

# ▶ TRIANGLE in ASEAN Quarterly Briefing Note ASEAN



## October – December 2023

### Main programme activities

On 25-26 October, the [16th ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour \(AFML\)](#) with the theme “[Enhancing the effectiveness of legal pathways for labour migration in ASEAN](#)” was successfully hosted by Indonesia Ministry of Manpower (MOM) in



16th AFML in Jakarta, Indonesia on 25-26 October 2023  
© Ministry of Manpower

Jakarta, Indonesia. The forum was attended by 94 participants (W:45; M:49) from ASEAN Member States, employers’, workers’ and civil society organizations, ILO, IOM and UN Women, as well as observers from the Governments of Australia, Canada, Japan, Switzerland and Timor Leste.

The discussion to finalize the [16th AFML recommendations](#) resulted in a strong and relevant set of recommendations. They include, among others, for the first time, recommendations on addressing discrimination, violence and restrictions based on the grounds of gender, disabilities, age and parental status. They also call for allowing migrant workers to change employers by notifying the previous employers and for longer-term labour migration programmes. Important Recommendations were also made on working towards prohibiting recruitment fees and related costs chargeable to migrant workers, lowering costs of passports and other essential documents issued by governments, and considering the adoption of Memoranda of Understanding and admission policies covering all skills levels. Importantly, the 16th AFML also recommended protecting the basic human rights of all migrant workers regardless of their legal status.

In the run up to the 16th AFML, TRIANGLE in ASEAN hosted [national preparatory meetings in seven ASEAN Member States](#) and regional preparatory meetings for [employers’ organizations](#) and [workers’ organizations](#). Recommendations from these preparatory meetings were shared with the 16th AFML. TRIANGLE also developed a background paper on the theme “*Enhancing the effectiveness of legal pathways for labour migration in ASEAN*”, which will be published in 2024.

## ASEAN

On 12-13 November, TRIANGLE held its **4th Regional Migrant Women's Group Meeting**, with 70 migrant women and women advocates present from Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand. The network has grown in strength and leadership capabilities since it last met in February 2023. The newly formed Myanmar Domestic Workers Association spoke about how they have formalized their structure and elected a leadership committee. The Association made plans for a bilateral meeting with the Network of Domestic Workers in Thailand (NDWT) for the first quarter of 2024. Together, the 19 migrant women's groups at the event formulated advocacy plans and messages for the 16 Days of Activism Against GBV and for International Migrants Day. Their social media accounts indeed were alighted between end-November and mid-December during those special days, when some of the TRIANGLE-supported migrant women groups also presented recommendations to local policy makers.

On 21 November, TRIANGLE joined the **Dissemination Forum for the ASEAN Multi-Sectoral Work Plan Against Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Work Plan 2023 – 2028** (Bohol Tip Work Plan 2.0). While TRIANGLE primarily directs its ASEAN support to implementation of the Action Plan (2018-2025) of the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers, TRIANGLE has substantively contributed to the implementation of the Bohol Tip 1.0 Work Plan (2017-2020) due to the multisectoral nature of these two work plans and due to the involvement of the ASEAN Committee on the Implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (ACMW) in both. Going forward, TRIANGLE stands ready to support ACMWs work under the Bohol 2.0 Work Plan in areas including fair and ethical recruitment; safe, orderly and regular migration, and working conditions, among others.

On 23 November, TRIANGLE in ASEAN participated in the **Open Session of 19th ASEAN Senior Labour Officials Meeting (19th SLOM)** and reported on our achievements to date, as well as future plans. Representatives from Ministries of Labour from all ten ASEAN Member States joined the meeting, as well as Timor Leste as observer. It took place in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam.

TRIANGLE joined ILO's **Disability Champions Network** meeting on 21 November and was asked to present our work on disability inclusion to ILO staff in all parts of the globe. TRIANGLE in ASEAN mainstreams disability inclusion in order to begin addressing discrimination and exclusion persons with disabilities face in the labour migration cycle. Starting mid-2022 with a concerted effort to build networks with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), TRIANGLE has begun including OPDs in some national programme governance meetings, and TRIANGLE MRCs work with OPDs for case referrals, in addition to providing MRC services to migrants with disabilities.

On 3 December, the **International Day of Persons with Disabilities**, TRIANGLE launched a brief [\*Disability rights and domestic work in ASEAN\*](#). The brief is based on the earlier study [\*Skilled to care, forced to work? Recognizing the skills profiles of migrant domestic workers in ASEAN amid forced labour and exploitation\*](#), which was published in June 2023. The brief highlights that migrant domestic workers are providing direct care to persons with disabilities, which is classified internationally as medium-skilled work. It calls on the ASEAN Member States to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to enable full social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities. Towards this, decent working conditions, as well as skills training and recognition, should be ensured for migrant domestic workers and other care service providers.

On 8 December, the **TRIANGLE in ASEAN Regional Programme Advisory Committee** convened for the 8th time. The meeting agenda covered TRIANGLE's regional partners' presentations on priorities and highlights of work done, and future plans related to migration. TRIANGLE in ASEAN also presented its key achievements in 2023 and plans for 2024-2025.

## ASEAN



Online Training on Portability of Social Security Benefits for Migrant Workers on 11-13 December.

© ILO

On 11-13 December, TRIANGLE in ASEAN supported the Cambodia Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MOLVT) to host an [Online Training on Portability of Social Security Benefits for Migrant Workers](#). This training was part of a year-long process to develop **ASEAN Guidelines on portability of social security benefits**, which is an activity of the ACMW-led by Cambodia MOLVT. About 60 participants joined the training, including representatives of social security organizations and labour ministries from ASEAN Member States and Timor Leste as well as employers', workers' and civil society organizations. The training was delivered by TRIANGLE in ASEAN, regional expert Dr Boonwara Sumano, specialists from the ILO Social Protection Department, Labour Migration Branch, and the International Social Security Association in Geneva. The participatory training design involved case study discussions, Slido quizzes, "tour of the table" sessions and plenty of opportunities for asking questions, which allowed the participants to actively engage with the trainers and one another. The next step in the process to develop the ASEAN Guidelines on portability of social security benefits includes two back-to-back events hosted by MOLVT in Siem Reap, Cambodia, on 15-18 January 2024 (see upcoming events below). The process started in early 2023 with the [First Consultation on](#)

[Development of ASEAN Guidelines on portability of social security benefits for migrant workers](#) hosted by MOLVT with TRIANGLE in ASEAN support on 9-10 March 2023.

On 14 December, TRIANGLE joined the **Colombo Process Thematic Area Working Group Meeting and Reintegration Knowledge Forum** to present the [ASEAN Guidelines on effective return and reintegration](#) (2020) in a panel titled "Lessons from Southeast Asian countries on reintegration". The development of these Guidelines was [supported by TRIANGLE](#). The other panellists included representatives of the Philippines Department of Migrant Workers and Migrant Forum Asia. TRIANGLE's intervention highlighted that to be effective, reintegration support should span the whole migration cycle from pre-migration to during employment and return and be seen as a shared responsibility for countries of origin and destination.



International Migrants Day Conference at Chulalongkorn University, 15 December 2023.

© ILO

On 15 December, TRIANGLE in ASEAN joined the Chulalongkorn University [International Migrants Day Conference](#) under the theme "**Exploring Pathways for Migrant Inclusion**". This regional event was hosted by Chulalongkorn University Asian Research Center for Migration, Centre of Excellence on Migration and Development, with TRIANGLE in ASEAN support among others. More than 100 persons from diverse backgrounds, including academia, governments, trade unions, national and international CSOs, international agencies, and financial institutions, joined the conference as speakers and participants. H.E Varawut Silpa-archa, Minister of Social Development and Human Security, delivered a keynote address. TRIANGLE presented its upcoming report "*Enhancing the effectiveness of legal pathways for labour migration in ASEAN*".

ASEAN

On 20 December, TRIANGLE and IOM met with Lao PDR Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MOLSW) to discuss joint support to the development of an **ASEAN Declaration on skills mobility, recognition, and development for migrant workers**. Lao PDR MOLSW is leading the development of this Declaration as a key output from its ASEAN Chair 2024. The Declaration is expected to establish a framework for ASEAN cooperation on enhancing migrant workers access to skills development; enabling mobility of migrant workers at all skills levels (elementary, medium-skilled, and high-skilled) within ASEAN; and promoting a whole-of-society approach and forging stronger cross-border collaboration for mutual recognition of skills in countries of origin and destination. The Declaration is expected to be adopted at the 44th and 45th ASEAN Summits in October 2024 in Vientiane, Lao PDR.

TRIANGLE, together with other ILO projects supporting [Migrant Worker Resource Centres \(MRCs\)](#) in various countries in Southeast Asia, are undertaking an **assessment of lessons learned and good practices in the implementation of MRCs**. The assessment reviews MRC services including information, counselling and training on safe migration and labour rights; legal assistance services to increase access to justice; organizing of migrants into network and trade unions; and support for sustainable return and reintegration. In addition to documenting lessons learned and good practices from the implementation of MRCs in Southeast Asia, the report will be used to build capacity and share information and successful approaches between MRCs in the region, as well as contribute to the global knowledge base on the provision of support services to migrant workers through MRCs to support replication in other regions. A regional event for ILO-supported MRCs will be organized in 2024, building on the findings of the assessment.

**SaverAsia activities** outreach continued during this quarter. From 1 October - 31 December, the [SaverAsia website](#) has received more than 33,288 users and 54,667 page views. Most of these users access the site from Malaysia, followed by Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand and Singapore. The SaverAsia application has acquired a total of 394 downloads, 1,000 sessions and 1,495 page views. SaverAsia overall social media reach (including SaverAsia, SaverAsia Indonesia, SaverAsia Cambodia, SaverAsia Myanmar, SaverAsia Bangladesh, SaverAsia Nepal, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok) includes 13,955 fans, 3,965,863 impressions, 111,670 video views (at least 3 seconds) and 30,178 reactions.

► **Upcoming activities and key dates (January – March 2024)**

Date	Event	Location	Attendees	Purpose
15 January	Second Consultation on the ASEAN Guidelines on portability of social security benefits for migrant workers	Siem Reap, Cambodia	Government of Cambodia (host), social security organizations, ministries of labour, employers', workers' and civil society organizations, ASEAN Secretariat, ILO, ISSA	Review and finalize the text of ASEAN Guidelines on portability of social security benefits for migrant workers.
16-18 January	Training in Negotiation of Social Security Agreements	Siem Reap, Cambodia	Government of Cambodia (host), social security organizations, ministries of labour, employers', workers' and civil society organizations, ASEAN Secretariat, ILO, ISSA	Build capacity of ASEAN Member States to negotiate social security agreements to put the ASEAN Guidelines into practice.

14 February	Fourth Joint Dialogue on labour migration between the ASEAN Trade Union Council (ATUC) and the ASEAN Confederation of Employers (ACE)	Vientiane, Lao PDR	Employers' and workers' organizations from ASEAN Member States.	Review outcomes of past collaboration and agree on priority areas for joint ATUC and ACE advocacy and action on labour migration.
-------------	---	--------------------	---	---

► Media Coverage

Date	Title	Media Source
3 October	<a href="#">Southeast Asian Migrant Workers in Taiwan: Human Rights and Soft Power</a>	The Diplomat
30 October	<a href="#">Thailand Lowers Fees for Cambodian, Laotian, Myanmar, and Vietnamese Workers</a>	Khaosod English
7 November	<a href="#">Minister stresses ASEAN collaboration for fighting human trafficking</a>	Antara Indonesian News Agency
23 November	<a href="#">19th ASEAN Senior Labour Officials Meeting enhance efforts towards inclusive, sustainable community</a>	ASEAN
5 December	<a href="#">Ministry of Manpower discusses ASEAN migrant worker protection</a>	Antara Indonesian News Agency

## ASEAN at a glance

Population: ≈ 631 million

Labour Force: ≈ 344 million

Source: ILOSTAT, 2023.

## Intra-ASEAN migration

Total: 7.1 million

Source: UNDESA, 2020.

## Main countries of origin for intra-ASEAN migration

Myanmar: 2.22 million

(M: 1.26 million, W: 0.96 million)

Indonesia: 1.42 million

(M: 0.85 million, W: 0.57 million)

Malaysia: 1.19 million

(M: 0.5 million, W: 0.67 million)

Lao PDR: 0.95 million

(M: 0.42 million, W: 0.53 million)

Cambodia: 0.71 million

(M: 0.33 million, W: 0.38 million)

Source: UNDESA, 2020.

## Main countries of destination for intra-ASEAN migration

Thailand: 3.49 million

(M: 1.74 million, W: 1.76 million)

Malaysia: 1.94 million

(M: 1.23 million, W: 0.71 million)

Singapore: 1.33 million

(M: 0.55 million, W: 0.78 million)

Brunei Darussalam: 0.09 million

(M: 0.049 million; W: 0.042 million)

Source: UNDESA, 2020.

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

## Background information

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

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

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

## ASEAN

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

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

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

## Key partners

- ▶ ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC)
- ▶ ASEAN Committee on the Implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (ACMW)
- ▶ ASEAN Trade Union Council (ATUC)
- ▶ ASEAN Confederation of Employers (ACE)
- ▶ Task Force on ASEAN Migrant Workers (TFAMW)

## Focal point

- ▶ Anna Engblom, Chief Technical Adviser, [engblom@ilo.org](mailto:engblom@ilo.org)

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



## Contact information

Ms Anna Engblom, Chief Technical Adviser,  
ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific,  
United Nations Building, Rajdamnern Nok  
Ave., Bangkok 10200, Thailand

T: +66 2288 2245  
E: [engblom@ilo.org](mailto:engblom@ilo.org)  
W: [ilo.org/triangleinasean](http://ilo.org/triangleinasean)  
Twitter: [twitter.com/annaengblom](https://twitter.com/annaengblom)

[ilo.org/asia](http://ilo.org/asia)  
 [twitter.com/iloasiapacific](https://twitter.com/iloasiapacific)  
 [flickr.com/iloasiapacific](https://www.flickr.com/photos/iloasiapacific/)  
 [youtube.com/ILOTV](https://www.youtube.com/ILOTV)  
 [facebook.com/ILO.ORG](https://www.facebook.com/ILO.ORG)

