-making spaces.

This section provides an overview of the key challenges, successes and gaps remaining in promoting gender equality, diversity and inclusion in the blue economy.

2.1. Brief overview of the blue economy and employment trends

The blue economy remains central to ASEAN's development, with fishing, aquaculture and seafood processing representing essential employment sectors across the region. These sectors employ tens of millions of workers, many of whom are migrants. The employment landscape is, however, marked by informality, fragmented regulation and uneven access to social protection, with the risks compounded by climate change and unsustainable fishing practices.

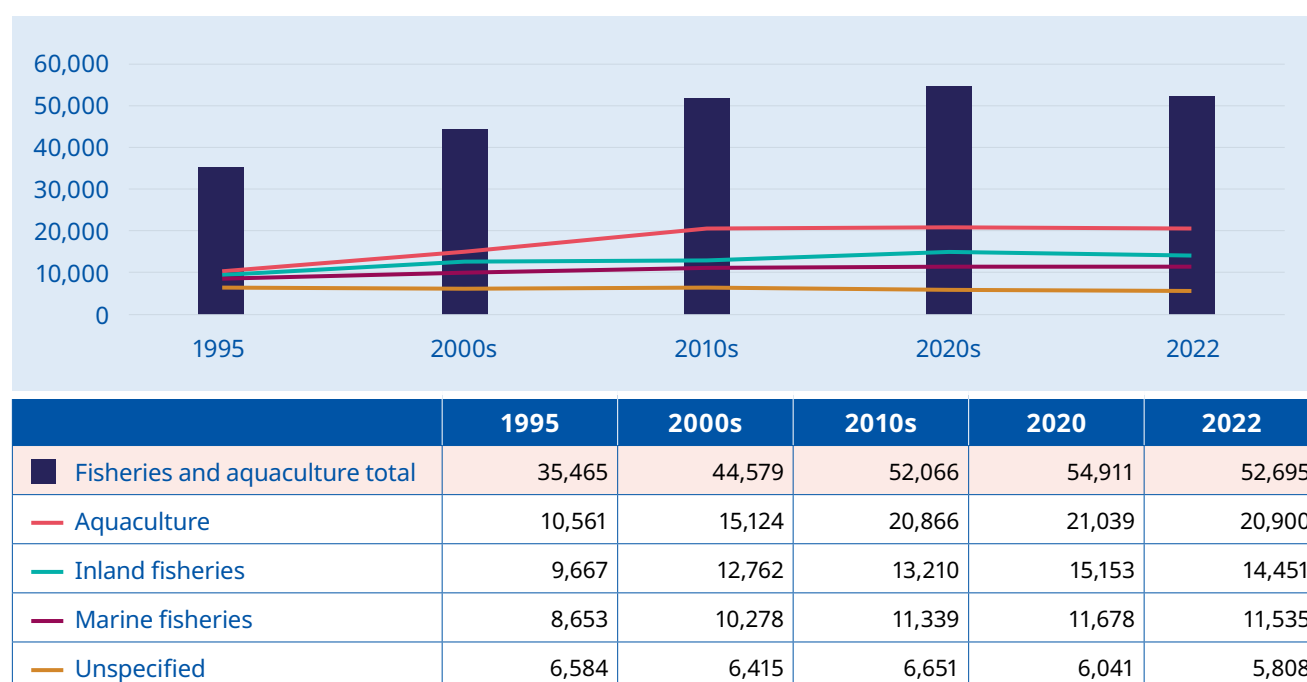
Rising sea levels, marine heatwaves, changing rainfall patterns and increasing temperatures are having a substantial impact on fisheries and aquaculture (FAO 2018), and a continuing decline in catch and aquaculture production is projected (Nong 2019). The communities that depend on these industries for their livelihoods are already facing challenges from these slow-onset environmental changes and by an increase in extreme climate events that are impacting income and food security. In the short to medium term, loss of income and job security will likely drive people to seek alternative work, potentially in other industries or in other locations, driving migration.

2.1.1. Employment trends

Globally, 61.8 million people were employed in primary fisheries and aquaculture in 2022, including 33.6 million in capture fishing and 22.1 million in aquaculture (FAO 2024). Asia hosts approximately 84 per cent of the global workforce engaged in fisheries and aquaculture, and 94 per cent of those engaged in fish farming.

Among these workers, women are estimated to make up 66 per cent in large-scale marine fisheries and 54 per cent in small-scale inland fisheries (UNESCAP 2017). Employment in fishing and aquaculture grew substantially from the mid-1990s into the 2000s, with the strongest growth seen in aquaculture but since the 2010s growth has largely plateaued (see figure 1).

► **Figure 1. Employment in fisheries and aquaculture in Asia, 1995–2022 (thousands of people)**



Source: FAO 2024.

Aquaculture

Aquaculture is the fastest-growing subsector of ASEAN's blue economy. In 2022, aquaculture accounted for 51 per cent of total aquatic animal production worldwide (FAO 2024). In ASEAN, expansion has been rapid, and Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Thailand all feature among the top 30 producers globally (FAO 2022a).

Indonesia's aquaculture already accounts for some 42 per cent of total fisheries products (Ramli and Waskitho 2023). Cambodia's farmed output grew from 27,000 tonnes in the early 2000s to over 338,000 tonnes in 2022 (FAO 2022a). Myanmar was a regional leader in aquaculture throughout the 2010s but growth slowed after 2019 and has since

plateaued (FAO 2022a). In Malaysia and the Philippines, aquaculture continues to expand, though employment remains dominated by smallholders and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), often in informal arrangements.

Across the region, employment in aquaculture is characterized by a mix of paid labour and unpaid family contributions, with limited data disaggregation available by gender or migration status. Although it is known that significant labour migration occurs into the aquaculture sector, official data is extremely limited.

Capture fishing

Fleet modernization has played a major role in altering employment patterns in the region, with significant growth in the number of motorized vessels and a shift in the fishing gear used from hook-and-line to trawl nets (SEAFDEC 2020). This restructuring has primarily been concentrated in the region's offshore industrial fleets, while small-scale and artisanal fisheries continue to provide an important source of livelihoods in other areas, such as the inland and coastal fisheries in Cambodia and Myanmar.

Notably, the more industrialized fishing fleets within the region have come to rely heavily on migrant workers due to the reluctance of national workers to take up this work. For example, research studies have shown that migrants represent the majority of workers on commercial fishing vessels in Thailand, though registration and immigration enforcement cycles have contributed to fluctuating data on their number and nationalities (ILO 2019a).

Seafood processing

Data on seafood processing, which is a core part of post-harvest activities, is very limited due to the highly informalized nature of work in the sector. The sector is considered to be highly feminized, with global estimates of up to 85 per cent of its workers being women (World Bank 2012). There is a perception among some employers in the seafood processing sector that women are more compliant than men in this type of work, and therefore are more likely to put up with the challenges involved, including working in very cold conditions.

2.1.2. Structural challenges

Employment across fishing, aquaculture and seafood processing is shaped by shared challenges. Informal recruitment and subcontracting dominate, particularly in offshore fishing and smallholder aquaculture, creating pathways to debt bondage, excessive working hours and modern slavery risks (Yuan, Choukroune and Failler 2024; ILO 2019a). The practice of using “flags of convenience”, whereby fishing vessels are registered in a country different from their country of ownership to avoid regulatory compliance requirements and tax payments, has been linked to a race to the bottom on wages and working conditions (Yuan, Choukroune and Failler 2024). Pier-based and home-based informal workers, many of whom are women, remain largely excluded from labour statistics and social protection despite their importance to supply chains (FAO 2022b; UNESCAP 2017). Migrant workers face heightened vulnerability to abuses due to irregular legal status, discriminatory treatment based upon national extraction and social origin, and barriers to accessing complaint mechanisms.

Demographic change is also increasingly having an impact on employment in the blue economy. The populations in several ASEAN countries are growing older, with Thailand the most rapidly ageing country in the world. Urbanization has also led to a population shift away from rural areas, leaving labour force gaps in coastal and rural communities engaged in aquaculture, although seasonal migration has relieved some of the labour shortages.

In “skip generation households” there is a common phenomenon of older women serving as the primary (unpaid) carers of the children of migrant workers, while also engaging in informal work in communities of origin (FAO 2020). These dynamics entrench gendered divisions of labour and sustain reliance on migrant workers, particularly in Malaysia and Thailand where young nationals are increasingly reluctant to accept low-paid jobs in fishing and seafood processing factories.

At the same time, climate change is altering the availability of fish and seafood. Rising sea temperatures, erratic flooding and coastal erosion are disrupting fish stocks and aquaculture productivity, making incomes and job security in the blue economy more unstable and intensifying competition for declining resources (FAO 2020).

These evolving demographic and climate pressures interact with gender, disability and migration status, amplifying inequalities and underscoring the urgency of GEDSI-sensitive programme strategies.

2.2. Progress in advancing gender equality, diversity and inclusion in the blue economy

Over the past five years, important steps have been taken across ASEAN to strengthen gender equality, diversity and social inclusion in the blue economy. Progress is visible both at the regional and national levels under the Ship to Shore Rights South-East Asia (S2SR) programme (2020–2024), providing lessons learned and scope for additional GEDSI-related interventions. These developments provide a baseline upon which the present strategy builds.

2.2.1. Progress in advancing regional frameworks

The ASEAN Guidelines on the Placement and Protection of Migrant Fishers were adopted at the ASEAN Summit in Vientiane in 2024, and are expected to become an important regional normative instrument for protecting the rights of migrant fishers. The Guidelines support the implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Placement and Protection of Migrant Fishers (2023), which is statement of commitment by ASEAN Member States to the achievement of human and labour rights standards for migrant fishers.

To realize these aims, the Guidelines provide guiding principles on the development and implementation of policy and practice. They highlight the principles of non-discrimination and equitable treatment in placement and protection of migrant fishers, noting that the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), which defines discrimination as any “distinction, exclusion or preference made on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin, which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation”. The ASEAN Guidelines also emphasize the importance of gender-responsive interventions, and note that policies and programmes should address inclusion.

ASEAN has also elevated the importance of disability inclusion as a labour market concern. The ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025, adopted by ASEAN leaders in 2018, commits to mainstreaming disability inclusion across ASEAN's remit, and to promoting accessibility and inclusion for persons with disabilities in all areas of policy and social and economic life. In addition, the recommendations of the 18th ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour (2025) call for mainstreaming accessibility and non-discrimination within labour market policies. Although disability remains largely invisible in fisheries and aquaculture statistics, these commitments create opportunities for inclusive action in the blue economy.

ASEAN has also developed a series of declarations specifically related to gender equality and women's empowerment, including the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the ASEAN Region (2013); the Declaration on Gender-Responsive Implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and SDGs (2017); and the ASEAN Declaration on Gender Equality and Family Development (2023).

2.2.2. Progress under Ship to Shore Rights South-East Asia

The second phase of S2SR (2020–2024) generated concrete progress and valuable lessons learned on advancing gender equality, diversity and social inclusion within the fishing and seafood processing industries. While the programme's overall objective was advancing safe migration and decent work, the gender equality and women's empowerment strategy was a key cross-cutting approach. Progress across industry practices, worker voice, access to remedy, inspection and governance provides a clear foundation from which the new Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy can be implemented.

To launch the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy, a two-day regional training was organized with 82 representatives of government, trade unions, employers and CSOs (52 women) across all seven of the programme target countries. The workshop was led by a highly experienced gender specialist who worked to support the socialization of the strategy among S2SR partners and staff, familiarize them with its concepts, tools and approaches and develop their own gender action plan for implementation within their organizations. The training leveraged a highly participatory approach, including small group discussions, whiteboarding and sharing of experiences in implementing gender transformative activities by partners.

A major structural achievement during the last phase was the introduction of gender budgeting into the programme's performance framework. Guided by its 2022 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy, S2SR set an ambitious target that 25 per cent of total programme expenditure should focus on activities that disproportionately benefit women or address gender equality. According to the end-of-project report, the programme achieved a result of 24 per cent for its gender budget by its final year, equivalent to US\$1.28 million (excluding staffing costs). This institutionalization

of gender budgeting represented a significant milestone for the programme, ensuring that gender equality was not a rhetorical commitment but a measurable and resourced component of implementation.

Some of the most tangible improvements for women workers emerged through the strengthening of industry practices under Thailand's Seafood Good Labour Practices (GLP) programme. Several gender-related improvements were noted under the programme, including the expansion of maternity protection and greater attention paid to the legal prohibition against mandatory pregnancy testing of migrant women prior to recruitment in seafood processing factories. This practice has now been largely eliminated by member companies of the Thai Tuna Industry Association and the Thai Frozen Food Association. Another sign of progress was greater inclusion and equitable representation of migrant workers in the Worker Welfare Committees at their factories. These findings were captured through the programme's "Most Significant Change" stories and were cited by the final evaluation as concrete indicators of progress towards gender equality and inclusion in workplace practices.

Beyond the factory setting, S2SR contributed to community-level organizing for migrant women. The Migrant Worker Solidarity Community was established in Samut Sakhon, with 838 registered members as of 2025, including 462 women. Likewise, the Cambodian Labour Confederation organized 123 prospective or returning migrants (95 women) into their trade union in Koh Kong Province, expanding the role of women in advocacy for protection of migrant workers' labour rights.

Overall, capacity building was provided to 8,338 stakeholders, 61 per cent of whom were women – a notable achievement. The trainings provided equitable access to women to engage with a wide variety of subjects, including a multi-disciplinary approach to labour inspection, dispute resolution for migrant worker grievances, case management training on human trafficking, safe migration outreach for ethnic women's groups, trade unionism and collective bargaining, adoption of good labour practices by the private sector, and implementation of labour migration governance laws.

Major gaps in access to information and services for women migrant workers were filled through partnerships with governments, trade unions and civil society organizations. The programme has supported a network of 23 Migrant Worker Resource Centres (MRCs) to deliver targeted and sector-specific assistance for migrant fishing and seafood processing workers in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam. In all cases, the MRCs were tasked with providing either equal or disproportionate support to migrant women, with many of the more specialized MRCs explicitly focused on delivering gender-responsive services.

For example, the MRC managed by Mawk Kon Local Development Organization in Tachileik, Myanmar provided capacity building training to the ethnic Ahka Women's Group, Lahu Women's Group and Shan Women's Group to become peer educators on safe migration and labour rights in Tachileik during 2024. In total, 360 women participated in the series of trainings and the women's groups later carried out outreach activities for 545 potential migrants within their communities.

Women also substantively contributed to and benefitted from pre-departure orientation trainings, including supporting the development of sector-specific training for migrant seafood processing workers. Notably, the ILO funded the Future Light Centre to deliver 13 pre-departure training sessions to 209 migrant workers (162 women) in Myanmar's Bago Region, providing them with information on how to migrate safely, labour rights, freedom of association, dispute resolution and support service providers in Thailand. The Future Light Centre organized five of the trainings as "women-only pre-departure orientation seminars", sharing the experiences of women migrant workers who had worked in Thailand to provide practical and gender-responsive information to women and LGBTQI+ migrants. These targeted approaches allowed for information gaps and structural barriers to safe migration to be more effectively addressed for women migrants.

Together, these outcomes confirm that S2SR SEA moved gender equality and inclusion from principle to practice. However, the achievements were largely concentrated in the formal seafood processing sector and did not extend fully into capture fishing, aquaculture or informal supply chain nodes such as pier-based and home-based work. Disability inclusion, ethnicity and LGBTQI+ dimensions remained largely outside the programme's operational scope.

The key lesson for the next phase is that systemic change is more likely to occur when inclusion is fully institutionalized, and not treated as only a specific component of projects. Embedding inclusion and equality standards within industry codes, inspection protocols, recruitment and grievance systems delivers durable progress that outlasts project cycles. The challenge now is to consolidate these proven approaches and to extend them to the broader blue economy workforce, ensuring that the benefits of decent work and safe migration reach women, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups across all subsectors.

2.3. Gaps and opportunities for ensuring respect for gender equality, diversity and inclusion

The following analysis examines decent work-related gender equality, diversity and inclusion gaps for migrant workers in the blue economy. The analysis takes into account the different experiences of migrant workers, recognizing the intersecting challenges and barriers faced by women and men, LGBTQI+ individuals, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities and those in situations of informality.

The purpose is to make visible how these intersectional disadvantages can widen decent work deficits in the areas of:

1. employment and working conditions;
2. fair recruitment;
3. freedom of association and collective bargaining;
4. social protection and occupational safety and health (OSH);
5. violence and harassment; and
6. cross-cutting issues.

2.3.1. Employment and working conditions

Capture fishing

Across ASEAN, the crews engaged in offshore and coastal fishing are typically all male, partially due to gender norms in the region that typically view fishing work as unsuitable for women. Likewise, previous studies have suggested that the highly masculinized culture on fishing vessels in the region is such that few LGBTQI+ people are openly working in the industry (ILO 2022a).

While the sector plays an important role in supporting food security and sustaining export-oriented industries, it is marked by some of the most severe decent work deficits in the blue economy. ILO research examining recruitment and working conditions for migrant fishers in South-East Asia found that one out of five (20 per cent) had experienced forced labour during the work abroad (Harkins, Lindgren and Ratnawulan 2026).

In particular, the all-male workforce is a contributing factor to the high incidence of workplace injuries within the sector, as social norms requiring men to take greater physical risks at work exacerbate the inherent danger of work on a fishing vessel. These norms combine with other structural features of the sector that can exacerbate risky behaviour (ILO 2022a).

For example, the casualization of pay practices in the fishing industry can have a particularly strong impact on employment outcomes for migrant fishers. In cases where pay is calculated as a “share of the catch” or a mix of wages and a share of the catch, payment may be largely determined by the profits from fishing voyages. The lack of transparency can make workers vulnerable to under- or non-payment of wages.

In addition, the absence of assurances for the wages to be paid can incentivize greater risk-taking to ensure that the catch is profitable. Consequently, workers may engage in long working hours with little rest – increasing the risk of accident or injury resulting from fatigue – or work under dangerous conditions at sea. Restricting pay to a share of the catch can also result in an inequitable division of the profits, potentially contributing to discriminatory treatment of migrant workers.⁸

Further contributing to the vulnerability of male migrant fishers is the strong social pressure for men to be breadwinners for their families. They are often unwilling to risk the loss of wages to support their families in countries of origin even if it means enduring protracted periods of abusive treatment. Because societal definitions of male success heavily emphasize their ability to provide for their families, many migrant men have described feeling unable to leave or report exploitative situations if it means returning home empty-handed and being viewed as a failure in their communities (ILO 2022a).

Seafood processing

The expansion of seafood exports has been accompanied by growing segmentation within the processing workforce as larger factories have become more formalized. Factory-based seafood processing work in Thailand and Malaysia represents a relatively better regulated part of the industry. Meanwhile, significant portions of the value chain, such as pier-based unloading, sorting and pre-processing, as well as home-based activities such as peeling, are less formalized

⁸ Interview with Future Light Centre, 13 October 2025.

and often reliant on short-term or subcontracted labour (Praxis Labs 2019). Within the industry, migrant workers, especially women, are concentrated in repetitive, low-paid tasks such as sorting, grading, peeling and packing; while men predominate in machine operation, maintenance and logistics (FAO 2022a).

An unknown number of workers are involved in shore-based pre-processing work or drying and peeling work from home on behalf of subcontractors. These informal and pier-based nodes remain largely invisible in official labour statistics and outside the reach of existing compliance systems, yet they form an essential part of supply chains, including those feeding export markets. Because of the informality of their employment, they typically do not benefit from labour protections or social security coverage.

Work experiences can vary significantly in the seafood processing sector. Export-oriented factories are frequently required to comply with legal procedures and recruit through regular migration channels as required by international buyers; while in the lower and more informal tiers of the seafood processing sector, recruitment commonly occurs through private brokers or informal intermediaries. The use of piece-rate and daily-hire arrangements, particularly for women and workers in informal and home-based settings, continues to exclude many workers from labour rights protections (ILO 2018; ILO 2020; Harkins, Lindgren and Ratnawulan 2026).

Aquaculture

Aquaculture employs millions of workers in the ASEAN region. It is largely an informal sector of work and official data is fragmented and not typically disaggregated by gender, disability status and other demographic categories. Indonesia alone was estimated to have some 3.3 million aquaculture workers across fish, shrimp, and seaweed farming in 2019, which is projected to rise to 8.9 million by the 2030s (Monterey Bay Aquarium 2025). Many workers in the industry are hired on daily or piece-rate terms without contracts or minimum wage guarantees.

Smallholder and household ponds dominate aquaculture in Indonesia, Cambodia and Myanmar. It is common for women and children to work in the industry as unpaid contributors to the family business, which is seen as an extension of their household duties. This unremunerated family labour, mainly by women and adolescents, underpins production but is excluded from employment statistics and labour protections (FAO 2022c). The invisibility of this work skews productivity data and can have the effect of masking women's economic contribution to the aquaculture industry.

A gendered division of labour is a prominent feature of the sector. Men typically perform pond construction, feeding and harvesting work; while women predominate in fry selection, sorting and packaging. The scale of economic activity being undertaken also has gender implications within the industry. Lower productivity homestead fish ponds providing household nutritional security and supplementing family income are more closely linked to female work, while larger commercially oriented operations tend to employ more men (FAO 2022c).

As mariculture⁹ is considered physically strenuous and is often conducted further from home, it is a male-dominated subsector of the aquaculture industry. For example, vocational training has been provided to male fishers in the Philippines to support a transition to this type of work as an alternative livelihood in response to a declining catch. Similarly, in Malaysia, the fish cage industry is perceived to be a male occupation, although women do assist with breeding and harvesting. Lack of data impedes analysis of the division of roles in seaweed cultivation, which is often perceived as a family enterprise in Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia (FAO 2022c).

2.3.2. Fair recruitment

Efforts are underway to promote fair recruitment in ASEAN, although significant gaps remain in alignment with the relevant international labour standards and guidelines. Recruitment related challenges persist in the fishing, seafood processing and aquaculture sectors, including contracts not being provided in a language workers can understand, contract substitution, excessive recruitment fees and employers withholding workers' personal and identification documentation.

Effective recruitment policies are a key component of well-governed labour migration. Progress is being made in legal reforms, for example, Indonesia's Law No. 18 of 2017 on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (hereafter "Law 18/2017") prescribes that "Indonesian Migrant Worker cannot be borne with recruitment fees" (Article 30 (1)). However,

⁹ Mariculture is defined as the cultivation, management and harvesting of marine organisms in the sea, in specially constructed rearing facilities (e.g., cages, pens and long-lines).

inconsistencies in the regulations to support implementation mean that, in practice, workers continue to be charged recruitment fees and related costs (Greenpeace and SBMI 2024).

It is also clear that the high costs of recruitment through regular recruitment channels can disincentivize their use (ILO 2022d). In 2017, an ILO study found that migrants from Cambodia, Myanmar and the Lao People's Democratic Republic who utilized regular recruitment channels paid substantially higher costs than those migrating through irregular channels (Harkins, Lindgren and Suravoranon). During focus group discussions with Myanmar migrant workers, it was found that they had been charged between US\$950 and US\$1,400 in total for documentation, transport and job placement Thailand, which required taking on substantial debts to afford.

These debts are more difficult for women to pay off than men due to persistent gender pay gaps. An 2020 Oxfam survey of migrant seafood workers in Thailand found significant gender pay gaps in the fishing, pre-processing, factory-based processing and aquaculture sectors, with female workers earning on average one third less than their male counterparts (Oxfam 2021). These findings were echoed in an IOM study of migrant workers in the pre-processing and processing sectors of the seafood supply chain, which found a gender pay gap of 16 per cent among daily wage workers and 21 per cent among those paid every two weeks (IOM 2023).

Recruitment in the blue economy commonly takes place through informal channels, although the higher prevalence of formal recruitment into large-scale seafood processing has been documented. In some cases, countries of origin have sought to restrict migration into the fishing sector. For example, in 2007, Cambodia's Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MLVT) issued an announcement to private recruitment agencies prohibiting the recruitment of workers into the fishing sector through regular channels. Although intended to protect migrant workers from abuse, migration has continued through irregular routes, which are now the only option available. This leaves migrants even more vulnerable to exploitation in the fishing sector, with reduced access to redress if their labour rights are violated (Hodge and Harkins 2024).

The impact of the MLVT announcement has extended to the seafood processing, as some authorities understood that the prohibition on recruitment into fishing work also applied to the seafood processing sector. Many recruitment actors have stopped sending Cambodian migrant workers into seafood processing, a major sector of employment for women, despite high demand. As a result, employment opportunities for Cambodian migrant women have been restricted (Hodge and Harkins 2024).

In aquaculture, social networks and brokers largely facilitate the recruitment process for local positions or to migrate internationally. As a result, few workers in the sector receive written contracts or pre-departure orientation. In Thailand, recruitment of migrant workers into aquaculture farms remains outside the MOU process used for regular migration into the seafood processing sector.

2.3.3. Freedom of association and collective bargaining

Migrant workers experience varying degrees freedom of association and collective bargaining in the ASEAN region, with additional limitations on representation for migrant women, ethnic minorities, LGBTQI+ persons and persons with disabilities. In Thailand, migrant workers have restricted rights to organize, wherein they are able to join existing trade unions but not hold official positions or form their own trade unions. In Malaysia, the Trade Union Act of 1959 allows migrant workers to join trade unions but individual approval was required by the Minister of Human Resources for non-citizens to become office holders. In January 2025, however, a blanket ministerial exemption was issued, meaning individual approval is no longer required.¹⁰

Trade union membership and organizing is perceived as hazardous in some locations across the blue economy, with human rights complaints being raised. For example, in the Philippines concerns have been brought up in relation to anti-trade union dismissals and harassment, including in the fishing industry.¹¹ Fear of reprisals for trade union membership or attempting to organize on board fishing vessels are cited as strong disincentives or barriers to joining trade unions where the option exists.¹²

10 See ILO Committee on the Application of Standards Conference Discussion, [Individual Case – Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 \(No. 98\) – Malaysia](#), 2025.

11 See ILO Committee on Freedom of Association [Case No. 3236 – Citra Mina Group of Companies and International Union of Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations \(IUF\)](#).

12 Interviews with NUSPM, LRF, Kamiparho, SENTRO and LSCW, and focus group discussion with migrant workers in Thailand.

Few trade unions are operational in highly informal and hard-to-reach industries within the region, which further limits the opportunities for migrant workers to organize in the blue economy (Harkins, Lindgren and Ratnawulan 2026). No aquaculture-specific trade union operates in the ASEAN region. Instead, aquacultural workers are sometimes organized into broader agricultural, fishing or other trade unions. Subcontracted workers in pier-based or home-based settings – who are predominantly women – usually have no representation.

At the global level, the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) represents seafood processing and aquaculture workers; while the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) represents fishers. Both global union federations have affiliates in South-East Asia, though their geographic coverage has some limitations.

Practical barriers for migrant workers further constrain trade union membership, with greater restrictions faced by the most marginalized due to time poverty, short-term contracts, language barriers and the possibility of employer retaliation, as well as the opportunity cost of joining meetings. In seafood processing plants, worker committees or welfare bodies sometimes substitute for more formal collective bargaining structures; although these rarely have decision-making authority. Women face greater barriers than men in taking up leadership positions in worker organizations due to restrictive gender norms. Combined with unpaid family responsibilities, the result is that women are markedly under-represented in leadership roles, both in factory committees and in national-level trade unions (UNESCAP 2017).

Lack of representation and awareness of gender equality, diversity and inclusion issues can also constrain office holders' ability to effectively represent workers' rights. For example, according to the trade union Kamiparho, one collective bargaining agreement negotiated in Indonesia by a group of male-only representatives successfully secured improved housing benefits – but only for men.¹³

In the Thai fishing and seafood processing sectors, migrant workers have formed informal workers' organizations with support from trade unions and civil society organizations. The Migrant Workers Rights Network, for example, is a membership-based organization operating in the seafood processing sector in Samut Sakhon. Without official trade union status, these organizations usually cannot negotiate legally binding collective bargaining agreements with employers, but they still offer valuable support to their members, such as legal advice and assistance in navigating grievance and complaint mechanisms (UN 2024).

2.3.4. Social protection and occupational safety and health

Across all six countries, OSH deficits entrench gender and diversity inequalities, with the impact of workplace accidents and injuries deepened when there is an absence of social security coverage. Women pre-dominate in detailed, repetitive, manual labour tasks in cold environments that are often associated with musculoskeletal strain; while men perform heavy-lifting and machine-operation work with a high risk of accidents. Personal protective equipment (PPE) is often sized for men – or not provided at all – and training is seldom delivered in migrants' or ethnic minority languages.¹⁴ Workplaces in the blue economy remain largely inaccessible to persons with disabilities.

Fishing is an exceptionally dangerous occupation with high rates of workplace accidents and injuries and is also subject to seasonal income variation, which makes access to social security coverage essential for migrant fishers and their families to cope effectively with the economic shocks. Acquisition of disabilities in the course of work can add expenses to everyday life, and potentially lead to long term labour market exclusion. In cases of sickness or injury, out of pocket expenses can be catastrophic, forcing families into unmanageable debt, prompting the selling of assets or cutting back on investments in the education of children.

Social protection coverage for migrant workers in the blue economy varies widely across the ASEAN region and largely depends on:

1. The extent of coverage in the country of destination or the flag state of the vessel;
2. the provision of coverage (or lack thereof) by the country of origin; and
3. the migrant worker's employment and migration status.

¹³ Interview with Kamiparho, 13 October 2025.

¹⁴ Interviews with FED, LRF and migrant workers.

Social protection coverage is considered a key component of decent work and relevant labour standards are outlined in several ILO conventions. Notably, the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), sets the minimum standards to ensure life-cycle protection; while the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202), lays out a framework to ensure universal coverage of life-cycle cash benefits and healthcare. Although Convention No. 102 does not apply to fishers, the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188), provides standards on social protection coverage for fishers (including migrant fishers) and their families, requiring that they benefit from social security protection under conditions no less favourable than those applicable to other workers (Article 34).

In practice, migrant fishers often experience gaps in social protection coverage based on their nationality, place of ordinary residence, type and duration of residence permit, territoriality of social security schemes and presence (or lack thereof) of social security agreements between countries of origin and destination. Because their work is frequently transboundary in nature, it may be unclear which national legislation applies to their employment (ILO 2025a). Fishers also face practical barriers in access, including lack of awareness of their rights; failure of employers to register them with social security institutions; and among small-scale and artisanal fishers, challenges navigating complex administrative procedures and meeting contributory requirements. In addition, a lack of monitoring and enforcement, language barriers and discrimination can present further barriers (ILO 2025a).

Migrant workers in post-harvest processing and aquaculture face many of the same barriers to accessing social protection, with the high rates of female employment in these sectors meaning that more women fall outside the scope of coverage. Social protection remains minimal in aquaculture even though the health hazards can be significant, including electrocution, exposure to chemicals and drowning. Women migrants may experience workplace discrimination and job loss in cases of pregnancy, and without maternity benefits can face difficult choices about their own post-partum health and infant care. For migrant workers with disabilities, regular disability benefits are often necessary to cover the higher costs they experience to work and live autonomously.

2.3.5. Violence and harassment

The strictly hierarchical management structures and prolonged periods of isolation in the fishing sector create particular risks for physical and psychological abuse. The highly masculinized and rigidly gendered work environment on fishing vessels, as well as fear of reprisals, can discourage fishers from reporting injuries or coercion. Extreme abuses in the form of debt bondage and forced labour are often closely associated with illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing practices (FAO 2024). The stress of the job, the isolation at sea, irregular or inadequate pay and lack of freedom of movement can lead to mental health challenges and, in some cases, migrant fishers may resort to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as drug and alcohol abuse (Pocock et al. 2018).¹⁵

In the seafood processing and aquaculture sectors, gender-based violence and harassment is widespread but under-reported. Cultural stigma, fear of dismissal and lack of awareness concerning complaint channels hinder reporting. Women migrant workers continue to experience harassment from supervisors and verbal abuse in production lines and dormitories, and anecdotal reports suggest that similar verbal abuse is also faced by ethnic minorities and LGBTQI+ individuals.¹⁶ Where grievance mechanisms exist – such as factory-level hotlines – uptake remains limited, as fear of dismissal among migrant workers, combined with a lack of awareness around rights and grievance processes deters many migrants from seeking help. Among contributing family members engaged in aquaculture or informal post-harvest production, where the workplace is also the home, violence and harassment in the workplace can sometimes blur into domestic violence. The consequences on mental health, familial and social stability, and income security, as well as the potential ripple effect of impacts that taking action can have on the individual and their family, may deter individuals from seeking help.

2.3.6. Cross-cutting issues

Although the decent work gaps and challenges described above differ across sectors, they can intersect in similar ways to amplify disadvantage for particular groups of migrant workers. Gender identity, disability, LGBTQI+ status, ethnicity, and migration and labour market status combine to produce overlapping exclusions that official data collection systems do not fully capture.

¹⁵ Interview with FED, 10 October 2025.

¹⁶ Interviews with LRF, SENTRO, Kamiparho and migrant workers.

Persons with disabilities

Disability-disaggregated labour migration data is not currently collected in South-East Asia, and broader national labour force data disaggregated by disability status is also typically scarce. Cambodia and Indonesia have included disability questions in their labour force surveys (LFS), and Myanmar previously included a related module in its 2015 LFS. However, the data is generally analysed at the aggregate level, and sectoral data is not readily available. As a result, persons with disabilities employed in the blue economy are largely invisible within official labour and migration statistics.

Pre-employment medical screening often results in automatic exclusion of persons with disabilities rather than assessment of their relevant competencies or the scope of reasonable accommodation that would be required. Physical access barriers are evident in workplaces and accommodation across the blue economy, including in factory dormitories, sanitation facilities, piers and other locations. Research has found that the accommodation costs for persons with disabilities are often substantially lower than imagined, with no financial cost at all in many cases (JAN 2024). These findings suggest an opportunity for future pilots in the seafood processing and aquaculture sectors, where basic adjustments – such as ramp access, modified workstations, use of simplified visual checklists and buddy systems – would enable employment without major cost implications and could enhance retention and productivity.

LGBTQI+ persons

There are few national policies in the ASEAN region that explicitly recognize and protect the rights of LGBTQI+ persons in the workplace. Research across Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand shows that LGBTQI+ migrants frequently hide their identity to avoid harassment or dismissal (Dwyer 2022). Individuals can also face imprisonment, flogging and fines in parts of Indonesia, Malaysia and Myanmar – where same sex relations are criminalized. Establishing safe and confidential reporting systems and promoting greater awareness about the fundamental rights of LGBTQI+ persons to freedom from discrimination would help close this protection gap.

Ethnicity, language and migration status

The interplay of ethnicity and caste is complex for migrants in the blue economy. In some cases, belonging to an ethnic minority, indigenous or caste group can reduce the employment opportunities available in countries of origin due to discrimination, which becomes a factor driving migration. In other cases, government-led resettlement programmes in a number of ASEAN Member States, often linked ostensibly to infrastructure projects, have led to large-scale relocation of ethnic minorities and indigenous persons, leaving international migration as a coping strategy for newly vulnerable populations who have lost their traditional livelihoods. Crisis and conflict situations also drive waves of migration by ethnic minorities, as seen in the ongoing conflict in Myanmar following the military takeover (Errico 2017; AIPP, IWGIA and Forum-Asia, n.d.).

Linguistic diversity among minority ethnic groups can have advantages and disadvantages for migrant workers. For example, Mon and Shan people from Myanmar speak languages closer to the Thai language than the majority Burmese ethnic group, making it easier for them to learn Thai and providing an advantage in the workplace. In other cases, minority ethnic groups face additional isolation and disadvantage through language barriers as minority members with the migrant population. These challenges arise, for example, in Indonesia and the Philippines, where high levels of internal linguistic diversity mean that not all migrant workers are fluent in Bahasa Indonesia or Tagalog, and speakers of minority languages may consequently have difficulty understanding contracts that have only been translated into these majority languages. Language barriers can also restrict understanding of safety procedures, access to grievance mechanisms, as well as the ability to participate in trade unions and other workers' organizations amongst other disadvantages.

Climate change and demographic stress

Environmental degradation and demographic shifts are reshaping the labour market in the blue economy. In some areas, declining fish stocks and rising sea temperatures are eroding small-scale fishing incomes and pushing coastal youth into irregular migration (FAO 2024). At the same time, ageing fisherfolk populations mean that older workers, who are often without access to social protection, remain in physically demanding roles with high risks of occupational injuries and illnesses. Gender- and inclusion-responsive adaptation planning are typically limited in climate change mitigation strategies for the blue economy in the region.

▶ 3

Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

The S2SR programme will mainstream gender equality, diversity and inclusion in achieving its overall goal of safe labour migration and decent work for a sustainable fish and seafood supply chain. In doing so, the programme will contribute to the practical fulfilment of ILO and EU commitments to these principles, including through advancing the SDGs.

Taking advantage of the opportunities available to promote gender equality, diversity and inclusion requires a clear understanding of the structural and intersectional nature of the disadvantages experienced, as well as embedding measures aimed at countering these disadvantages throughout all aspects of the programme. A particular focus is needed on the selection of project focus, the design of activities, and the methods and principles with which these activities are put into action.

▶ Strategic vision

Ship to Shore Rights will work with diverse women and men stakeholders to make visible the intersectional inequalities faced by women and men, persons with disabilities, ethnic and national minorities, LGBTQI+ individuals, and migrant workers with irregular status. The programme will adopt an intersectional, transformative approach based on human and labour rights. It will employ the following specific strategies:

1. **Focus on the most excluded segments of the blue economy** by prioritizing informal and semi-formal nodes such as pier work, small-scale seafood processing and aquaculture sites.

► **Strategic vision (cont.)**

- 2. Address discriminatory practices towards women, LGBTQI+ individuals, ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities** by supporting efforts to end discrimination in recruitment and hiring practices; wages and pay; routine pregnancy testing; unfair dismissals; and access to grievance procedures.
- 3. Support women's reproductive autonomy** through maternity protection, childcare provision and the promotion of flexible, parent-friendly work arrangements in the formal sector.
- 4. Promote inclusive working conditions and reasonable accommodation** by expanding access to decent work; building capacity in relation to the provision of accessible information, reasonable workplace accommodation, and inclusive OSH and training systems; and enabling the participation of migrant workers with disabilities and workers with varied language, literacy and learning needs.
- 5. Strengthen the organizing, representation and leadership of marginalized workers** by supporting the membership and meaningful participation of women migrant workers, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ workers and ethnic minorities in trade unions and worker associations and by supporting them to take up leadership and decision-making roles.
- 6. Ensure inclusive, safe and effective grievance mechanisms** by promoting systems that are confidential, accessible, linguistically inclusive and responsive to violence and harassment (including gender-based violence), bullying, discrimination and exploitation.
- 7. Generate new knowledge on intersectionality, vulnerability and resilience** by producing new research on how gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics affect migrant workers in the blue economy. The knowledge produced will include a focus on masculinities, ableism, racism, heteronormativity and exclusionary labour structures.
- 8. Promote inclusive leadership and accountability across institutions** through work with governments, employers' organizations, trade unions, migrant workers' associations, CSOs and community networks to mainstream GEDSI principles, build accountability for labour rights violations and strengthen norms that enable equality in the blue economy.

3.1. Principles for implementing the Strategy

The S2SR programme will seek to apply a transformative approach to gender equality, diversity and inclusion across all of its activities promoting safe migration and decent work in the blue economy. Implementation will be guided by the following principles:

Free prior and informed consent

The programme will uphold the principles of free prior and informed consent alongside safeguarding standards. In some contexts, self-identification or self-reporting on personal status can itself carry risks of stigma, retaliation or legal sanction. For example, LGBTQI+ persons in some countries may face legal or social sanctions if they are identified, or workers with disabilities may fear job loss or discrimination if they disclose their status.

S2SR will draw on the contextual knowledge and advice of local partners to assess risks and determine where it may be safer not to pursue certain sensitive interventions or public visibility efforts. All engagement will be based on informed consent, confidentiality and respect for participants' own assessments of risk.

This approach ensures that efforts to promote gender equality, diversity and inclusion expand opportunities without compromising safety or dignity, and that the programme remains firmly grounded in the UN system's commitment to "Leave No One Behind".

In line with ILO and UN guidance, the activities will:

- Apply informed consent, ensuring participants understand potential risks and can choose how they are represented.
- Guarantee confidentiality and secure data management, particularly regarding disability status, gender identity, sexual orientation or health conditions.
- Conduct context and risk assessments before convening public or workplace events that could unintentionally identify or “out” individuals.
- Design inclusive participation processes that protect anonymity where necessary, such as using representative organizations as safe intermediaries.
- Provide staff and partner training on ethical engagement, safeguarding and survivor-centred approaches.

Always assume agency

Assume women, persons with disability, ethnic minorities and LGBTQI+ individuals have agency, will express it when possible and can be supported to express it more if not discouraged in everyday interactions.

Centre intersectionality to inform action

Gender equality, diversity and inclusion need to be approached through intersecting lenses of gender, disability, nationality and ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as migration and labour market status. Decisions on programming priorities will be grounded in data and evidence rather than simplistic assumptions about vulnerability.

Nothing about us, without us

Persons from under-represented or marginalized groups will be involved in identifying needs and co-designing responses, and will participate in programme governance.

Ensure accessibility and reasonable accommodation within the programme activities

Activities will conform to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and related ILO standards on disability inclusion. Accessibility measures will include both sign language and spoken language interpretation (as appropriate), captioning and the use of accessible venues and materials. Where relevant, the ILO’s internal policies on disability inclusion will also be applied.

Build inclusive partnerships and capacity

Inclusion will be promoted by extending partnerships more broadly across civil society, bringing in organizations of persons with disability, feminist organizations, and actors from anti-racism, minority rights, and environmental movements to cross-fertilize on promising practices in promoting behavioural and normative changes. Such partnerships should be forged in line with the S2SR Institutional Capacity Building Strategy.

Apply normative standards to address discrimination

Efforts will address discriminatory norms and practices that constrain marginalized people and limit freedom and well-being. Using normative human rights and labour standards as the established benchmark, activities will bridge gaps to decent work for all individuals, and support accountability mechanisms to eliminate labour rights violations and exploitation.

Remove structural barriers to a fair and inclusive industry

Barriers linked to gender stereotypes, disability inclusion, and social background continue to limit job opportunities, advancement and equality of treatment for many migrant workers in the blue economy. Creating more fair and inclusive industries requires policies and practices that acknowledge and address these structural challenges in addition to supporting individual empowerment.

3.2. Twin-track approach

The Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy adopts two mutually reinforcing tracks, consistent with ILO and EU external action frameworks. It seeks to retain the gender gains achieved during the last phase of the S2SR programme and extend them in the areas of disability, ethnicity and LGBTQI+ inclusion.

Track 1. Mainstreaming inclusion, non-discrimination and equality of treatment across all programme activities.

All programme activities will integrate inclusive and human rights-based non-discrimination principles. As such, equality and inclusion will be promoted at all opportunities throughout the programme, even when these are not the main objective of the activity.

Track 2. Specific activities to empower marginalized groups.

Certain activities will be designed to specifically address the inclusion and empowerment of particular disadvantaged or marginalized groups, including women, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities and LGBTQI+ individuals.

Together, these tracks guide both the framing and the implementation of activities. First, activity design will systematically ask which groups are affected, how power and resources are distributed among them, and how activities can be structured to reduce – rather than reproduce – inequality. Second, once activities are agreed, the programme will seek ways to maximize their contribution to gender equality, diversity and inclusion – for example, through inclusive participation processes, accessible communications, targeted outreach and partnerships with specialized organizations.

3.3. Priority actions on gender equality, diversity and inclusion

A set of priority actions are identified below which are considered the most strategic and feasible entry points for advancing gender equality, diversity and inclusion across the S2SR programme. A more detailed menu of activities is provided in the Annex at the end of this document, which the programme can use to inform annual work planning processes.

The priorities were selected using five criteria:

1. **Logframe alignment:** Each priority directly contributes to outcomes and indicators under the four specific objectives of the S2SR programme.
2. **GEDSI impact:** Priority was given to actions that reduce intersecting disadvantages faced by women and men migrant workers, as well as migrant workers with disabilities, ethnic and national minorities, and LGBTQI+ individuals.
3. **Feasibility and mandate:** The selected activities fall within the normative, policy, convening and capacity building roles of the ILO, IOM and FAO, and can be delivered within the timeframe of the programme.
4. **Responsiveness to evidence:** Priorities reflect the key findings from the gender equality, diversity and inclusion analysis conducted.
5. **Regional scalability:** The priority actions are suitable for adaptation across multiple S2SR implementing countries and value chains in the blue economy.

Specific Objective 1. Increase ASEAN and subregional connectivity and cooperation on safe labour migration and decent work in the fish and seafood supply chain.

Priority 1.1. Produce a regional synthesis of promising inclusive labour migration practices in the blue economy.

Priority 1.2. Develop ASEAN sectoral guidance for inspectors and maritime authorities on including gender, diversity and inclusion perspectives.

Specific Objective 2. Support national authorities to design, implement and enforce stronger legal and policy frameworks on labour migration, labour protection, and sustainable fisheries.

Priority 2.1. Incorporate issues of discrimination and unequal protections affecting migrant workers in the blue economy in legislative gap analyses.

Priority Activity 2.2. Develop inclusive standard operating procedures for dispute resolution, case management and referral of labour rights violations and human trafficking.

Specific Objective 3. Promote a culture of accountability, sustainable corporate practices, due diligence and responsible fishing practices among employers and enterprises, including promoting promising practices and exchanging knowledge.

Priority Activity 3.1. Adapt existing ILO guidance on gender equality, disability inclusion and non-discrimination into sector-specific policy briefs on migrants in the blue economy.

Priority Activity 3.2. Develop a training curriculum for employers, human resources managers, supervisors, recruiters and worker representatives on equality, non-discrimination, pay equity, violence and harassment-free workplaces, and reasonable accommodation for companies employing migrants in the blue economy.

Specific Objective 4. Promote social dialogue, increase freedom of association and collective bargaining, and empower migrant workers, their families and their communities.

Priority Activity 4.1. Provide inclusive institutional capacity building training to workers' organizations and civil society organizations, applying the S2SR capacity building strategy and curriculum.

Priority Activity 4.2. Strengthen the ability of Migrant Worker Resource Centres (MRCs) to deliver accessible gender, disability and ethnicity-responsive services across the migration cycle.

3.4. Recommendations for programme management

1. Theory of change

The theory of change should continue to treat GEDSI as both a cross-cutting principle and a core result pathway. Explicit mention should be made of women and men, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities and LGBTQI+ individuals to ensure that the different experiences of each group are recognized.

Where appropriate, separate assumptions should be articulated for different groups (for example, gender-specific labour market barriers, accessibility constraints or concerns).

2. GEDSI budgeting

A minimum of 25 per cent of programme resources should be earmarked for activities that advance gender equality, diversity and inclusion.¹⁷ Activities under this category should be costed and reported annually in narrative reports.

3. Performance framework

The following indicator is recommended for assessing results in establishing a gender, diversity and inclusion budget: *% of programme budget spent on activities that disproportionately benefit marginalized beneficiaries or directly address equality of treatment.*

All data collected under the S2SR Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Plan should be disaggregated – at a minimum – by sex, with progressive inclusion of ethnicity, disability and LGBTQI+ variables, in accordance with data protection and ethical safeguarding principles.

4. Evaluation criteria

The mid-term and final evaluations should include a dedicated evaluation criteria to assess how the Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy has been developed and implemented within programme operations, drawing on evidence from tripartite partners and other implementing partners.

5. Monitoring and evaluation training manual

Monitoring and evaluation training for implementing partners and programme staff should include practical guidance on collecting, analysing and reporting disaggregated data, as well as on data protection principles. Reporting templates should include prompts for GEDSI analysis.

¹⁷ Qualification for inclusion in the GEDSI budget requires that the activities are intended to disproportionality benefit a disadvantaged or marginalized group (women, LGBTQI+, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities) or have a thematic focus on addressing issues of equality and non-discrimination.

6. Bi-annual reflection and work planning meetings

Biannual reflection and work planning meetings should include a specialized session on effective implementation of GEDSI approaches, including sharing of good practices and lessons learned by the ILO Senior Specialist on Gender Equality, Non-Discrimination and Inclusion and organizations representing the interests of women, LGBTQI+ persons, ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities.

7. GEDSI Task Force

A GEDSI Task Force will be established within the S2SR team to guide the implementation of this Strategy. The Task Force will:

- Regularly meet to review progress on GEDSI mainstreaming.
- Support national coordinators and technical leads in integrating inclusion objectives.
- Facilitate cross-agency learning and sharing of tools.
- Oversee GEDSI budgeting, reporting and evaluation processes.

Each implementing agency will nominate at least one member, including a representative from Administration and Finance to support budgeting functions.

8. GEDSI in planning and work plan review

Annual work plans should make explicit how the activities will address GEDSI priorities before being shared with key stakeholders during National Programme Advisory Committee meetings.

During the drafting of work plans, a critical review will be conducted by the S2SR GEDSI focal point and/or Task Force, who will provide constructive comments on how the planned activities contribute to GEDSI outcomes, as well as recommendations for further improvements.

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Annex 1. Detailed activity menu mapped to outputs

The following activities provide a framework through which the S2SR programme will translate gender equality, diversity and inclusion principles into practical activities at the regional, national, enterprise and community levels. The activities are structured according to the objectives and outputs in the theory of change and are intended as a menu of options from which the programme may select, adapt and integrate for development of annual work plans with tripartite plus constituents in each target country and at the regional level.

Specific Objective 1. Increase ASEAN and subregional connectivity and cooperation on safe labour migration and decent work in the fish and seafood supply chain.

Output 1.1. Strengthened coherence and implementation of ASEAN policies on safe labour migration and decent work in the fishing and seafood processing supply chain, including the ASEAN Declaration and Guidelines on the Placement and Protection of Migrant Fishers.

- Ensure research on recruitment, working conditions and labour inspection frameworks in fishing, aquaculture and seafood processing:
 - disaggregates data by sex, disability, ethnicity and LGBTQI+ identification where possible;
 - analyses the intersectional challenges faced by particularly marginalized individuals and groups; and
 - identifies opportunities to enhance migration outcomes for all.
- Produce a regional synthesis of promising practices and practical tools on inclusive labour migration in the blue economy to support ASEAN Member States, social partners and civil society in strengthening implementation of existing standards and commitments.
- During regional dialogue among the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, the ASEAN Political Security Community and other relevant sectoral bodies, ensure the integration of diversity and accessibility into discussions around the implementation of the ASEAN Declaration and Guidelines on the Placement and Protection of Migrant Fishers.
- Strengthen coordination between global and regional organizations of persons with disabilities, women's organizations and LGBTQI+ organizations and ASEAN sectoral bodies to ensure inclusive participation in policy dialogue, and to build the capacity of these organizations to support the interests of marginalized migrant workers in the blue economy.
- Ensure that gender equality, diversity and inclusion principles are mainstreamed into bilateral and multilateral dialogues among ASEAN Member States and sectoral bodies.

Output 1.2. Enhanced capacity of ASEAN sectoral bodies and Member States to develop policies and guidelines to strengthen labour inspections, protect labour rights, and combat trafficking in persons, and support successful return and reintegration of migrant workers in the fish and seafood supply chain.

- Extend or update existing sectoral training modules for inspectors and maritime authorities operating in fishing, aquaculture and seafood processing sectors to include gender equality, diversity and inclusion perspectives in order to:
 - enhance sensitivity;
 - enable recognition of gender- and disability-based risks; and
 - enhance interagency cooperation for better service provision.
- Develop tailored checklists for accessibility and reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities to be applied by inspectors.
- Facilitate peer-learning exchanges among ASEAN inspection bodies to share inclusive methodologies and lessons learned from Thailand's PIPO model and Indonesia's joint inspections.

- Build understanding and capacity to effect normative change at regional coordination meetings between CSOs and workers' organizations on gender equality, diversity and inclusion challenges and opportunities in the blue economy. At the meetings, engage specialized or representative organizations to lead discussions related to the group of individuals they represent.

Output 1.3. Improved public awareness and attitudes and attitudes towards the role and contributions of women, men and LGBTQI+ migrant workers in ASEAN's blue economy.

- Conduct regional media training sessions on inclusive reporting, ethical storytelling and digital accessibility in order to:
 - boost capacity to use inclusive imagery and accessible content;
 - ensure gender equality, diversity and inclusion principles are mainstreamed across training materials, including in discussions around just transitions and sustainability;
 - include a broad array of media actors, including journalists, social media influencers and partner communication staff.
- Develop ethical reporting guidelines that reflect an intersectional approach to understanding the different experiences of sub-groups of migrant workers.
- Support worker- and CSO-led communications campaigns that provide tailored information to marginalized groups aimed at:
 - promoting recognition of migrants' economic and social contributions through their work in the blue economy;
 - challenging stereotypes and stigma; and
 - building understanding about their rights and the conditions of work in the blue economy.
- Develop accessible community-based multimedia communication resources using channels known to be popular among migrant workers and national populations, including social media, radio and in-person platforms. These resources should be in regional languages, and include captioning, sign language and easy-to-read versions.

Specific Objective 2. Support national authorities to design, implement and enforce stronger legal and policy frameworks on labour migration, labour protection and sustainable fisheries.

Output 2.1. Expanded evidence base and social dialogue to inform the development of national policy and legal frameworks on migration, labour and social protections and on environmental sustainability in the fish and seafood supply chain.

- Conduct a legal gap analysis to assess the alignment of national legislation with the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) with respect to work in the blue economy.
- Conduct an analysis of regular migration channels to identify entry points for increasing their accessibility and safety for migrant workers with disabilities.
- Ensure marginalized groups are represented in policy consultations through the participation of representative civil society organizations and through the provision of reasonable accommodation.
- Provide technical assistance for the development of national data collection systems to help ensure they are able to provide disaggregated data by sex, age, disability and ethnicity to inform policymaking decisions.

Output 2.2. Strengthened capacity of government authorities to implement and enforce labour, social and environmental protections for a sustainable fish and seafood supply chain, applying a multi-disciplinary approach in collaboration with workers, employers and civil society organizations.

- As part of developing multi-disciplinary training on inspection and other operational tools for government officials, ensure that the modules mainstream gender equality, diversity and inclusion principles to build awareness of the barriers and challenges experienced by marginalized groups in disclosing workplace abuse and exploitation.

- ▶ Develop inclusive standard operating procedures for dispute resolution, case management and referral for labour rights violations that ensure confidentiality, accessibility and a survivor-centred approach for marginalized groups.
- ▶ Develop sector-specific guidance and checklists on OSH for use in the seafood supply chain, including practical guidance on the rights and responsibilities of workers experiencing temporary or permanent disabilities.
- ▶ Develop integrated inspection and compliance planning tools that cover wages, OSH, housing, medical access and reasonable accommodation for workers with disabilities, including those who acquire disabilities either at the workplace or during the course of their migration.
- ▶ Incorporate social criteria modules into traceability and sustainability certification systems so that environmental compliance is paired with inclusive monitoring of labour standards.
- ▶ Convene national roundtables between government, employers, recruiters, trade unions and CSOs to share information and promote collaboration on promoting gender equality, diversity and inclusion in the blue economy, as well as on addressing the impacts of intersectionality on labour migration outcomes for sub-groups of migrant workers facing heightened discrimination.

Output 2.3. Increased capacity of government authorities to identify, refer, prosecute and protect survivors in cases of human trafficking for purposes of forced labour.

- ▶ Strengthen the accessibility and inclusiveness of shelters and rehabilitation services to enable men and persons with disabilities to access protection and psychosocial support.
- ▶ Develop or enhance national standard operating procedures that integrate gender, disability and SOGIESC-sensitive referral and protection protocols for survivors.
- ▶ Support national monitoring systems to capture inclusion indicators within anti-trafficking frameworks and to ensure that survivor voices inform policy adaptation.

Specific Objective 3. Promote a culture of accountability, sustainable corporate practices, due diligence and responsible fishing practices among employers and enterprises, including promoting promising practices and exchanging knowledge.

Output 3.1. Increased knowledge and commitment of employers and enterprises with respect to their human and labour rights obligations, and climate change mitigation strategies to support a sustainable fish and seafood supply chain.

- ▶ Support dissemination of ILO tools such as the Global Business and Disability Network Charter and awareness of the global normative framework, including the ILO's MNE Declaration and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
- ▶ Strengthen and expand the Seafood Good Labour Practices (SGLP) programme by embedding gender, disability and inclusion criteria within its factory assessment tools and guidance materials.
- ▶ Adapt existing ILO and partner guidance on gender equality, disability inclusion and non-discrimination into sector-specific briefs for the blue economy, and disseminate these through employers' organizations, industry bodies and platforms such as the ILO Global Business and Disability Network.
- ▶ Engage national fisheries associations to pilot inclusive recruitment guidelines and gender-responsive on-boarding protocols, including reasonable accommodation for workers with disabilities.
- ▶ Document and disseminate regional case studies demonstrating productivity and reputation gains from inclusive business practices, using evidence from partner enterprises.

Output 3.2. Strengthened capacity of employers and enterprises to comply with international labour standards and implement gender-responsive and sustainable corporate practices and due diligence measures for environmental safeguarding and decent work.

- ▶ Deliver modular training for employers, human resources managers, supervisors, recruiters and workers' representatives on equality, non-discrimination, pay equity, violence- and harassment-free workplaces, and reasonable accommodation.

- Develop enterprise self-assessment and reporting tools on gender equality, diversity and inclusion linked to normative due diligence frameworks.
- Continue to promote the adoption of “employer pays” recruitment models to reduce debt bondage and enhance equality of access to employment for marginalized groups.
- Encourage buyers and certification bodies to include diversity and accessibility benchmarks in their procurement and traceability procedures.
- Recognize enterprises that demonstrate exemplary inclusive practices through national and regional awards and public-private partnerships.
- Develop model anti-bullying and harassment policies for fishing enterprises, including designated focal points and confidential reporting lines.
- Conduct research to support livelihood diversification and just transition opportunities for marginalized groups of fishers, seafood processing and aquaculture workers affected by climate change.

Specific Objective 4. Promote social dialogue, increase freedom of association and collective bargaining, and empower migrant workers, their families and their communities.

Output 4.1. Increased capacity and inclusiveness of workers’ organizations and civil society organizations to provide information, organize and offer support services to workers in the fish and seafood supply chain.

- Provide modular institutional capacity building support on gender equality, diversity and inclusion, in line with the S2SR Institutional Capacity Building Strategy.
- Support dedicated efforts to increase membership, voice and influence of women, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities and LGBTQI+ migrant workers in trade unions and workers’ organizations, including expanded representation in leadership positions.
- Establish mentoring partnerships connecting experienced labour rights advocates with emerging leaders from marginalized groups.
- Support trade unions and CSOs to adopt internal inclusion policies and elect diversity focal points within executive committees.
- Facilitate peer-to-peer exchanges among trade unions and CSOs representing marginalized workers from across the blue economy – including organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), women’s empowerment groups, LGBTQI+ groups and environmental groups – to share organizing strategies, strengthen solidarity networks and disseminate successful advocacy and behaviour change strategies.

Output 4.2. Improved access to accurate information and responsive support services for migrant workers, their families and their communities throughout the migration cycle, including through counselling, legal assistance, information and training, networking, worker organizing, and return and reintegration services.

- Strengthen Migrant Worker Resource Centres (MRCs) to deliver accessible gender, disability- and ethnicity-responsive services across all migration stages, including legal counselling, psychosocial assistance and referral, ethical collection of diversity-related data, provision of accessible information and other support.
- Develop or update standard operating procedures for MRCs on confidentiality, data protection and ethical communication approaches that are consistent with the principle of free prior and informed consent.
- Produce multilingual, plain language and sign language information materials on rights, complaint mechanisms and social security benefits.
- Train MRC staff and paralegals on inclusion, gender sensitivity, disability awareness and survivor-centred approaches to violence and harassment.
- Support reintegration initiatives that are inclusive and accessible, including outreach efforts to expand participation among returning migrants who acquired disabilities during their migration experiences.
- Establish an online inclusive blue economy knowledge sharing platform that consolidates case studies, training tools and peer-learning opportunities across countries.

Cross-cutting measures

Across all programme objectives:

- ▶ Apply intersectional analysis and inclusive data collection and disaggregation in planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning.
- ▶ Ensure accessibility and the use of inclusive language in all communication products and events.
- ▶ Maintain a Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Task Force to coordinate implementation and monitor progress.
- ▶ Apply gender-, diversity- and inclusion-responsive budgeting (minimum 25 per cent of programme resources dedicated to inclusion-related actions).
- ▶ Prioritize activities in line with feasibility and safeguarding principles, relying on partner intelligence to determine when public or highly visible interventions may endanger participants and opting not to proceed where the risks cannot be mitigated.
- ▶ Mainstream mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) in pre-departure training modules to include basic referral guidance and stress-management awareness, as well as provide contact information for accessing related support services.

Ship to Shore Rights South-East Asia: Gender equality, diversity and inclusion strategy

Labour migration patterns in the fishing, seafood processing and aquaculture sectors are heavily gendered. Migrant women are concentrated in seafood processing and aquaculture, most often in factories, aquaculture farms and pier-based or home-based settings where employment is informal and labour protections are weak. Men dominate work on board fishing vessels, and are often allocated to logistical, supervisory and heavy lifting roles in the seafood processing sector.

Discriminatory gender norms, ableism, racism and heteronormativity can intersect with class and legal status to influence who migrates, under what conditions and with what protections. Women, LGBTQI+ individuals and workers with disabilities often face restrictive social expectations or legal barriers that limit their options for regular migration. Migrants from ethnic minority communities may confront additional language barriers at each stage of the migration cycle, leading to lower awareness of rights and greater exposure to deception and abuse.

The Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for the Ship to Shore Rights South-East Asia programme lays out a transformative agenda for responding to these sectoral challenges. The programme will mainstream gender equality, diversity and inclusion in pursuing its objectives to promote safe migration for decent work in a sustainable fish and seafood supply chain. On this basis, the Strategy outlines a vision, framework and practical recommendations for embedding an intersectional approach to addressing the inequalities faced by women, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, LGBTQI+ individuals and other marginalized groups in the blue economy.

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