

TRIANGLE in ASEAN Quarterly Briefing Note



Background information

Labour migration is an established feature of ASEAN labour markets. Intra-ASEAN migration is also rising, with 6.8 million intra-regional migrants accounting for two-thirds of the region's total international migrant stock (UN DESA, 2019). Within ASEAN, Myanmar, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Viet Nam, and the Philippines (in descending order) are net-sending countries while Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam are net-receiving countries. Viet Nam, in particular, while still being a net-sending country, emerges as a net-receiving country.

The ASEAN Community has established far-reaching 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 Workers (ACMW). ACMW falls under the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. A range of regional stakeholders are involved in labour migration governance, including the ASEAN Confederation of Employers (ACE), ASEAN Trade Union Council (ATUC), and the Task Force on ASEAN Migrant Workers (TFAMW).

Despite steps taken to ensure the rights of migrant workers in ASEAN, migrant workers are still subject to exploitative conditions including underpayment, unsafe workplaces, debt bondage, and human trafficking. Prior to migration, migrant workers are vulnerable to recruitment related abuses due to governance gaps and their relatively 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 the fishing industry, men and women in agriculture and construction, 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 part due to government bans and restrictions on women's mobility in the region. This often leads to women migrant workers being employed in occupations that remain outside the 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, to unfair and even harmful practices and abuse.

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ASEAN at a glance

 Population: ≈ 649 million

 Labour Force: ≈ 337 million

Sources: ASEANstats, 2019; ILOSTAT, 2019.

Intra ASEAN migration

Total: 6.8 million

Source: UNDESA, 2019.

Main countries of origin for intra-ASEAN migration

Myanmar: 2.22 million
(M: 1.26 million, W: 0.96 million)

Indonesia: 1.38 million
(M: 0.82 million, W: 0.56 million)

Malaysia: 1.00 million
(M: 0.45 million, W: 0.56 million)

Lao PDR: 0.94 million
(M: 0.41 million, W: 0.53 million)

Cambodia: 0.71 million
(M: 0.33 million, W: 0.38 million)

Source: UNDESA, 2019.

Main countries of destination for intra-ASEAN migration

Thailand: 3.50 million
(M: 1.74 million, W: 1.76 million)

Malaysia: 1.92 million
(M: 1.20 million, W: 0.72 million)

Singapore: 1.12 million
(M: 0.47 million, W: 0.65 million)

Brunei Darussalam: 0.09 million
(M: 0.049 million; W: 0.042 million)

Source: UNDESA, 2019.

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

Since early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the entire world, including the ASEAN region. Women and men migrant workers in the region are striving to protect their livelihoods and their health through the crisis, yet many are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and its economic and health impacts. During this reporting period, TRIANGLE in ASEAN has focused on a humanitarian response to the COVID-19 crisis.

Main programme activities: July – September 2020

TRIANGLE in ASEAN supported the ASEAN Chair, Viet Nam, and the ASEAN Secretariat in hosting the [ASEAN Committee on Migrant Workers \(ACMW\) Virtual Open Session on Planning for the Action Plan in 2021-2025](#) on 22-23 July 2020. The Open Session brought together 87 stakeholders (W:50; M:37) including the ACMW focal points from ten ASEAN governments, representatives of ASEAN Secretariat, employers' organizations, workers' organizations, civil society organizations, ILO, IOM, UN Women, ASEAN dialogue partners and regional projects to discuss priorities and partnerships for next five years' of ACMW work. This was the first time that the ACMW consulted non-governmental stakeholders in its work planning process.

TRIANGLE in ASEAN also supported ASEAN Trade Union Council (ATUC) and the Taskforce on ASEAN Migrant Workers (TFAMW) to host online preparatory meetings to help their affiliates to prepare their priorities and proposals for the ACMW Virtual Open Session. The **workers' preparatory meeting** was hosted on 17 July, and it was attended by 10 representatives (W:4; M:6). The **civil society preparatory meeting** was co-organized on 20 July, and attended by 16 representatives (W:8; M:8). The ASEAN Confederation of Employers (ACE) chose to prepare its priorities and proposals for the ACMW work planning offline without a preparatory meeting.

On 17 September, TRIANGLE in ASEAN hosted the **Sixth Technical Meeting of Focal Specialists on International Labour Migration Statistics in ASEAN** as an online meeting. The meeting was attended by 74 participants (W:43; M:31), including 41 Focal Specialists or other government representatives, 6 officials from the ASEAN Secretariat, 22 ILO representatives from headquarters, regional-, and country levels, and 5 other partners. The

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meeting reviewed the current status of the International Labour Migration Statistics (ILMS) database in ASEAN and identified ways to further improve data collection and sharing among ASEAN Member States. Next steps in improving quality and gender disaggregation of data sources at the country level were also discussed. The 8th ILMS data collection round in ASEAN will be launched on 6 October.

The **SaverAsia mobile app** went live in the [Google](#) and [iOS](#) app stores on 31 August and is available for downloading. The SaverAsia app enables migrant worker users to compare remittance costs and find useful financial information in Bahasa Indonesia, Burmese, Khmer and English. Updates on the website [saverasia.com](#) have also been finalized. TRIANGLE in ASEAN and Developing Markets Associates (DMA) are finalizing information materials and explainer videos to support the public launch of SaverAsia in Q4, and developing dissemination plans for introducing SaverAsia to Cambodian, Filipino, Indonesian and Myanmar's migrant communities in Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore and Thailand.

Preparations for the **13th ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour (AFML)** on 10 and 12 November on the theme "Supporting migrant workers during the pandemic for a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN Community" are in full swing. TRIANGLE in ASEAN hosted [national preparatory meetings](#) in Cambodia on 14 September with 46 participants (W: 11; M:35), and Viet Nam on 28 September with 25 participants (W:15; M:10, final participants to be confirmed), and six more national meetings are scheduled to take place within October. TRIANGLE in ASEAN is also finalizing two background papers for the event: one technical paper on the 13th AFML theme and one progress review paper to assess implementation of past AFML recommendations.

Upcoming activities and key dates (October – December 2020)

Date	Event	Location	Partners	Purpose
October	National Tripartite Preparatory Workshops for the 13th ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour (AFML)	Face-to-face or online meetings in Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Thailand.	Tripartite partners and CSOs	Review progress in implementing past AFML recommendations and discuss the theme of the 13th AFML "Supporting migrant workers during the pandemic for a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN Community"
10 & 12 November	13 th ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour (AFML): "Supporting migrant workers during the pandemic for a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN Community"	Hanoi and online	Viet Nam (ASEAN Chair), ASEAN Secretariat, governments, employers, workers and civil society from 10 ASEAN countries	Discuss and adopt recommendations on the 13 th AFML theme, and to review implementation of past AFML recommendations
November-December	SaverAsia mobile app dissemination in Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore and Thailand.	Face-to-face and social media outreach activities and promotion	Developing Markets Associates, MRCs partners and other CSOs, trade unions.	To introduce SaverAsia mobile app to Cambodian Indonesian, Filipino and Myanmar migrant communities in Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore and Thailand

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Media coverage

Date	Title	Media Source
25 July	Migrant workers from Asean allowed to return to Thailand as country eases lockdown	The Star
03 August	Global remittances could drop by \$108bn in 2020, new report shows	Al Jazeera
03 August	The need to value, not vilify, migrant workers	FMT News
08 August	Time to step on the gas, not to hit the brakes	The Jakarta Post
19 September	Uncertain future for migrant workers, in a post-pandemic world	UN News
25 September	Singapore's road to recovery	East Asia Forum

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