

The ASEAN



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Safe Journeys Protecting Migrant Workers in Times of Crisis



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VIEWPOINT

Bienvenido E. Laguesma
Secretary of Labor and
Employment Philippines

THE INSIDE VIEW

Migrant Workers: Vital
Contributors to ASEAN's
Socio-Economic Development

CONVERSATIONS

One Dream, Separate Lives
How Migrant Workers Cope



○ Ministerial Bodies

*) takes guidance from and reports to both AMCA and AMRI

AMRI-ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information

AMCA-ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Culture and Arts

AMMY-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Youth

ASED-ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting

AMMS-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Sports

AMRDPE-ASEAN Ministers on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication

AMMSWD-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Social Welfare and Development

AMMW-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women

ALMM-ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting

ACCSM-The Heads of Civil Service Meeting for ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service Matters

AHMM-ASEAN Health Ministers Meeting

AMMDM-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Management

COP-AADMER-Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response

AMME-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Environment

COP to AATHP-Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution

SOMCA-Senior Officials Meeting on Culture and Arts

COCI-The ASEAN Committee for Culture and Information

SOMRI-Senior Officials Meeting Responsible for Information

SOMY-Senior Officials Meeting on Youth

SOMED-Senior Officials Meeting on Education

SOMS-Senior Officials Meeting on Sports

SOMRDPE-Senior Officials Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication

SOMSWD-Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development

ACWC-ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children

ACW-ASEAN Committee on Women

SLOM-Senior Labour Officials Meeting

SOM-ACCSM-Senior Officials Meeting on ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service Matters

SOMHD-Senior Officials Meeting on Health Development

ASOEN-ASEAN Senior Officials on the Environment

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Note from the Editorial Team

The ASEAN region is home to approximately nine million migrants, with almost seven million being intra-regional migrants.

Labour migration has a significant impact on the socio-economic development of both countries of origin and destination. In the region, the Philippines and Indonesia are major sending countries, while countries like Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, and Brunei are popular destinations for migrant workers.

This significant migration flow not only meets the demand for labour within the region but also contributes to global economic growth. An article by Mega Irena and Carl Rookie O. Daquio from the Labour and Civil Service Division of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Department sheds light on this important aspect.

Ensuring the protection of migrant workers has long been a priority on the ASEAN development agenda. In 2017, ASEAN Leaders signed the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers. Furthermore, the ASEAN Migration Outlook, published last year, highlighted the challenges

posed by the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the 42nd ASEAN Summit, under Indonesia's 2023 ASEAN Chairmanship, the Leaders adopted two declarations that further strengthen ASEAN's commitment to safeguarding the rights and welfare of migrant workers, particularly in times of crisis.

In this issue, Philippine Labor Secretary Bienvenido E. Laguesma, who also serves as the Chair of the ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting (ALMM), explains how these declarations enhance ASEAN's dedication to protecting the rights and welfare of migrant workers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of providing equal access to social protection for migrant workers. In November 2022, the ASEAN Declaration on the Portability of Social Security Benefits for Migrant Workers was adopted. Som Chamnan, the Senior Labour Official from Cambodia's Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, shares that guidelines are being developed within the labour sector

to effectively implement this declaration.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) contributes an article highlighting the vulnerability of migrant fishers in the region and the collaborative efforts undertaken by ASEAN and its regional partners to improve protection for this particularly vulnerable group of workers.

Deputy Director General Ha Thi Minh Duc and Officer Phan Nhat Minh from the International Cooperation Department of Vietnam's Ministry of Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs provide valuable insights from a Study on Labour Market Reintegration for Returned Migrant Workers in the ASEAN Region.

Amidst the myriad of migrant worker stories, our Conversations section provides a glimpse into the lives of those who have chosen to leave their home countries in pursuit of better job opportunities. We also feature stories of migrant workers who have overcome the challenges of returning home and are now empowered with the necessary skills to shape their futures.

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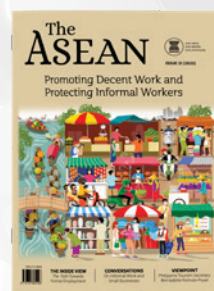
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THE INSIDE VIEW

ASEAN builds a stronger foundation for
the protection of migrant workers and
their families

ASEAN COMMITS TO STRENGTHENING PROTECTION OF MIGRANT WORKERS

The ASEAN Editorial Team

Migrant workers are an integral part of the ASEAN Community, contributing to the economic and social development of both their countries of origin and destination. However, they also face many challenges and risks, such as exploitation, discrimination, and lack of access to social protection. To address these issues, ASEAN has placed the well-being of migrant workers high on its policy agenda.

One of the key milestones was the signing of the **ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers by the ASEAN Leaders** in 2017, which specifies the fundamental rights of migrant workers, such as fair treatment, decent work conditions, and access to justice. It also lays down the shared responsibilities of both sending and receiving states in the migration process. ASEAN also adopted the **ASEAN Guidelines on Effective Return and Reintegration of Migrant Workers** in 2020, which provides for the economic and social reintegration of returning migrant workers through, among others, basic training in financial literacy and entrepreneurship. Another important initiative is the **ASEAN Declaration on Portability of Social Security Benefits for Migrant Workers in ASEAN**, which opened the way for Member States to forge bilateral or multilateral agreements

for the cross-border transferability of migrant workers' social security benefits.

At the 42nd ASEAN Summit held on 10 May 2023 in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia, the ASEAN Leaders adopted two more important declarations that aim to improve the safety of millions of migrant workers in the region. One is the **ASEAN Declaration on the Protection of Migrant Workers and Family Members in Crisis Situations**, and the other is the **ASEAN Declaration on the Placement and Protection of Migrant Fishers**.

ASEAN Declaration on the Protection of Migrant Workers and Family Members in Crisis Situations

The Declaration recognises the need to provide humanitarian assistance

to all migrants and their family members—regardless of their legal status— during crisis situations. It encourages the ASEAN Member States to include migrant workers and their families in all stages of crisis management and ensure they have access to continuing support.

The following are the specific commitments:

- Adapt policies to include assistance to migrant workers across occupational areas at all stages of crisis preparedness, response, and recovery for the specific needs of migrant workers, especially women, and their families already residing with them in crisis situations;
- Mainstream the protection and promotion of the rights of migrant workers caught in crisis situations and their family members left behind in the policies, programmes, and mechanisms of sending states;

- Facilitate access of migrant workers to timely and relevant information and support services in times of crises;
- Support access to justice, grievance mechanisms and referral and support mechanisms to address various forms of harm and exploitation experienced by migrant workers in crisis situations;
- Facilitate, where relevant, timely access of all migrant workers affected by crises to sustained safety, health care, psychosocial support, social protection, livelihood support in time of furlough, sickness or injury, and return and reintegration to their countries of origin;
- Strengthen bilateral and/or multilateral cross-border coordination between countries of origin, transit, and destination authorities in assisting and protecting migrant workers and their family members already residing with them in crisis and preventing them from becoming undocumented or being the victims of trafficking in persons;
- Strengthen cooperation to extend assistance to migrant workers of ASEAN Member States who are caught in crisis situations outside ASEAN in the event of need, based on the capacities and resources of the Embassies and Consular Offices of the relevant ASEAN Member States and based on bilateral consultations and arrangements;
- Promote whole-of-society and whole-of-government collaboration and partnership between ASEAN Member States and ASEAN's external partners, international organisations, and other relevant international entities to better protect migrant workers and their family members already residing with them in crisis situations throughout the entire migration process;
- Cooperate and coordinate among ASEAN Member States to extend humanitarian assistance to migrant workers, irrespective

of their legal status, and their family members who are already residing with them in the States where the crisis occurred.

ASEAN Declaration on the Placement and Protection of Migrant Fishers

The Declaration seeks decent work, human rights recognition, and social protection for migrant fishers in the region. It urges ASEAN Member States and relevant stakeholders to cooperate on migration data and law enforcement.

The following are the specific commitments:

- Consider mainstreaming the protection of migrant fishers in all relevant migration policies, mechanisms and processes of ASEAN and its Member States, including with those of ASEAN's External Partners, international organisations, and other relevant international entities;
- Endeavour, where appropriate, to strengthen measures, in cooperation with the private entities, employers and other partners and dedicate resources to enhance the labour conditions of migrant fishers and ensure their labour rights protection, including but not limited to decent working and living conditions, occupational health and safety, risk evaluation, access to justice, access to social protection with special attention to the workers who are sick, injured or dead, including humanitarian assistance in case of health emergencies and crisis situations for fishers on board;
- Further endeavour to take appropriate and gender-responsive measures to identify, address and punish all forms of violence, abuses and exploitation against migrant fishers, including strengthening the institutional capacities and systems of labour inspections and referral systems, occupational safety and health, accident prevention, workplace injury, grievance mechanisms,

and to improve inter-agency coordination and labour inspection to effectively protect migrant fishers;

- Improve the entire migration process of migrant fishers through improvement in ethical and fair recruitment and placement; pre-employment, pre-departure and post-arrival orientations; and access to employment contracts or proper documentation in the language they understand;
- Improve the protection of migrant fishers and their families left behind by ensuring their access to communications, access to information on migration policies, job risks and their rights, and right to any modes of transfer of wages and employment benefits to their families;
- Encourage ASEAN Member States to initiate or conclude bilateral agreements among each other and with countries outside the region to facilitate safe and regular migration of migrant fishers especially in recruitment and placement processes, safe repatriation and reintegration, and access to justice and remedies;
- Explore cooperation among ASEAN Member States on data collection and sharing on, but not limited to, case management, recruitment and repatriation of migrant fishers in and outside of ASEAN, and sharing of best practices and lessons learned in the migration process of migrant fishers;
- Promote collaboration and partnerships between ASEAN Member States and with relevant ASEAN external partners, international organisations and other regional and national stakeholders for more effective law enforcement and in protecting ASEAN migrant fishers in the entire migration process.

Viewpoint

Bienvenido E. Laguesma

Secretary of the Department
of Labor and Employment,
Philippines

Chair, ASEAN Labour
Ministers Meeting (ALMM)

Philippine Labor Secretary Bienvenido Laguesma, who serves as ALMM Chair, discusses two new ASEAN declarations that champion the rights and welfare of migrant workers and their families. He also describes a Philippine-led public campaign to raise awareness on safe and fair migration in the ASEAN region. Secretary Laguesma also shares some of the Philippines' recent initiatives to assist its migrant workers, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. These include the creation of an online platform to track their repatriation, provision of various forms of assistance, and the establishment of a new department for migrant workers.



“

The Philippines has been taking proactive steps to protect the rights and improve the well-being of its migrant workers, especially in the face of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting (ALMM) champions the development of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection of Migrant Workers and Family Members in Crisis Situations and the ASEAN Declaration on the Placement and Protection of Migrant Fishers as part of Indonesia's ASEAN Chairmanship priority this year to strengthen social protection for migrant workers. What will be the impact of these Declarations on the region's steadfast commitment towards greater protection of the migrant workers and their family members?

Secretary Bienvenido E. Laguesma: The ASEAN Declaration on the Placement and Protection of Migrant Fishers and the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection of Migrant Workers and Family Members in Crisis Situations demonstrate the region's commitment to safeguarding the rights and welfare of migrant workers and their families. The declarations reinforce previous commitments and international human rights standards, including the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Specifically, the ASEAN Declaration on the Placement and Protection of Migrant Fishers acknowledges that fishing is a hard-to-reach and hazardous occupation that exposes migrant workers to poor working conditions, such as abusive recruitment practices and inadequate labour inspection. To address these issues, ASEAN Member States commit to mainstreaming the protection of migrant fishers in all relevant migration policies, enhancing their labour conditions and rights protection, and identifying and punishing all forms of violence, abuses, and exploitation against them.


Overall, these declarations serve as an essential step towards promoting equitable access to social protection and basic social services, enhancing the well-being of ASEAN people, and building an inclusive, sustainable,

resilient, and dynamic ASEAN Community.

The Philippines is currently spearheading the project “Public Campaign for Safe and Fair Migration in the ASEAN Region.” Can you tell us more about this project? What are the expected outcomes? How do you envision such an initiative to contribute to further strengthening migrant workers' education and safe migration programmes?

Secretary Bienvenido E. Laguesma: The Public Campaign on Safe and Fair Migration in the ASEAN Region is a recently completed initiative led by the Philippines, which aimed to raise awareness on safe and fair migration to improve the protection and promotion of the rights of migrant workers in ASEAN. It was pursued in partnership with the ASEAN Secretariat, the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the Enhanced Regional EU-ASEAN Dialogue Instrument (E-READI). The project was carried out in collaboration with the ILO's Safe and Fair Project and UN Women with the support of the EU under its Spotlight Initiative.

The management of the project was lodged with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) in 2020, with the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, DOLE-International Labor Affairs Bureau, and the DOLE-Institute for Labor Studies acting as joint implementing agencies. The outputs included audio-visual presentations (AVPs), the production of which underwent a vetting process by the 10 ASEAN Member States representing the ASEAN Committee on Migrant Workers), through the ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC). E-READI funded the consultancy agreements with ten national experts from each Member State, which provided technical and administrative support for the research and video production phases of the project. It also facilitated the subtitling of the AVPs in key ASEAN languages (Filipino, Bahasa Indonesia, Burmese, Khmer, Lao, Thai, and Vietnamese) in coordination with DOLE and ASEC.



Migrant workers ride in the back of a truck in Manila, Philippines

The two AVPs targeted countries of origin and countries of destination. The AVP for countries of origin is a short video that aims to provide reliable, updated, and easy-to-comprehend information about labour migration in the ASEAN region. It also aims to increase viewers' awareness about rights violations during the migration cycle, with a specific focus on irregular/undocumented labour migration. The AVP for countries of destination is a short film that reinforces the importance of being a regular labour migrant and the risks associated with being an irregular or undocumented migrant in countries of destination. It provides a checklist of do's and don'ts for migrant workers upon arrival at the country of destination or airport and their worksite.

The development and dissemination of the AVPs as part of the Public Campaign on Safe and Fair Migration in the ASEAN Region is an important initiative that can contribute to strengthening migrant workers' education and safe migration programs. By complementing pre-departure orientation conducted by the country of origin, the AVPs can reinforce key messages and information that migrant workers need to know to ensure that they are fully informed and prepared for their journey. The AVPs can also inspire viewers to choose and promote fair recruitment and safe labour migration, thereby promoting better working conditions and opportunities for migrant workers.

Through this initiative, migrant workers and their families can have better access to reliable, updated, and easy-to-comprehend information about labour migration in the ASEAN region, helping to reduce the risks and challenges associated with migration. Overall, the AVPs can contribute to a more informed and empowered migrant workforce that is better equipped to protect their rights and ensure safe migration.

The Philippines is one of the largest sources of migrant labour in the region and the world. Can you share with us some of the Philippines' recent initiatives to protect the rights and improve the well-being of migrant workers, especially those severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Secretary Bienvenido E. Laguesma: The Philippines has been taking proactive steps to protect the rights and improve the well-being of its migrant workers, especially in the face of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020, the DOLE implemented a monitoring mechanism to track all overseas Filipino workers who plan to come back to the Philippines amid the COVID-19 pandemic with the establishment of the Overseas Filipino Workers Assistance Information System or OASIS, an online platform run by the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration to assist in the safe and orderly repatriation of overseas Filipino

workers. The system is intended to aid the government in identifying and categorising incoming Overseas Filipino Workers or OFWs in several ways to enable a smooth arrival process at the airport, efficient COVID-19 testing, and quick transportation to their designated hotels and residences, among other necessary procedures. By having access to information, such as the airlines used by the OFWs, their health status, local addresses, and other pertinent details in the tracker, the government will be able to provide the necessary assistance to them. Likewise, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the government provided various forms of assistance to migrant workers, such as free repatriation flights, quarantine facilities, and transportation to their hometowns. Upon their return, migrant workers could avail themselves of competency assessments, job-matching services, skills development programmes, and financial assistance for e-commerce, agriculture, and entrepreneurial activities.

Further, with the newly constituted Department of Migrant Workers (DMW), the functions of the Department of Labor and Employment related to overseas employment have been transferred to the DMW. Nevertheless, the DOLE will continue to closely coordinate with the DMW on the implementation of programmes affecting returning overseas Filipino workers.



PORTABILITY OF SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS FOR MIGRANT WORKERS IN ASEAN



Som Chamnan

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Ministry of Labour and
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The ASEAN region's population of 634 million accounts for 8.85 per cent of the world's total. It is also the source of millions of migrant workers, who seek employment in countries within the region and beyond. According to the *ASEAN Migration Outlook*, which was launched in 2022, the ASEAN region has around nine million working-age international migrants, with the large majority being intra-ASEAN migrants.

The significance of labour migration in the region cannot be overstated. It greatly contributes to the economic growth and development of both countries of origin and destination. With ASEAN's blueprint for deeper economic, socio-cultural, and political integration, interconnectivity, and the gradual

increase of mobility across the region, it is essential for our migrant workers to be protected.

However, while labour migration offers opportunities, it also provides a lot of challenges. It is recognised that ASEAN would not become an inclusive community if the rights of migrant workers are not promoted and protected. For this reason, the



ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers was adopted in 2007 during the 12th ASEAN Summit in Cebu, the Philippines. To enhance the obligations of the ASEAN Member States in promoting and protecting the rights of migrant workers as stipulated in this declaration, the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers was later adopted in 2017 in Manila, the Philippines.

Notably, the ASEAN Consensus emphasised the obligation of the Member States to treat migrant workers as they do to their domestic workers, subject to their respective laws and regulations. Subsequently, it is crucial to provide them with the same access to social protection, especially the right to the portability of their social security benefits. Considering that the Member States have different laws and regulations, as well as social security systems, a study on the portability of social security rights

of migrant workers between the Member States was conducted by the Thailand Development Research Institute in 2019. The study not only provided an overview of the social security systems of the Member States, but also made a good set of recommendations on how they can work together towards connecting the social security schemes, particularly on the portability of social security benefits through either the bilateral or multilateral social security agreement (SSA).

It is noteworthy that the portability of social security benefits for ASEAN migrant workers has been one of the key priority issues in the region. Many discussions at the bilateral and multilateral levels, and within the ASEAN framework have been conducted to explore the possibility of transferring social security benefits of the migrant workers when they return to their home countries.

For instance, under the labour cooperation framework of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar,

Thailand, and Viet Nam (CLMTV), the 4th Senior Labour Officials Meeting of the CLMTV in 2018 with the theme of “Social Security: Portability of Social Security for Migrant Workers in the CLMTV” was held. At the meeting, the CLMTV countries agreed to strive towards the signing of a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding on the portability of social security benefits for migrant workers for relevant economic sectors. And to accelerate the discussion to reach this common objective, Cambodia, as the host of the 5th CLMTV-SLOM Meeting and the 3rd Labour Ministerial Conference of the CLMTV countries which was held in September 2019 in Siem Reap, also selected the topic “Toward the Protection of Migrant Workers in CLMTV Countries: Cooperation in Social Security” as the theme of the Conference in a bid to develop a common framework for the possible portability of social security benefits for migrant workers in the CLMTV countries. As a result, the “Siem



Burmese female migrant workers sewing or stitching leather shoes in footwear production line of factory in Sankhlaburi, Kanchanaburi, Thai-Burma border province

Reap Declaration on the Roadmap towards the Labour Ministerial Declaration on the Portability of Social Security Benefits for Migrant Workers of CLMTV countries” was successfully adopted.

Undoubtedly, providing equal access to social protection to migrant workers was even more vital during the pandemic. There had been several measures put in place at the regional level to respond to this crisis, including the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework and the Joint Statement of the ASEAN Labour Minister on Response to the Impact of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) on Labour and Employment. In line with these, the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training of Cambodia, during the Cambodia ASEAN Chairmanship 2022 under the theme of **“ASEAN A.C.T: Addressing Challenges Together,”** initiated the development of the “ASEAN Declaration on Portability of Social Security Benefits for Migrant Workers in ASEAN” to broaden

the discussion not only amongst the CLMTV countries but also within ASEAN. Consequently, this declaration was adopted by ASEAN Leaders at the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summits in November 2022 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

The ASEAN Committee on the Implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (ACMW) is now implementing a project to develop the “ASEAN Guidelines on Portability of Social Security Benefits for Migrant Workers”—an important document which will guide the Member States on how to create bilateral and multilateral instruments on portability of social security benefits for migrant workers between the sending and receiving countries within ASEAN. During the technical dialogue held from 9 to 10 March 2023, the ACMW shared and discussed the opportunities and challenges relating to the portability of social security benefits and exchanged views on key concepts

that should be included in the guideline.

In a nutshell, the adoption of the ASEAN Declaration on Portability of Social Security Benefits for Migrant Workers in ASEAN is the realisation of the ASEAN Leaders’ commitments made in the 2007 Cebu Declaration and the 2017 ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers. It also reflects the concerted efforts of the Member States to transform ASEAN into a community that is people-centred, inclusive, sustainable, resilient, and dynamic as stated in the ASEAN 2025 Vision. ASEAN has been actively promoting and protecting the rights of migrant workers because it recognises that it is imperative to promote social justice and respect for human rights.

The Member States are committed to staying on this course of action, even as they strive to build back better and address multiple challenges caused by the pandemic and current global conditions.

MIGRANT WORKERS

Vital Contributors to ASEAN's Socio-Economic Development



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With a market size of 2.3 trillion US dollars, ASEAN has solidified its position as the third-largest economy in Asia and the fifth-largest globally. Large-scale recruitment of migrant labour is integral to economic development and will increase even more as the region's economies grow and contribute to global value chains (GVCs). Migrant workers are part of the 75 million workers in ASEAN who are employed in GVCs, accounting for more than 25 per cent of total employment in the region.

The importance of GVCs to the ASEAN region is evident in the distribution of employment across sectors. In Southeast Asia, over 60 per cent of manufacturing employment in 2021 was linked to GVCs. Notably, industries such as leather and footwear, electrical and optical equipment, machinery, textiles, and garments relied heavily on GVC-related jobs. Beyond manufacturing, GVCs played a significant role in sectors such as agriculture, services (especially tourism), and non-manufacturing industrial sectors, where migrant workers found employment opportunities.

The receiving states in ASEAN employ migrant workers in various sectors. For instance, in 2019, migrant workers made up more than half of the total employment in the industry sector in Singapore (62.0%) and Brunei Darussalam (56.5%). In the agricultural sector, migrant workers represented approximately one-third of total employment in Malaysia, which includes workers in palm oil and rubber plantations. Brunei Darussalam (58.2%) and Singapore (19.9%) also had high percentages of migrant workers in agriculture. In the services sector, migrant workers formed a significant portion of the workforce in Brunei Darussalam (31.2%), Singapore (29.8%), Malaysia (9.2%) and Thailand (5%), including in accommodation, food services, wholesale, and retail.

These employment statistics indicate that migrant workers play a vital role in the labour markets of the region. Out of an estimated 9.2 million international migrants of working age residing in ASEAN's receiving states, 7.1 million originated from other Member States. Their contributions to GVCs have had a profound impact on the region's socio-economic development, enabling increased production, cost reduction, alleviation of labour market shortages, and the transfer of new skills and knowledge. Furthermore, migrant workers often send remittances back to their home countries which contribute to the economic well-being of their families and communities.

The rights of migrant workers in GVCs

Despite their significant contributions, low-skilled migrant workers who are part of GVCs frequently encounter job-related challenges, including poor working conditions and limited access to social protection and labour rights. Moreover, existing migration dynamics have increased the vulnerability of women migrant workers to gender-based risks and discrimination in the workplace and during recruitment processes.

Businesses have a vital role to play in safeguarding the rights of migrant workers, both in their direct activities and throughout the value chains. Responsible business practices are increasingly important for stakeholders, such as investors, consumers, and advocates for migrant rights. They often exert pressure on businesses to comply with labour standards, fair wages, employment conditions, workplace safety, and health. This pressure is particularly evident in the growing interest of the international community in including labour provisions in modern free trade agreements.

To support responsible business practices, ASEAN has adopted and implemented various initiatives. The ASEAN Guidelines for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on Labour provides a framework for companies to incorporate CSR initiatives into their policies and practices and support human-centred development. The ASEAN Guidelines on Good Industrial Relations Practice stipulates guiding principles on promoting functional social dialogue, tripartism and bipartism in achieving decent work for all, particularly in the context of rapid economic growth and increasing trade and investments.

The elimination of forced labour and child labour in GVCs is a fundamental goal. ASEAN Member States are committed to eradicating the worst forms of child labour through the ASEAN Roadmap, which outlines a five-year holistic

plan. Various ASEAN bodies are contributing to the protection of children and the prevention of child labour through relevant initiatives in their respective work plans.

Migrant workers' well-being in post-pandemic recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the challenges faced by migrant workers in GVCs. Lockdowns, business closures, and travel restrictions disrupted production in sectors heavily reliant on migrant workers, causing significant layoffs and income losses. In 2020, the region experienced a 3.6 per cent drop in the combined output, with countries like Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore witnessing a per capita GDP decline between 4 and 7 per cent. As the region recovers from the pandemic, the return of migrant workers to employment has been slower than desired.

Recognising the contribution of migrant workers to the socio-economic development of Member States, ASEAN has taken steps to improve their overall situation in the post-pandemic era. The ASEAN Declaration on the Protection of Migrant Workers and Family

Members in Crisis Situations was adopted during the 42nd ASEAN Summit to support these efforts. The ASEAN Declaration on the Placement and Protection of Migrant Fishers gives particular attention to the well-being of migrant workers in fishing vessels. These commitments are aligned with the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers which provides a framework for the implementation and improvement of policies and programmes that enhance working conditions and labour rights for migrant workers.

Looking ahead: Protecting and empowering migrant workers in GVCs

While progress has been made in the ASEAN region, there is still much work to be done at the global, regional, and national levels to improve the participation and protection of migrant workers, especially those in GVCs. Strengthening labour inspection in hard-to-reach sectors, such as agriculture, fishery, mining, and informal sectors can serve as entry points for inter-sectoral regional collaboration to ensure

responsible business practices within GVCs. It is essential to ensure that the private sector complies with labour laws and standards. Ethical recruitment practices and the provision of acceptable working conditions should become standard practices in businesses, on the premise that these measures are not merely costs but rather long-term investments that contribute to competitiveness and sustainability. By taking these steps, governments, employers, and workers can collectively contribute to the well-being of migrant workers and their greater contribution to the region's sustainable economic growth.

In conclusion, the contributions of migrant workers in ASEAN's GVCs are undeniable and play a vital role in the region's socio-economic development. However, it is imperative to address the challenges faced by these workers, protect their rights, and ensure their well-being, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. By fostering responsible business practices, strengthening labour protection, and promoting collaboration at all levels, ASEAN can continue to empower migrant workers and fully harness their potential within the global value chains.

Myanmar migrant workers harvest green beans on a farm at Pop Pra, Tak, Thailand



REINTEGRATING Migrant Workers into Local Job Markets



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As the fifth-largest economy globally, ASEAN is both the origin and destination of 6.5 million intraregional migrant workers (UNDESA, 2019). After spending time working overseas, at the end of their contracts, migrant workers are expected to return to their home countries with a wealth of income, language fluency, enhanced skills, and technologically savvy. In theory, they contribute to society in the form of the remittances they send back, lowering the rate of unemployment and boosting productivity.

After slowing down during the COVID-19 pandemic, the overseas labour market has almost recovered fully with the number of workers going overseas reaching back to pre-pandemic levels. The increase in international labour migration in general and labour migration within ASEAN will continue to be a major trend. Governments, now armed with the experience gained in crisis response during the pandemic, should be able to adapt and improve future policies and approaches to better protect and promote the rights of workers going to work overseas as well as take advantage of the strengths that this experienced workforce can bring back to the economy.

As a country of origin, Viet Nam has initiated the *Study on Labour Market Reintegration for Returned Migrant Workers in the ASEAN Region* to tackle the labour market reintegration of return migrant workers. With the first phase conducted in Viet Nam as a pilot activity, the project seeks to understand further the hurdles faced by returning migrant workers, and from these findings, jump-start activities that support migrant workers as they reintegrate into the domestic labour market. These activities are designed to help the workers re-establish their lives and promote and use the qualifications and skills they acquired during their time working overseas. Recently, with the support of The Asia Foundation, the study was consolidated and put forth in a local but open workshop, where the opportunities and challenges faced by returning migrant workers were discussed. Through the exchanges among various stakeholders, the workshop has taken the first step in constructing a complete and realistic overview of the situation of returning workers, as well as the connections between the domestic and international labour markets.

As interviews with the study's participants revealed, returning migrant workers faced several challenges, which is contrary to the rosy picture often painted of working overseas. There is an observation that migrant workers may be unaccustomed to the local working environment after returning from overseas, and as a result, were easily discouraged, and experienced job dissatisfaction.

Although local government support and Employment Support Centers' (ESC), job fairs, and matching services are available to returning workers, most workers expressed a lack of awareness of labour support policies, although some are aware, thanks to the internet, of the operation of ESC. As a result, the support that returning workers are entitled to, whether for job searching or entrepreneurship, is underutilised.

Another aspect that greatly affects their future economic prospects is whether their home country's economy can recognise the skills they had acquired overseas and provide appropriate remuneration so that they can attract skilled workers to participate productively and sustainably. Many returned workers have difficulties accepting the lower wages offered in the local labour market, rejecting what they consider to be low offers, and opting to seek employment elsewhere or back abroad. Others that accept lower pay may allow their dissatisfaction to affect their workplace attitudes or may leave employment quickly when they find a higher-paying job, causing employers to consider returned workers "risky" recruits. The problems varied from province to province, with those that had many migrant workers being more organised and having more support from the community of returning workers themselves.

In fact, the interview process of the study also surfaced the success stories of migrants who



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The success stories all have something in common: a well-developed plan from pre-departure to post-return that shaped the career path of migrant workers.

returned to their homes. Using their accumulated wealth, experiences and contacts, they started businesses that created more jobs in the community. Even those who found work in other companies showed greater skills and initiatives than their local counterparts, which raised the standard for others to follow.

The success stories all have something in common: a well-developed plan from pre-departure to post-return that shaped the career path of migrant workers. These could be developed into suitable templates to guide future migrant workers in planning for a fulfilling future.

Overall, the lack of data and statistics on the migrant returnees caused the greatest challenge to both policy-making and personal planning. While returning migrants should not be viewed as a protected group that needs support like other vulnerable groups, they do need guidance so their elevated skills

and experiences can be recognised and tapped to contribute to the local economy. With access to more resources and better skills than entry-level workers in the domestic labour market, migrant workers represent an untapped resource that can be utilised to help alleviate the internal pressure of the labour market and create an incentive to develop higher-skilled workers to meet the demand of the job market.

From the workshop, several directions were charted, from pressing matters such as developing an integrated labour market database for departing and returning migrants, which will feed into evidence-based policies and more awareness of the worker situation at the macro-level; extending migrant worker support services; improving inter-agency and public-private coordination and communication channels; accelerating the implementation of labour reintegration policies; to longer terms goals of developing the Policy Framework for and mutual recognition of skills and qualification, and matching skills training programmes with job market demands.

It is expected that the pilot stage will produce its complete report in the first half of 2023, which will then provide a basis for developing an approach to the issue, so other ASEAN Member States can jump-start their national studies. In Phase 2, the study will be replicated in other countries of origin in ASEAN with the participation of countries of destination and other stakeholders to provide a complete view of the topic.

The study output will be a regional report on the reintegration of returning migrant workers, which can warrant better cooperation among ASEAN Member States to expand the implementation of the ASEAN Declaration to Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers towards the common vision of ASEAN 2030.

MIGRATION BY THE NUMBERS

International migrant stock in ASEAN Member States by country of destination, 2000-2019

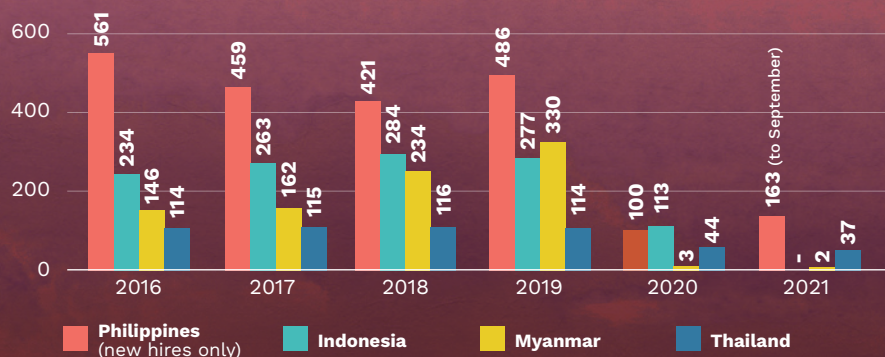
Country	International migrant stock as a percentage of the total population			Total migrant stock (000)	Share of women in total migrant stock	Working-age migrant stock (000)	Share of women in working-age migrant stock	Net migration (000)
	2000	2010	2019					
Brunei Darussalam	28.9	25.9	25.5	111	43.4%	105	43.1%	64
Cambodia	1.2	0.6	0.5	79	46.1%	73	45.9%	-1,019
Indonesia	0.1	0.1	0.1	353	41.8%	317	41.5%	-4,180
Lao PDR	0.4	0.5	0.7	48	35.6%	44	34.2%	-1,299
Malaysia	6.3	8.6	10.7	3,430	38.9%	3,111	37.9%	1,741
Myanmar	0.2	0.2	0.1	76	45.2%	65	43.7%	-3,623
Philippines	0.4	0.2	0.2	219	48.2%	167	46.6%	-5,159
Singapore	33.6	42.2	37.1	2,156	55.9%	1,980	56.1%	1,815
Thailand	2.0	4.8	5.2	3,635	49.8%	3,234	49.4%	2,615
Viet Nam	0.1	0.1	0.1	76	42.1%	67	40.5%	-2,608

Note: Net migration is the number of immigrants minus the number of emigrants, including citizens and noncitizens. A negative value means that more people are leaving than entering an area.



Sources: ILO (2022) and UN DESA (2019), cited in the ASEAN Migration Outlook (2022) <<https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ASEAN-Migration-Outlook-Final.pdf>>

Overseas worker deployment before and during COVID-19 ('000)



Sources: Based on data from the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (2022), Indonesia Migrant Worker Protection Agency (2022), Ministry of Planning and Finance, Myanmar (2022); Bank of Thailand (2022), cited in the ASEAN Migration Outlook (2022) <<https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ASEAN-Migration-Outlook-Final.pdf>>

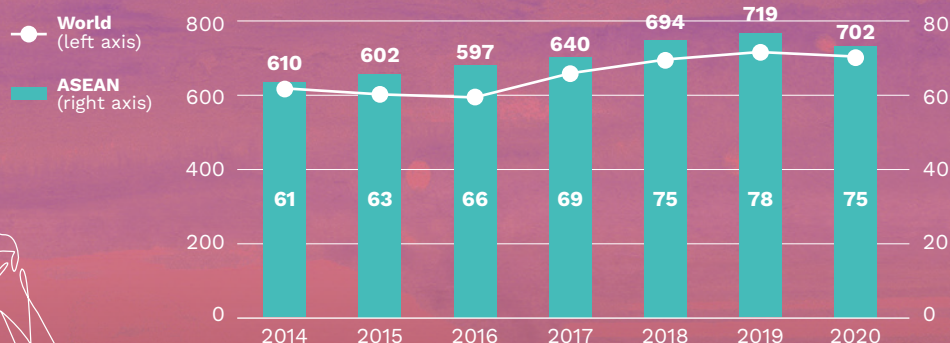
Growth in migrant remittance inflows

AMS	Average Annual Growth					Remittance inflows in 2020 (US\$ Million)
	2000-2004	2004-2009	2009-2014	2014-2019	2019-2020	
Cambodia	7.5%	-0.7%	50.6%	6.7%	-16.6%	1,272
Indonesia	9.4%	29.5%	4.7%	6.4%	-17.3%	9,651
Lao PDR	4.0%	115.7%	38.0%	9.5%	-10.6%	265
Malaysia	18.6%	7.1%	6.9%	0.7%	-11.2%	1,454
Myanmar	2.7%	-14.1%	102.7%	5.4%	-7.1%	2,250
Philippines	10.6%	11.7%	7.5%	4.2%	-0.7%	34,913
Thailand	-0.9%	18.6%	11.4%	4.6%	-1.2%	8,067
Viet Nam	11.5%	21.1%	14.8%	7.2%	1.2%	17,200



Source: World Bank and KNOMAD (2021), in ASEAN Migration Outlook (2022)
<https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ASEAN-Migration-Outlook-Final.pdf>

Migrant remittance inflows (in US\$ billion)



Source: World Bank and KNOMAD (2021), cited in the ASEAN Migration Outlook (2022)
<https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ASEAN-Migration-Outlook-Final.pdf>

Migrant worker returnees to ASEAN Member States from all regions



Cambodia

260,000
returnees

from start of pandemic to
Dec 2021



Indonesia

250,000
returnees

from start of pandemic to
(February-2022)
formal channel only



Lao PDR

227,702
returnees

from start of pandemic to
Jan 2022



Philippines

1,169,000
returnees

from start of pandemic to
Sep 2021



Viet Nam

200,000+
returnees

from start of pandemic to
Jan 2022



Sources: ASEAN Migration Outlook (2022) <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ASEAN-Migration-Outlook-Final.pdf>



IDS Policy Briefing: Impact of Vietnam's COVID-19 Response on Vulnerable Groups (2022) https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/17246/IDS_Policy_Briefing_191.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

A fisherman wearing a red vest over a white long-sleeved shirt, a tan cap, and blue gloves is pulling a large black fishing net. The background is dark and out of focus, showing other people in blue clothing.

Advancing Labour Rights

for Migrant Fishing and Seafood Processing Sector Workers in ASEAN



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With its long coastlines and fertile seas, ASEAN Member States are some of the world's top producers and exporters of fish and seafood products. In 2020, Indonesia, Viet Nam, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, and Myanmar were all among the top 25 countries for marine capture fisheries. The Asian region is home to nearly 80 per cent of the world's fishers, employing over 30 million women and men for work on fishing vessels and millions more in the broader seafood supply chain.



Photo Credit: © ILO Asia-Pacific / Flickr

In recent decades, the ASEAN labour market in the fishing and seafood processing sectors has changed dramatically in response to the region's rapid social and economic development. Migrant workers now fill a substantial share of these jobs because of the reluctance of nationals to pursue fishing work.

Fishing is well-known to be one of the most dangerous occupations worldwide, with fishers facing a high incidence of injuries and deaths at work. Fishing often involves working in adverse weather conditions and hazardous marine environments. The living conditions can be difficult and uncomfortable, requiring fishers to stay in cramped quarters for extended periods.

Workers in the fishing sector also routinely experience major deficiencies in their working conditions. They frequently work long and unpredictable hours, are excluded from basic labour and social protections in some countries, and receive relatively low and irregular wage payments. Fishers also commonly lack sufficient opportunities for freedom of association and collective bargaining to improve their wages and conditions of work. In addition, fishers work in isolated situations at sea where they are unable to access assistance when faced with exploitation and abuse.

The migrant workers who make up such a large proportion of ASEAN's fishing and seafood processing workforce experience additional vulnerabilities during their recruitment and employment. During the recruitment process, migrant fishers are frequently required to pay hefty migration costs and fees, which can place them deeply into debt. Once they are working onboard a fishing vessel, they often discover wages and working conditions differ from those promised by their recruiter. In addition, migrant fishers often work in a precarious legal status that is strictly tied to their employers, making it difficult for them to leave exploitative employment situations.

ASEAN and its Members States commit to improving protection for migrant fishers

In response to growing concerns about working conditions for migrant fishers, ASEAN Member States have been strengthening labour and social protections through a number of regional platforms. The ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour (AFML) has consistently recognised the need to enhance policies and improve enforcement to protect migrant fishers' rights. Developed through dialogue between government, employer, worker and civil society representatives, the AFML has made important recommendations on the fishing sector, including improving the effectiveness of labour inspections, addressing occupational safety and health, and formalising employment for migrant fishers. Moreover, the 8th ASEAN Labour Inspection Conference in 2019 also recognised the need to enhance coordination among labour inspectorates in countries of origin and destination countries, as well as to take other measures to improve enforcement in the fishing industry.

To further regional cooperation on work in fishing, the European Union-supported ILO Ship to Shore Rights South East Asia programme, a multi-country, multi-annual initiative, and the Indonesian Coordinating Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Investment co-hosted the Fair Seas Labour Conference in Bali, Indonesia, in September 2022. The conference brought together tripartite and civil society representatives from eight ASEAN countries to discuss safe migration and decent work in the fishing and seafood processing sectors. The key outcome of the conference was a plenary resolution, which recognised a number of priority areas of work and committed the participants to continue to meet regularly to expand regional cooperation between ASEAN countries.



As Chair of ASEAN in 2023, the Government of Indonesia has been leading regional coordination efforts. With support from the International Labour Organization, International Organization for Migration, and other international organisations, a workshop for the development of an ASEAN Declaration on the Protection of Migrant Fishers was organised in March 2023. Workshop participants included government, social partners, and civil society representatives from all ASEAN countries and provided substantive feedback to strengthen the draft declaration circulated by Indonesia. The declaration has been adopted during Indonesia's chair and will be followed by concrete guidelines for implementation.

All of these regional initiatives on improving conditions for migrant fishers build upon the foundation of previous ASEAN commitments to protect the rights of migrant workers. In particular, this includes the guiding principles of the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers, which establishes a set of rights for migrant workers and members of their families and recognises the shared responsibilities of countries of origin and destinations in ensuring they are able to benefit from them in practice.

Individual ASEAN countries are also increasing their efforts to protect migrant fishers' rights. In 2018 and 2019, Thailand ratified the 2014 Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) and the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007

(No. 188). In addition, Thailand has established 30 Port-in/Port-out Inspection Centres to help ensure that Thai fishing sector employers adhere to national regulations onboard fishing vessels. Several other countries in Southeast Asia are now considering following Thailand's lead, developing similar initiatives to strengthen regulations in the fishing sector.

Charting a course towards fairer seas in ASEAN's blue economy

The long-standing problems with exploitative working conditions for migrant fishers are a daunting global challenge. These issues are particularly manifest in Southeast Asia because of its critical role as a key producing region and area of origin and destination for migrant fishers. With the increasing global demand for seafood and expanding regulation of supply chains in key market states, it is more critical than ever that ASEAN Member States make a strong commitment to strengthening labour and social protection for migrant fishers.

A particularly critical step that all ASEAN Member States should strongly consider is to ratify the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188). The Work in Fishing Convention is extremely important because it responds directly to many of the key decent work deficits faced by migrant fishers within the region, setting legally-binding minimum standards for recruitment,

minimum age of fishers, hours of rest, work agreements, payment of wages, repatriation, food and accommodation, occupational safety and health, social security coverage, labour inspection, complaint mechanisms and other key issues. Ratifying and fully implementing the articles in the Convention would have a major impact on improving working conditions for migrant fishers in the ASEAN region.

The structural factors that drive labour mobility for migrant fishers in ASEAN are not likely to change in the near term. With ageing populations and labour shortages in key destination countries, and unemployment and low wages in countries of origin, the regional disparities in development remain. It is therefore an opportune time for ASEAN Member States to adopt a progressive regional declaration on the protection of migrant fishers—in line with international standards—and take forward its implementation to ensure safe migration for decent work in ASEAN's blue economy.

The Ship to Shore Rights South East Asia Programme is a multi-country, multi-annual initiative of the European Union and the United Nations, implemented by the International Labour Organization in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations Development Programme. More information on Ship to Shore Rights South East Asia can be found at: www.shiptoshorerights.org



Upholding Child Migrants' Rights



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Migration is inevitable in today's world. People migrate for different reasons, perhaps to seek better life opportunities, or to find refuge or a safer place to live. Sometimes, migration is a matter of choice, but at other times, it is a necessity.

Who is a migrant? According to the International Organisation for Migration, "migrant" is an "umbrella term for any person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons" (IOM, 2019).

Technological advancements, increased regional connectivity and integration, ease in transportation, and borderless social networking facilitate migration. But migration is also caused by crises and emergencies, such as natural

and human-induced disasters, violence, conflicts, insecurities, and pandemics.

Migration is an urgent agenda in ASEAN since it is a major hub for migration. ASEAN Member States serve as countries of origin, transit, destination, or both for migrants. Internal and cross-border migrants in the region also appear to outnumber international migrants, according to UNICEF.

In 2019, intra-regional migrants made up over 92 per cent of the migrant population of Southeast Asia, mainly to neighbouring countries, according to ILO. Three

of the top five host countries for migrants are from the ASEAN region, including Thailand (3.6 million), Malaysia (1.5 million) and Singapore (1.2 million) (ILO, 2015).

If migration is governed safely, orderly and humanely, it can benefit society at the local, regional, and international levels. It can boost socio-economic growth and productivity towards achieving sustainable development and improving people's lives. The challenge is to balance the positive and negative impacts of migration to ensure that no one is left behind.

Child migrants' rights

The current state of migration around the world presents enormous challenges that go beyond the issues of migrant workers and refugees, or the adult migrants. Migration equally and urgently concerns children; however, they are commonly invisible in the discussion of issues, analysis and solutions. Their needs and concerns are thus left unheard and unaddressed.

ASEAN is committed to promoting and protecting children's rights, including those in the context of migration, as a matter of policy and moral imperative. Ending all forms of violence against children has been at the centre of ASEAN's priorities. ASEAN aims to create a safe and peaceful society where all children can prosper, thrive, and develop.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) guarantees the rights of children regardless of their migration status. Realising this universal commitment to children, however, is challenged by the growing phenomenon of migration within and beyond the ASEAN region, which displaces more children and exposes them to higher risks and vulnerabilities.

The number of child migrants in ASEAN reached 1.3 million in 2020. In 2021, there were around 630,000 children refugees from ASEAN. Meantime, more than 2.5 million children were internally displaced in 2021 due to natural disasters and conflicts. Parents migrating for work also leave many children at risk (UNICEF, 2021).

According to ILO, the largest number of international child migrants moved to Thailand (508,900), Malaysia (408,200), and Singapore (237,160). While the data show that fewer children migrated to other countries in the ASEAN region, they may have captured only a small proportion of the child (and adult) migrants in the region. This is because the majority of intra-regional migrants are in irregular situations (UNICEF, 2023).

Often, issues that directly affect migrant children are overlooked amid complex and competing

Close to 272 million of the global population in 2019 are international migrants



Two-thirds
were labour
migrant



48 per cent
were female



38 million
were migrant
children

Source: International Organization for Migration. (2019). World migration report 2020. https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr_2020.pdf



8 per cent
of international
migrants originates
from ASEAN,
while



4 per cent
is hosted in the
region

Source: ASEAN Secretariat. (2022). ASEAN Migration Outlook (2022) <<https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ASEAN-Migration-Outlook-Final.pdf>>



One of every eight
international migrants in
ASEAN countries is a child
according to UNICEF

migration concerns and priorities, such as, poverty, migrant labour issues, cross-border law enforcement, trafficking-in-persons, regional connectivity and integration, climate change, and the unprecedented impact of the pandemic.

However, the impacts of migration to children cannot be undermined and treated as mere extension of or subsumed under migrant workers' issues. Children's rights to protection and support must be placed at the centre of all efforts on migration. Countries cannot claim to have safe and orderly migration until they look after the safety and protection of children in migration.

Vulnerabilities and risks faced by child migrants

ASEAN recognises that children in the context of migration are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and certain types of violence, abuse, and exploitation, including bullying, forced and child labour, child early and forced marriage, sexual exploitation, gender-based violence, neglect, and domestic servitude.

Other key child protection risks as consequences of migration include, among others child immigration detention, lack of protection for refugee and asylum-seeking children, unaccompanied and separated children, and children of migrant workers; discrimination in access to basic services (e.g., health, education, protection etc.); exploitation by smugglers and traffickers; the sale of children; child marriage; millions of children left behind in origin countries while their parents migrate for work, facing risks of violence, abuse and exploitation; and lack of data on the situation of children in the context of migration contributing to their vulnerability.

Child migrants are at greater risk of statelessness if they cannot obtain identity documentation, such as a birth certificate, and/or cannot prove their connection to a country through ancestry. Statelessness deprives children of many other rights which may have long-term impacts to their overall well-being.

According to UNHCR, ASEAN is home to over one million stateless persons (who are not considered citizens of any country). In ASEAN,

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) - on the Rights of Children in the Context of Children

Article 1: The States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights of every child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

Article 2: The State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.

the largest number of stateless persons live in Myanmar, where there are 600,000 stateless individuals registered with UNHCR, and in Thailand, where there are over 560,000. UNHCR also estimates that stateless children account for a third of the overall number of stateless persons around the world.

The COVID-19 pandemic also exposed child migrants to vulnerabilities. More than three million migrants were stranded due to travel restrictions, according to IOM. This left the migrants, including their children, dependent on the support of the host country during this time of crisis. However, migrant workers were often excluded from host nation's COVID-19 policy responses and social protection measures.

Strengthening evidence and data on children in the context of migration is a priority in the region. To understand and address the cross-cutting nature and multi-dimensional challenges faced by children in the context of migration, gender equality and social inclusion perspectives are essential.

Children face unique needs and situations depending on the reasons

Who are the Children in the Context of Migration?

Under the Joint General Comment No. 3 (2017) of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and No. 22 (2017) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, "children affected by migration" is a broad umbrella term that encompasses children (those aged under 18 years) who move or have moved within their country of origin or across the border into another State, temporarily or permanently. This includes children who migrate voluntarily or involuntarily (as a result of forced displacement due to natural disasters or conflict); or for economic, social, educational or cultural reasons. It includes children who move individually or to accompany parents who have migrated. It also includes children who remain behind while one or both of their parents migrate ('children remaining behind').

The **ASEAN RPA on CCM** defines "children in the context of migration" as follows:

- i. children moving or who have moved for a variety of reasons, voluntarily or involuntarily, within or between countries with or without their parents or other primary caregivers;
- ii. children who were born to migrant parents in countries of destination, or
- iii. children remaining in the country of origin after one or both parents have migrated.

for migration and their country of destination. Gender inequalities and inclusion issues significantly perpetuate migration and increase the risks and vulnerabilities of women, children and persons with disabilities who experience gender-based violence and lack of protection and support.

ASEAN's efforts to protect and advance the rights of children in the context of migration

ASEAN is stepping up efforts to uphold the rights of children in the face of the growing migration issues in the region.

Following the adoption of the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers in 2017, the ASEAN Leaders adopted the ASEAN Declaration on the Rights of Children in the Context of Migration in 2019 and noted the Regional Plan of Action on Implementing the ASEAN Declaration on the Rights of Children in the Context of Migration (ASEAN RPA on CCM) in 2021.

The five (5) focus areas in the ASEAN RPA on CCM that guide actions for children in the context of migration at the regional and national levels:

Focus Area 1: Policies and procedures are strengthened to enhance the accessibility to child protection systems for all children in the context of migration

Focus Area 2: Policies and procedures are strengthened to enhance accessibility to basic services

Focus Area 3: Increased capacity of relevant actors - law enforcers, social workers, service providers, civil society organizations and others

Focus Area 4: The evidence base on the situation of children in the context of migration is further strengthened

Focus Area 5: Networking and partnerships are strengthened

The ASEAN RPA on CCM enshrined ASEAN's commitment to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of all children, regardless of their migration status, in accordance with the CRC by 2030. It complements the implementation of the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Children (ASEAN RPA on EVAC) and leverages ASEAN's efforts to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in ASEAN with reference to migration while taking into consideration the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact for Refugees.

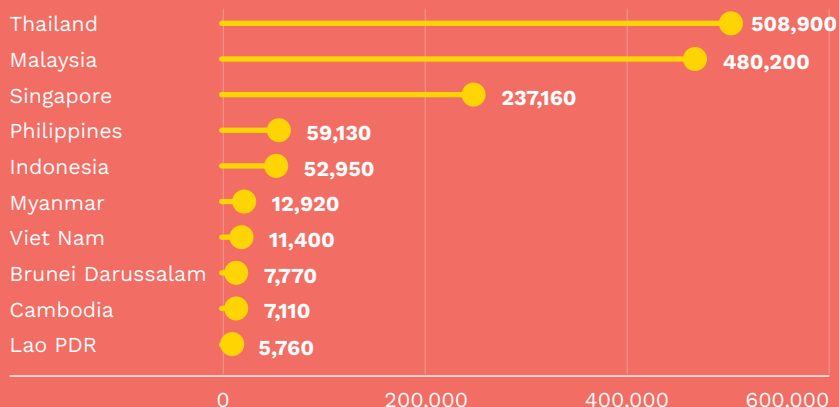
The global community supports an ASEAN-led approach that aims to protect the best interests of the child in all relevant policies and practices related to children in the context of migration.

Grounded on the issues and concerns and the disproportionate vulnerabilities of children in the context of migration, "child-sensitivity" and "gender-responsiveness" are set forth as the core principles guiding ASEAN's collective actions to strengthen national systems to provide for the specific needs of children in the context of migration, including but not limited to child protection, social protection, education, health, psychosocial support, safe environment, and justice.

As such, ASEAN endeavours to enhance the identification, referral and protection of, and assistance to all children in the context of migration, including those who are in situation of trafficking, refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced children and all other children requiring protection and assistance through integrated and coordinated service delivery systems among key stakeholders.

In fostering regional cooperation to address the cross-cutting issues of migration, further inquiry into the intersectionality of migration with a broad range of issues, such as human trafficking, violence against women, online abuse and exploitation, child labour, care work, disability, and climate change, is a priority. The leadership of the ASEAN

International child migrants by country of destination, ASEAN Member States, 2019



Note: According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children affected by migration is a broad umbrella term that encompasses children (those aged under 18 years) who move or have moved within their country of origin or across the border into another State, temporarily or permanently.

Source: UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office. (2023). The situation of children affected by migration in ASEAN Member States. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/eap/media/13461/file/ASEAN%20CABM%20UNICEF%20Migration%20SitAn%20Main%20report%20.pdf>

Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) and the Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development (SOMSWD) will be pivotal in upholding children's rights in the context of migration in close collaboration with the Senior Labour Officials Meeting (SLOM), ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC) and other relevant ASEAN Sectoral Bodies.

Addressing child migration issues in the lens of the children is imperative. The voices of children in situations of migration and their stories of resilience must be heard by the leaders, policy-makers and key stakeholders to inform decisions and actions moving ahead. Organisations of children in the region, like the Children on the Move; Protection on the Move Children and Youth Network in Northern Thailand, deserve an opportunity to participate in the ASEAN's discourse on child migration and to receive support so they can reach out to more children in the context of migration.

Empowering families, including those in the context of migration,

and building their resilience to adapt to different forms of setbacks and challenges facing families is also crucial.

To this end, ASEAN is committed to using a whole-of-ASEAN strategy for a holistic family-centred approach towards strengthening family well-being and development, family resilience and family solidarity to adapt to challenges facing families under the Bandar Seri Begawan Declaration on the Importance of the Family for Community Development and Nation-Building adopted by the ASEAN Leaders in 2021.

All these initiatives are essential to fully realising ASEAN's promise of protecting and promoting the rights of children in ASEAN.

No child deserves to live in uncertainty because of migration status. Children deserve protection and support to access life opportunities and develop their fullest potentials, regardless of their location and legal status.




References may be downloaded from this link: <https://shorturl.at/bhxGR>

Labour Migration Publications


Civil Society Proposal: ASEAN Framework Instrument on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (2009)

This book was launched by the Task Force on ASEAN Migrant Workers as a tool to achieve a comprehensive ASEAN agreement that will protect the rights of migrant workers. The civil society proposal featured in this book was formally proposed to the ASEAN Senior Labour Officials Meeting in Vientiane, the Lao PDR.

 <https://asean.org/book/civil-society-proposal-asean-framework-instrument-on-the-protection-and-promotion-of-the-rights-of-migrant-workers/>

ASEAN Guidelines on Effective Return and Reintegration of Migrant Workers (2021)

In the absence of a comprehensive framework of support services, returning migrant workers may experience a variety of challenges affecting their capacity to reintegrate with their home communities, cope with psychosocial challenges, find sustainable livelihood opportunities, or reintegrate into the labour market. The lack of adequate reintegration policies and options constitutes a loss to migrant workers, their communities and society as a whole. Therefore, this guideline focuses on the main principles, actionable commitments, and good practices related to return and reintegration. This guideline is also available in other ASEAN languages.

 <https://asean.org/book/asean-guidelines-on-effective-return-and-reintegration-of-migrant-workers/>


Migration and Health in ASEAN: Regional Case Studies (2023)

This report aims to examine and explain recent migration trends, flows, and patterns throughout the 10 ASEAN Member States, while taking into consideration recent developments, legislative commitments, efforts and initiatives in the field of migration and health. It details each Member State's overall general country profile, migrant profile, health governance and financing structures, health service delivery mechanism and identifies each Member State's key challenges to implementing migrant health policies and strategies.

 <https://asean.org/book/migration-and-health-in-asean-regional-case-studies/>

Compendium on Migrant Workers' Education and Safe Migration Programmes: A project of the ASEAN committee on the implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (ACMW) (2017)

Providing a comprehensive and accessible documentation on the current situation of migrant workers in ASEAN countries, this publication is a significant contribution towards the protection of the rights of migrant workers in ASEAN. It goes beyond the diagnostic by also assessing what is needed in practice, including legal standards, policies and practices of pre-employment and pre-departure education programmes, onsite and post-arrival programmes, and return and reintegration programmes in both sending and receiving countries within ASEAN and beyond.

 <https://asean.org/book/compendium-on-migrant-workers-education-and-safe-migration-programmes-a-project-of-the-asean-committee-on-the-implementation-of-the-asean-declaration-on-the-protection-and-promotion-of-the-rights-of-migrant-workers/>

Comparative Study on Law and Policies in the Management of Migrant Workers in ASEAN (2021)

The publication offers comprehensive analysis on how ASEAN Member States have dealt with the movement of migrant workers in their labour markets, covering all skill levels and including occupations under the 8 ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs), and providing recommendations as feedback for ASEAN policy-makers and practitioners in improving policies and measures pertaining to the mobility of migrant workers.

 <https://asean.org/book/comparative-study-on-law-and-policies-in-the-management-of-migrant-workers-in-asean/>

ASEAN Migration Outlook (2022)

This outlook provides a situational analysis of the return home of migrant workers because of crisis situations—primarily the COVID-19 pandemic—and the economic and social costs of their return and reintegration. The Outlook aims to inform the implementation of the ASEAN Guidelines on Effective Return and Reintegration of Migrant Workers.


 <https://asean.org/book/asean-migration-outlook/>



Other labour-related publications


Regional Study on Informal Employment Statistics to Support Decent Work Promotion in ASEAN (2019)

The study delves into statistics across ASEAN Member States in order to identify trends and gaps in informal employment. Furthermore, it provides practical recommendations to improve informal employment statistics to support evidence-based policy responses. Through the study, the first-ever ASEAN statistics on informal employment has also been established.

 <https://asean.org/book/regional-study-on-informal-employment-statistics-to-support-decent-work-promotion-in-asean/>


ASEAN Roadmap on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour by 2025 (2020)

The objective of this roadmap is to guide ASEAN to collectively support its AMS over the next five years in working towards the elimination of the worst forms of child labour in the region by building upon achievements and lessons learnt from the implementation of the previous ASEAN Roadmap and similar policy initiatives. This Roadmap will provide a region-wide framework of cooperation that complements the commitments and actions of AMS against child labour at national and global levels through the focus areas described below.

 <https://asean.org/book/asean-roadmap-on-the-elimination-of-the-worst-forms-of-child-labour-by-2025/>


Managing Technology's Implications for Work, Workers, and Employment Relationships in ASEAN (2020)

This study investigates how technology, especially the automation of routine intensive work, the emergence of the knowledge economy, and the evolution of platform work, is affecting employment in the region. How must policies and regulations evolve to accommodate this new reality? This report examines the region's digital transition and the associated transformations underway in the world of work against the backdrop of its economic achievements, demographic change, and existing labour market trends.

 <https://asean.org/book/managing-technologys-implications-for-work-workers-and-employment-relationships-in-asean/>


Implementing the Future ASEAN Agenda for TVET (2020)

This publication showcases models for the participation of business and industry in labour market- oriented TVET in the ASEAN region and aims to support the implementation of the Future Agenda for TVET across the ASEAN region.

 <https://asean.org/book/implementing-the-future-asean-agenda-for-tvet/>

ASEAN Rapid Assessment: The Impact of COVID-19 on Livelihoods Across ASEAN (2020)

The rapid assessment of the socio-economic impacts of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic in the ASEAN region comes at a time when generating data and analysis has become a necessity in determining the most appropriate and targeted measures at mitigating the pandemic's impacts. This report succinctly reviews the responses undertaken by ASEAN Member States thus far in the social welfare, labour, and education sectors. The report also identifies key challenges and scalable approaches and proposes a set of policy recommendations.


 <https://asean.org/book/asean-rapid-assessment-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-livelihoods-across-asean/>

ASEAN Declaration on Human Resources Development for the Changing world of Work and Its Roadmap (2020)

The ASEAN Declaration on Human Resources Development for the Changing World of Work was

adopted by the 36th ASEAN Summit on 26 June 2020. The Declaration calls for the development of a roadmap for its implementation through concrete strategies and actions that will complement the work plans of the ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting (ALMM), ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting (ASED), ASEAN TVET Council (ATC)¹ and other relevant sectoral bodies.

This Roadmap translates the commitments in the ASEAN Declaration on Human Resources Development for the Changing World of Work into concrete actions that contribute to the attainment of the ASEAN Vision 2025 of a people-oriented, people-centred ASEAN Community where people enjoy higher quality of life and the benefits of community building. This Roadmap also supports one of the key purposes of ASEAN, as stipulated in the ASEAN Charter, which is to develop human resources through closer cooperation in education and lifelong learning, and in science, technology, for the empowerment of the people of ASEAN and for the strengthening of the ASEAN Community.

 <https://asean.org/book/asean-declaration-on-human-resources-development-for-the-changing-world-of-work-and-its-roadmap-3/>


Regional Study on Labour Productivity in ASEAN (2021)

This pioneering study provides a comprehensive assessment on labour productivity trends in ASEAN and demonstrates human capital has statistically significant impact on the overall productivity in the world of work.

 <https://asean.org/book/regional-study-on-labour-productivity-in-asean/>


ASEAN Guideline on Gender Mainstreaming into Labour and Employment Policies Towards Decent Work for All (2021)

This guideline elaborates on relevant international standards and frameworks on gender equality and decent work, shares promising practices from within and outside the region, as well as provides checklists on employment promotion, decent working conditions, social protection and international labour migration. These tools are envisioned to enable greater promotion of gender mainstreaming into labour and employment policies in ASEAN.

 <https://asean.org/book/asean-guideline-on-gender-mainstreaming-into-labour-and-employment-policies-towards-decent-work-for-all-2/>


Addressing Unpaid Care Work in ASEAN (2021)

This report describes the state of the unpaid care economy in ASEAN countries. By examining the socioeconomic, political, legislative and institutional conditions in each country of ASEAN, this report highlights examples of promising policy measures undertaken either prior to the COVID-19 pandemic or as emergency measures after its onset to address women's unpaid care and domestic work. The report proposes recommendations to introduce a care-sensitive dimension into national and regional gender policies towards building back better and more equal.

 <https://asean.org/book/addressing-unpaid-care-work-in-asean/>


Human Resources Development Readiness in ASEAN—Regional Report (2021)

This publication was designed to provide a baseline on the status of HRD across ASEAN Member States and identifies areas of improvement against the current progress. In particular, the study explores the HRD strategies, policies and programmes currently employed in Member States in response to future challenges in a changing world of work.

 <https://asean.org/book/regional-study-report-on-human-resources-development-hrd-readiness-in-asean-regional-report/>


Old-Age Income Security in ASEAN Member States—Policy Trends, Challenges, and Opportunities (2021)

The study provides recommendations contributing to a comprehensive approach towards effective pension policies and systems, particularly on the prospects of future social old-age income policies, as one of the most important macroeconomic policy agenda in the region. It covers mechanisms in extending existing and new contributory schemes particularly to workers in informal employment and in new forms of employment brought about by rapidly changing business models and job transformation.

 <https://asean.org/book/old-age-income-security-in-asean-member-states-policy-trends-challenges-and-opportunities/>


Regional Study on Green Jobs Policy Readiness in ASEAN (2021)

This report goes some way to encourage policy makers to work on a common definition, along with knowledge sharing and understanding best practices in promoting green jobs and skills. The report aims to highlight a policy framework for the promotion of green jobs and just transition, then utilizes the framework to assess the policy readiness of ASEAN Member States.

 <https://asean.org/book/regional-study-on-green-jobs-policy-readiness-in-asean/>


Regional Report of ASEAN-ROK Technical Mobility (TEAM) programme—Component 1: Enhancing the Competitiveness of Human Resources through Responsive TVET Curriculum Supported by Involvement of Industries and Labor Market Information Integrating the Case Studies of 10 ASEAN Member States (2022)

The Component 1 of the ASEAN-Republic of Korea (ROK) Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) for ASEAN Mobility (TEAM), titled 'Enhancing the Competitiveness of the ASEAN Human Resources through Responsive Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) curriculum supported by Involvement of Industries of Labor Market' is a joint-endavor of the 10 ASEAN Member States to seek how to enhance the human resources by checking and exploring the TVET curriculum of the ASEAN Member States from the point of the labour markets.

 <https://asean.org/book/regional-report-of-asean-rok-technical-mobility-team-programme-component-1-enhancing-the-competitiveness-of-human-resources-through-responsive-tvet-curriculum-supported-by-involvement-of-indust/>

Research on Economic Justification of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Implementation in the Construction Sector (2023)

This Study on Economic Justification of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Implementation in the Construction Sector is a regional initiative in the Work Plan ASEAN Occupational Safety and Health Network (ASEAN-OSHNET) 2021-2025. It examined the implementation of OSH programmes in the construction sector and its economic gains across eight ASEAN Member States. The analysis showed that investments in occupational safety and/or health programmes in the construction workplace resulted in benefits that, from the economic perspective, are at least twice greater than the investment spent— an affirmation that expenditures for OSH should be seen as an investment and not a cost.

 <https://asean.org/book/research-on-economic-justification-of-occupational-safety-and-health-osh-implementation-in-the-construction-sector/>

SHIFTING CURRENTS

- ASCC Policies and Trends
Strengthening ASEAN Public Health Emergency Measures
- Women in Maritime Transport
- In Promoting a Circular Economy, Why a Gender Perspective is Needed

Photo Credit: © PopTika / Shutterstock

Policies and Trends

ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Policy Brief

The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Policy Brief is a publication of the ASCC Department at the ASEAN Secretariat. It identifies trends and challenges that will impact ASEAN and ASCC sectors and propose policy-relevant solutions and recommendations to uplift the quality of lives of ASEAN people.



ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Policy Brief #1

STRENGTHENING ASEAN PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY MEASURES

by Resilience Development Initiative and Aly Diana

This policy brief discusses the challenges in strengthening ASEAN's public health emergency measures. It highlights the need to invest in diverse surveillance and preparedness systems; align efforts to efficiently use available resources; strengthen capacities of infrastructure—such as vaccine manufacturers and laboratories—and of health workers through training and scholarships and improved healthcare and social protection; and enhance digital transformation in health.

Highlights of the Policy Brief



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The unique interaction among infectious agents and hosts in the environment, coupled with ASEAN's geographical position, affect the development of both health risks and non-health related risks in the region. Health risks such as, microbial adaptation, human susceptibility to infections and health behaviours, along with non-health risks like rapid urbanisation and increased human mobility, can lead to the emergence and re-emergence of infectious diseases. As proven by the COVID-19 pandemic and previous outbreaks, these diseases pose regional and global health threats with far-reaching non-health impacts such as economic instability.

The pandemic has brought to light the vulnerabilities in our regional and global health security. While infectious disease outbreaks are not new to the ASEAN region—the Nipah virus, and the H1N1 virus, dengue and other respiratory and intestinal diseases have been encountered in the region, the COVID-19

pandemic has prompted the need for innovative and advanced ways to detect, mitigate and respond to health risks, especially those that may pose threats globally.

In the *ASCC Policy Brief No. 1 (2023)*, “Strengthening ASEAN Public Health Emergency Measures,” experts argue that implementing strategic actions tailored to address various risks in ASEAN's health security is paramount.

The policy brief highlights that the pandemic has exposed the limited capacities of the existing health infrastructure to prevent, detect, and respond to health emergencies.

Surveillance systems which are crucial to detect the evolution of diseases, monitor trends and evaluate the impacts, tend to be diverse and fragmented. Early warning systems, risk assessment and communication, and information sharing, are crucial to ensure preparedness for public health emergencies (PHEs), but these are managed and operationalised by relevant national agencies of each ASEAN Member State.

Member States have no self-reliance on vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics and this has greatly diminished their capacity to respond swiftly to PHEs. Limitations on manufacturers and resources, and disparities in laboratory and health worker capacities have also contributed to the overburdening of the region's health systems.

The policy brief also highlights that the provision of health insurance and the implementation of different social protection programmes have aided in reducing the burden of PHE among vulnerable populations, and that a lack of safety nets can contribute to the breakdown of health systems. The brief further mentions that financing is a major hurdle to the implementation of universal health care and the provision of various social protection schemes.

Finally, the brief emphasises the role of digital transformation in health. Digital advancements can aid in the improvement of health systems. For example, the ASEAN BioDiaspora Virtual Center (ABVC) aims to

improve the region's capacity to respond to hazards and emerging threats via Big Data predictive analytics and visualisation.

In developing appropriate responses to public health emergencies, the brief flags political, financial, infrastructure-related, behavioural and food-security-related challenges that need to be addressed. The policy brief lays down the following recommendations:

i. *Intelligent Surveillance*

An advanced and integrated regional surveillance system that can combine multiple types of surveillance to predict future threat development is needed. While there has been increasing data sharing among the ASEAN Member States, surveillance systems in general tend to be diverse and fragmented. Approaches or tools such as the Whole Genomic Surveillance (WGS) and Health Impact Assessment (HIA) for climate change are some of the surveillance systems that can supplement regional systems.

ii. *Aligning ASEAN's Initiatives and Programmes*

There is a need to harmonise efforts at the regional level to ensure a unified and streamlined response in

times of PHEs. Therefore, it is important to identify existing regional initiatives such as the ASEAN Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and the ASEAN BioDiaspora, and for a regional body or institution to be able to list, align, and coordinate the regional and national initiatives relating to health emergencies to ensure better-targeted response and use of resources and to avoid redundancy of efforts. The brief highlighted that the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases may be well-placed to fulfil this role.

iii. *Maintaining and increasing commitment to PHE measures even after the COVID-19 Pandemic*

The commitment to long-term PHE measures is essential, and can be done through enhancing self-reliance on vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostic tools; increasing laboratory capacity and strengthening health workers' ability to manage infrastructure through capacity building and training on PHE management; and, developing social protection measures and programmes through expanding community-based health insurance and social assistance

through primary healthcare facilities.

iv. *Building and optimising big data and information-sharing system*

To optimise the benefits of digital transformation and big data analytics, there is a need to advance data-sharing systems. Diverse protocols in data gathering, limited infrastructure to conduct AI analysis at the regional level and gaps in the Member States' capacities can hinder the potential advantages of digital transformation. The brief recommends conducting feasibility studies and landscape analyses to assess the possibility of big data network development at the regional level, and to develop guidelines that will ensure standardisation in data gathering and encoding, and to enhance greater regional cybersecurity measures.

Download the policy brief from:



https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/ASCC_Policy-Brief_Issue-7_Jan2023.pdf

ASEAN Head of Delegations (HODs) in a group photo with IMO Secretary-General



ASEAN MARITIME TRANSPORT WORKING GROUP CELEBRATES WOMEN IN MARITIME

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The second International Day for Women in Maritime was celebrated early at the 44th ASEAN Maritime Transport Working Group Meeting (MTWG) in Da Nang, Viet Nam. The meeting, held on 9-11 May 2023, discussed strategic plans to enhance regional maritime cooperation and catalyse maritime decarbonisation in the ASEAN region. During the meeting, there were also presentations and discussions on measures to improve the diversity and competencies of the workforce in the maritime transport sector.



IMO's International Day for Women in Maritime is observed on 18 May each year to celebrate women in the industry. This event promotes women's recruitment, retention and sustained employment of women to address the gender imbalance in the maritime sector, and highlights IMO's commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 on Gender Equality

The 44th ASEAN MTWG meeting was hosted by the Vietnam Maritime Administration (VINAMARINE), an agency under Vietnam's Ministry of Transport. In attendance were International Maritime Organization (IMO) Secretary-General Kitack Lim; Deputy Minister of Transport for Viet Nam Nguyen Xuan Sang; representatives from the ASEAN Member States; and the ASEAN Secretariat. Also represented were dialogue partners, particularly China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the US, and other ASEAN partner organisations.

During his keynote address at the opening ceremony of the meeting, the IMO Secretary-General Kitack Lim spoke about the second International Day for Women in Maritime. IMO Secretary-General Kitack Lim said: "This is the second

year we are marking 18 May as a key moment in our calendar to celebrate women in the industry and to promote the recruitment, retention and sustained employment of women in the maritime sector." He noted that this year's theme, "Mobilising Networks for Gender Equality," recognises the importance of networking to support the advancement of women in the maritime workforce.

During the celebration, the 44th MTWG Chairman, Hoang Hong Giang, awarded a Certificate of Competency to Viet Nam's first female machine officer, Hua Nguyen Hoai Thuong. She graduated from Ho Chi Minh City University of Transport with a degree in Ship Engine Operations. While it is not uncommon for women to study ship engineering in Vietnam, many prefer to work in offices after graduating. Hua Nguyen Hoai Thuong, however,

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This is the second year we are marking 18 May as a key moment in our calendar to celebrate women in the industry and to promote the recruitment, retention and sustained employment of women in the maritime sector.



Viet Nam's first female machine officer, Ms Hua Nguyen Hoai Thuong

chose a different path. She worked in the engine room of an ocean liner, inspiring other women to chart a similar career path.

According to the IMO WISTA Women in Maritime Survey 2021, women make up less than 2 per cent of workers at sea (mostly in the cruise industry), and 29 per cent across all subsectors of the maritime industry, including, for instance, marketing, recruitment and port operations. Only 20 per cent of the maritime authority workforce in the Member States are women.

Much needs to be done to support women to achieve fair representation in the sector in keeping with 21st-century expectations and to ensure a balanced and diverse workforce that can help the industry move forward. This is particularly important in the context of ASEAN, where countries

like the Philippines, Indonesia, Myanmar, Viet Nam, and Malaysia contribute a significant share of workers to the global seafaring community, and play a pivotal role in ensuring the smooth and safe operations of shipping networks.

In this connection, the IMO is committed to facilitating professional networks to improve gender balance in the shipping world, including through the creation of eight Women in Maritime Associations (WIMAs) in Africa, Arab States, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and the Pacific. These offer mentoring, training, and other opportunities to support women in maritime and cultivate the next generation's interest in the maritime industry.

IMO-funded opportunities at the IMO International Maritime Law Institute and the IMO course on "Women in Port Management," and

the Maritime SheEO Leadership Accelerator Programme that IMO launched in 2022 provide avenues for women in maritime to develop technical expertise and advance their careers.

Recognising the importance of closer cooperation, the 44th MTWG meeting also deliberated the draft Memorandum of Understanding between IMO and ASEAN, which will become the way forward for strengthening knowledge-sharing and building capacity within the maritime workforce in the Southeast Asia region. It is hoped that this stronger cooperation will result in substantive and meaningful joint projects that are mutually beneficial, to catalysing decarbonisation and digitalisation of maritime transport in the region, and also to improve seafarers' welfare, through competency improvements and the sharing of best practices.

WHY PROMOTING A CIRCULAR ECONOMY NEEDS A GENDER PERSPECTIVE



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ASEAN's pioneering efforts in pursuing a circular economy in the region can be a game-changer. A circular economy purports a fundamental shift away from the “take, make, waste” linear economy towards an economic model that promotes the efficient use of materials by design, prolonging the value of resources and regeneration.

The Framework for Circular Economy for the ASEAN Economic Community (CE Framework) created a defined policy space for inclusive and sustainable development in economic integration, providing an opportunity to advocate gender equality and the empowerment of all women in ASEAN in the economic pillar. Locating gender dimensions in the strategic priorities and proposed initiatives for circular economy in ASEAN makes sound business sense and at the same time promotes women's economic empowerment that leads to inclusive economic growth.

The CE Framework recognises that purposive steps must be undertaken to promote circularity in ASEAN's ongoing economic integration. This necessitates exploring how a circular economy can prevent gender disparities from the transition stage, how to account for and address the practical and strategic needs of women, and how to ensure the active inclusion of women in circular-economy-related activities. Such an exploration would help policy-makers ensure that the opportunities presented by the circular economy are equally accessible and beneficial for both women and men.

Women tend to be confined to low-value-added work and the informal sector due to the perceived conventional roles of women in society. In the region, more than two-thirds of workers in the informal sector are women; this number is even higher, at more than 90 per cent, in the agriculture sector (ILOSTAT database). And the rate of informal employment is generally higher for women compared to men except in Viet Nam, Brunei Darussalam, and Malaysia (ASEAN, 2019). In contrast, the (formal) labour force is disproportionately male—women comprise only around 40 per cent, mainly in public administration and social activities, trade and hospitality, and manufacturing (ILOSTAT database). Various studies confirm the same lopsided distribution in the circular economy, where there is a

substantial share of women in waste picking and recycling activities but low representation in industrial eco-design and advanced technology-related professions and in senior management roles (Albadejo, et al., 2022).

Surfacing the gender dimensions of the circular economy entails a closer look at the following domains: i) laws, policies, regulations and institutional practices; ii) cultural norms and beliefs; iii) gender roles, responsibilities and time use; iv) access to and control over assets and resources; and v) patterns of power and decision-making.

The CE Framework outlines specific policy enablers that can accelerate and scale-up circularity in the region, consistent with ASEAN's ongoing gender mainstreaming initiatives. For example, the policy frameworks and institutions that intend to guide ASEAN Member States in pursuing appropriate and inclusive policy interventions to encourage CE in the region can be complemented by the implementation of the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework, among others.

Several ASEAN frameworks complement and add value to the implementation of the Framework for Circular Economy for the ASEAN Economic Community. The ASEAN Declaration on the Gender-Responsive Implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development (2017) mandates the mainstreaming of gender perspectives across the three ASEAN Community pillars. This mandate adds value by applying a gender lens in the analysis of the CE Framework. Similarly, the Action Agenda on Mainstreaming Women Economic Empowerment in ASEAN Economic Community (2017) articulates ASEAN's commitment to adopt concrete and measurable actions to address the barriers that impede women's economic potential, and promote women's participation and skills development in STEM and ICT, among others. Additionally, the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework guides the introduction and



institutionalisation of such gender perspectives in ASEAN's work including the implementation of the CE Framework.

Advocating for the CE Framework carries with it the fundamental need to address unpaid care and domestic work. Promoting a circular economy holds the potential to recognise the value of the reproductive roles that women and girls fulfil. Traditionally, women and girls have been relegated to undertaking reproductive roles and domestic roles in the family and home life while men undertake productive endeavours that are remunerated. As women and girls undertake care work, albeit unpaid, there is an opportunity to promote circularity at the household and community levels. This ranges from making decisions on energy consumption, and resource and waste management, to green approaches to productive ventures.

A cursory look at the priority strategies of the CE Framework reveals opportunities to address gender gaps in several areas. For example, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) are the backbone of ASEAN's interlinked economies, and women are significantly represented in this sector as entrepreneurs and workers, among others. Women would fulfil various roles in the

production and provision of circular products and services (strategic priority 1), as well as participate in the trade of circular goods and services (strategic priority 2).

In terms of partnership and collaboration that promotes a "multi-stakeholder" approach to bridge sustainability-related initiatives under the three ASEAN Community pillars, inclusive approaches can be undertaken by facilitating the active participation of relevant stakeholders, including women's organisations. Also, there is an opportunity to enhance the participation and contribution of women in innovation, digitalisation and green technologies (strategic priority 3). Significantly, the ASEAN Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform has been established as a regional facility to support ASEAN Member States achieve sustainable consumption and production by accelerating a transition to a circular economy. The website can be accessed here: <https://ce.acsdsd.org/about/>

In sum, promoting a circular economy in ASEAN has the potential for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. As the CE Framework usher in new and "green" jobs and phase out other jobs, women need equal opportunities to access such jobs and be protected from any forms of displacement and

workplace discrimination during the transition period.

More broadly, it is imperative to systematically incorporate a gender lens in circular economy design since it requires understanding consumer behaviour and local/traditional sustainable practices, which are domains where women are often the knowledge holders. In particular, investigating "gender roles and behavioural preferences in consumption as well as waste generation and prevention" could lead to addressing gender inequalities "through recognising the value of jobs supporting circular economies" (OECD, 2020).

Lastly, in promoting a gender-responsive circular economy in ASEAN, it is of vital importance to continue amplifying the voices and engaging women in the discourse on the circular economy in ASEAN and increase women's participation and women's role as agents of transformative change in circular economy strategies to eliminate discrimination and advance gender equality.

References may be accessed through this link:



<https://shorturl.at/bhxGR>

CONVERSATIONS

Journeys of Hope

- From Migrant Worker to Entrepreneur
- A Lawyer for Migrants
- No Way Home, Life in a Pandemic
- Forming Lifelong Bonds Away from Home
- One Dream, Separate Lives: How Migrant Families Cope



From Migrant Worker to Entrepreneur

A Success Story



Joanne B. Agbisit

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ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department

Richard Regaspi was a migrant worker in the United Arab Emirates for 13 years before the COVID-19 pandemic hastened his return to the Philippines. It was a tough transition, but the move back allowed Richard and his wife to grow their young business and start a new one.

During Richard's stay in the UAE, he took on many different jobs, first working as a lifeguard at a five-star hotel in Abu Dhabi and ending up as operations manager of a health club in Dubai. These jobs allowed him to comfortably raise a family in the UAE while helping his parents back home.

Richard recalled, "I worked as a lifeguard for two and a half years. As a lifeguard in the Middle East, I worked outdoors in extreme temperatures of 40 C to 50 C. I knew it wasn't going to be a lifetime career, so I thought of ways to advance my career. I trained and improved myself constantly. I accepted all the challenges thrown my way, even if they're outside of my job responsibilities. Nothing was too menial for me.

"It paid off. A supervisor who appreciated my work ethic offered me a job when he moved and became a manager in another hotel. Even though it paid less, I accepted it for the supervisory role. In total, I had five jobs when I was in UAE, moving up the ladder along the way. In my last job, I was operations manager for a health and safety training centre.



Photo Credit: ©Richard Regaspi

"I struggled to adjust to a foreign work environment in my first two years abroad. But I knew that to succeed, I had to work well with people from different backgrounds. Humility, respect and knowing your place are important. It's all about respecting people, no matter the nationality."

The global pandemic shutdown was a fork in the road for Richard. He was faced with a difficult choice of staying in Dubai or going back to the Philippines to reunite with his family.

"My wife and kids were already in the Philippines when the pandemic hit," Richard said. "They returned in 2019 so our kids could go to school there, while I stayed in Dubai. We also decided that my wife would run full-time the business we put up in 2018. It's a training centre called Health and Safety Solution. It's a business we know inside out because of our previous jobs as safety trainers. We used our savings to start the business."

"The idea is to get the kids set up for school and get the business up and running, while I continue working abroad so that we have a stable income to fall back on in case the business did not prosper."

"When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down all businesses in March 2020, I kept my job, but received only a fourth of my salary in the first few months. By June 2020, I stopped getting any salary at all. There was so much uncertainty. I was worried that we might not survive the pandemic and I wanted to be with them (family). That, along with losing my income, made me decide to go home. I packed up and left in October 2020."

At that time, Richard said he still meant to return to the UAE. He planned to support his wife with their new centre and eventually go back when the pandemic is over.

Richard narrated, "It was really a struggle for a while. We had to pay the staff salary, the rent, utilities, and internet every month, but we had no income coming in because of the pandemic. It was fortunate that the Department of Labor and Employment accreditation came through in 2020. We got permission

to conduct online training. It actually benefited us because online courses allowed us to accept clients from outside of Metro Manila and abroad. That is the reason the business survived."

At the height of the pandemic, Richard stumbled on a new business venture. In the UAE, *biryani*, a South Asian rice dish, became his "comfort food." It was a craving he could not satisfy back in the Philippines. None of the *biryani* he tried from different vendors captured the flavours he was looking for, so he learned to make it himself.

"A friend encouraged me to make *biryani* to my taste, so I did. I shared it with friends and they loved it. Soon, I was receiving a lot of orders from friends, their friends, and so on. Since it was still in the middle of the pandemic, I decided to create a facebook page to advertise my business."

"By the third month, I had so many orders, my small kitchen couldn't accommodate my food preparation anymore. I had to buy additional burners, tables. I had to hire a staff just to respond to orders and handle food delivery bookings."

With his online food business doing so well, Richard reconsidered his plans to return to Dubai. Instead of going back, he pitched the idea of opening a restaurant to his wife. His wife was initially resistant, as the training centre was also just in its infancy. But Richard was convinced he could make the restaurant a success. In the end, his family supported his decision.

Richard related, "We went to the banks for a possible loan, but got rejected because we had no credit record, having lived abroad for many years. So aside from the money we had earned from the online food business, we had to dip into our emergency savings to open the restaurant."

"We ended up renting two stalls in the food hub in Quezon City in 2021. At that time, the government had eased the quarantine restrictions and allowed 30 per cent dine-in capacity. Of course, we kept selling online, and we reinvested the earnings from this into the business."

"We expanded our restaurant space in Quezon City, then opened our second branch in 2022. We recouped our investment for the first branch and that's what we used as capital for our second branch."

Richard said he and his wife wanted the restaurant to be a legacy that can be passed on to their children, so they made sure that the quality and taste of the food are first-rate and thought carefully about the branding.

"We started looking into the supply chain stability. In the beginning, we bought spices from Indian stores, but the mark up was so high so we started looking into warehouses, wholesalers, exporters. We asked friends from UAE to bring ingredients that we cannot buy here. We want the taste to be as authentic as possible, and give our clients value for money. Our food may cost more, but the taste and the generous portions are worth it."

"We wanted our brand, the Golden Rice Hyderabad Biryani Restaurant, to make an impact, to make our product different from other sellers. We are the only Indian restaurant that has our own unique packaging for takeout. The service of our staff is also excellent."

"We don't look at the immediate profit. We believe in delivering a quality product and we believe that to be able to gain the market, you should be willing to lose some. We are not looking at it short-term. In the future, we want to open multiple branches."

Richard believes that success comes from continuously improving oneself, pursuing one's passion with integrity, and taking advantage of opportunities when they arise. Still, he said the government should give a leg up to returning migrant workers by helping them access bank loans or funding assistance to translate their talents and skills into viable businesses.

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Defending Migrant Workers' Rights



Ixora Tri Devi

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Forty-nine-year-old Sumitha Shaanthinni Kishna always knew she wanted to become a lawyer. With a natural flair for expressing her thoughts, growing up, she was never afraid to assert her critical thinking.

Sumitha pursued a law degree in the UK before returning home to Malacca, Malaysia where she obtained her bar certification. However, her initial experience as a banking lawyer left her disheartened and disconnected from the law's true purpose - helping people.

"It was very depressing type of work. You make someone bankrupt; you take someone's house away. I thought that this was not what I wanted to do," shared Sumitha.

Her bank lawyering career lasted all of two years. Determined to make a difference, Sumitha joined the Bar Council Secretariat in Malaysia in September 2007. Shortly after, she shifted her focus to migrant and refugee issues.

"I didn't know anything about migration. Zero-knowledge. I used to think that foreign nationals shouldn't be in Malaysia and that they were here to take our jobs. But, after I learned and gained knowledge about migration; about migrants and their families; the struggle they were going through; and their contribution to their society and ours, my perception changed," Sumitha conveyed.

After a decade of working with the Bar Council, Sumitha felt compelled to create a more significant impact and established her organisation, Our Journey, in 2018.





Sumitha and Our Journey organised various events to support migrant workers in Malaysia, from orientation seminars to COVID-19 vaccination drives



"I have learned that very few lawyers were doing migration law because there is no money. The migrants are poor. You have to do it pro bono. I had always struggled to get lawyers to do the cases. Finally, I said this is nonsense! I am a lawyer; why don't I just get out and do the cases myself? That is when I left the Bar Council Secretariat in January 2018, reclaimed my practising certificate, and embarked on this path of helping migrants."

With limited initial funding, she used her savings to set up an office and handle various migrant cases. Gradually, donors recognised her efforts, enabling her to expand the reach of Our Journey and provide crucial support to migrants and refugees. "I have a very strong principle: no fees charged for the migrants. My work is entirely funded by donors. I apply for grants to carry out my work, but I never take a single cent from migrants."

"We also provided humanitarian aid for migrants during the pandemic until early this year. We had a food program to help migrants who have lost their jobs, who couldn't pay their rent, children's vaccination, and more," she added.

As part of her ongoing commitment to migrants, in 2019, Sumitha introduced the Just Good Work app, a revolutionary tool aimed at addressing migrants' needs. "Just Good Work came through Ethical Trading Initiative, an NGO based in the UK that wanted to highlight a technology app," she said.

The app was developed based on an initial interview with migrants

working in the rubber industry. Just Good Work app offers features such as general inquiries about wages, working hours, accommodations, and a complaint system for reporting labour violations. The app, which is available in nine languages, also includes audio options to cater to illiterate migrants, ensuring that information reaches all those in need.

"There is also a hotline in the app where users can send us an SMS or a voice message. Not only can they use the app, but they can also use our numbers and send us the inquiry. We allow that also because some migrants do not know how to type," she explained.

Sumitha's work focuses on providing legal assistance and finding amicable solutions for migrants and employers. By emphasising dialogue and negotiation, she aims to address the underlying causes of work conflicts.

"My primary beneficiaries are undocumented migrant workers. Undocumented migrant workers' cases are not entertained unless it is a trafficking case," she revealed.

"This comes down to civil society like myself. Most of the time, the migrant workers would ask us to negotiate on their behalf rather than filing cases. Even though the worker has suffered some violence with the law, the employer has also violated the law by hiring an undocumented person. You can use that against the employer," Sumitha assessed.

As the chair of the Migrant Forum in Asia, one of the largest networks of civil society, trade unions and

individuals working on migrant issues in Asia and the Middle East, Sumitha has a strong message for sending and destination countries. She calls for unity among sending countries to advocate for better treatment of their citizens in destination countries while emphasising the responsibility of destination countries to respect and protect migrants within their borders, regardless of their documentation status.

"Sending countries should unite in their voice. Give a strong message to the country of destination in the region that you must treat our citizens much better than you are treating them now. Meanwhile, the country of destination needs to respect the migrants coming into their countries.

"Once migrant workers enter our border, we are responsible for their welfare. We cannot say just because they are foreigners, it is not our problem. If we allow them into our borders, then it is our responsibility, even if they are undocumented."

Looking ahead, Sumitha hopes to see an increased role for the ASEAN Secretariat in addressing labour and migration issues. She believes that greater involvement and guidance from the Secretariat could lead to more informed decision-making and better outcomes for all stakeholders involved.

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No Way Home

Life in a Pandemic



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Warni Ibrahim vividly recalls the tumultuous period of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the past decade, 39-year-old Warni has worked as a migrant domestic worker. She first worked as a nanny before transitioning to her current role as a live-in caregiver for an older person at the request of her new employer.

During the peak of the pandemic, Warni found herself confined to her employer's house, isolated from the outside world. However, her affiliation with a migrant worker organisation, allowed her to stay informed and connected, despite the stringent lockdown measures.

With a deep sense of solidarity, Warni witnessed the plight of her fellow migrant workers, stranded and abandoned by their employers upon testing positive for COVID-19. These migrant domestic workers could not go back home. There were no flights scheduled; countries barred their border. Their only option was to stay in a foreign country, feeling unwanted.

In response, Warni and her organisation took action, utilising social media platforms to provide guidance on filing reports and securing accommodation in shelters run by the organisation and a local partner.

“We informed them about the procedures for filing a report and guided them on securing accommodation in our organisation’s shelters,” she explained.

During the peak of the Omicron variant cases in 2021, Warni and her friends also distributed care packages containing medicines, vitamins, antigen tests, masks, and staple food to approximately 700 migrants who tested positive for COVID-19 and self-isolated at their employer’s house.

“These migrant workers could not leave their rooms, and their employers didn’t provide them with food allowances. So, our organisation reached out to them. We even delivered hygiene care items like menstrual pads and underwear because some employers prohibited them from using the bathroom,” Warni said.

Warni recalled that most workers who recovered from COVID-19 and completed their quarantine in shelters were allowed to resume working with their former employers. According to Warni, the organisations encouraged these workers to assert their rights.

“We ensured they were aware of the regulations, employers should never terminate their employees when unwell.”

Indeed, migrant workers experienced significant discrimination during that extraordinary period.

“People always targeted migrant domestic workers, viewing us as unsanitary. They mistakenly believed that our close-knit social circles made us carriers of the virus. Yet, at the same time, we were at the forefront, diligently safeguarding our employers’ homes. We were exposed to greater amounts of harmful chemicals while cleaning their houses,” Warni said.

“Many employers were also working from home, adding a more emotional toll on migrant domestic workers. For example, previously, they only needed to cook once a day for dinner, but when their employers were working from home, they needed to cook three meals a day, do more dishes, do more



Warni Ibrahim is looking forward to visiting her family after four years apart

cleaning, and not rest. We did a lot of extra work; still, people pointed their fingers at us. It was truthfully hurtful,” she added.

Conflict and stress also came from home. As a single mother of two, Warni needed to send more money home to help the family she left behind to survive. Her parents used to sell *keripik*, crackers; however, the lockdown made it hard for them to sustain their business.

Warni’s children, a 17-year-old daughter, and an 8-year-old son, needed money to purchase a new cell phone and mobile data because they had to attend school from home. Warni’s family also required masks, vitamins, and other necessities during those hard times.

“We needed to send more money home. All this happened while there was no pay raise. For three years, we didn’t receive any raise. And once they gave it last year in 2022, they only increased our pay by less than 13 US dollars, which was insufficient.”

Warni believes the role of governments is to protect its citizens, provide shelter to those who have been kicked out from their employers’ houses, give financial aid, masks and vitamins, and deliver urgent information. “Most of the time, our fellow migrant workers get their news updates more quickly from social media,” she added.

Starting eight months ago, Warni’s employer allowed her one day off per month. And since the World Health Organisation declared the COVID-19 pandemic no longer a public health emergency on 5 May 2023, Warni is excited to go home again to Grobogan, Central Java, where her parents and children have been patiently waiting for four years.

“I can’t wait to hug my children, my parents. I want to say how much I am grateful that they have endured the previous difficulties without me. I am thankful that they always support me. And then, of course, I want to devour my mother’s home-cooked meals,” she expressed longingly.

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ASEAN Leaders adopted the Declaration on the Protection of Migrant Workers and Family Members in Crisis Situations at the 42nd ASEAN Summit on 10 May 2023. The declaration addresses the concerns and challenges faced by migrant workers during the pandemic. To read in full, access the following link:



https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/09-ASEAN-Declaration-on-Protection-of-Migrant-Workers-and-Family-Members-in-Crisis-Situations_adopted.pdf

A man in a white shirt and green backpack is seen from the side, holding a white stuffed animal. He is in an airport setting with other people and screens in the background.

One Dream, Separate Lives How Migrant Families Cope



Mary Kathleen Quiano-Castro
Editor-in-Chief, The ASEAN

In the Philippines, there are almost 1.8 million registered migrant workers, more commonly called OFWs or Overseas Filipino Workers. The country is one of the world's largest sources of migrant labour. At its international airports, scenes of tearful goodbyes are often seen - children crying out for their fathers or mothers, parents seeing off their adult children - as loved ones leave for jobs overseas. It may be years until they get reunited. For many, the separation is a difficult choice but a pragmatic one. Two migrant families share their stories with *The ASEAN*.

Romeo and Mina Consignado

Mina and Romeo Consignado, Jr., have been married for 13 years and have a 10-year-old daughter, Zoie Cassidy Jace. Rome has been working as an aviation logistics technician in Abu Dhabi, UAE for the past eight years.

In 2017, they posted a video of Zoie tearfully saying goodbye to Romeo at the airport. “Zoie’s video sending her Dad to the airport broke millions of hearts online,” shares Mina. “It shows how hurtful it is to be separated from your father. She had lots of questions in her mind but I made sure to answer them all. I explained to her that Dad needs to be away for work for him to provide all our needs, for us to send her to a good school, to have food on our plates, to buy all the things we need, and to prepare for our future.”

“Our main reason for him to work overseas was the good compensation and career growth that the company is offering, aside from the benefits they provide. Before, we were both working in the Philippines, we struggled to provide for our daughter, if we want to give her a comfortable life we must earn more, for us to send her to a good school. He was offered five times his salary here in the Philippines, so he decided to accept the offer, keeping in mind that soon we will be financially stable.

“When he started working abroad there was a lot of change when it comes to our finances, we were able to pay off our debts and somehow have our savings. We were also able to travel and buy things we couldn’t afford before. Of course, we can say that we only spend on things that are important. Even when we are apart, we make sure that the ties and love we have are much stronger. We value every moment that we are together.

“The hardest thing about being apart from him was when anyone of us got sick. Just last 22 May 2023, my husband suffered a heart attack. The feeling of I can’t do anything for my husband in that situation since he is far away and all I can do is just pray. But god is all in control. He saved my husband’s life and now he is still recovering. As much as I wanted to be there and take care of him I can’t go there as easy as 1-2-3.”

Mina had to quit her job and take solo responsibility for their daughter’s care.

“Raising Zoie alone is not easy especially when she starts asking why her Dad is working so far away. Seeing her classmates’ daddies in all their school events and activities saddens her, but I make sure that even if her Dad is away we are here together with her grandparents, uncles, and aunts supporting her,

too. Videocalls are very important for us. It is the only way to somewhat ease our longing for each other.”

Romeo used to go home to his family twice or thrice a year, but they have been apart for most of the pandemic. Mina says her husband was fortunate to have kept his job, despite the economic downturn that followed the pandemic. He did get a pay cut as his company had to downsize and cut Romeo’s working hours.

“During the pandemic, those with family members working abroad were less of a priority. We were not included in the financial help from the government. We hope next time we can be considered for assistance too, since all of us were affected. We hope the government can extend help like for hospitalisation and scholarships for the children of the OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers).

“In my point of view, if our country can give the same opportunities like the one he is having right now, I might as well ask him to stay here. But now the prices of commodities are getting higher together with all the utility bills. The salary they offer to a regular worker here is just not enough to sustain a living. I can say that for migrant workers, separation is an acceptable reality for families now.”



Rodrigo and Ma. Sheena Blanca

For married couple Rodrigo and Ma. Sheena Blanca, working overseas and living separately have always been part of their plan. They dated in high school and after graduation, Rodrigo decided to work as a seaman.

“He went abroad at the age of 19 as part of their on-the-job training programme. We were just boyfriend-girlfriend during that time. He set his mind and heart in this profession as he wanted to have a comfortable life in the future”, shares Sheena.

Sheena became a registered nurse and worked overseas too, until their son Gabriel Zale was born four years ago.

“When we got married things changed, I got pregnant immediately after our wedding. I had to give up my career and stayed here in the Philippines as my pregnancy journey didn’t go smoothly. His contract changed too, and he later worked 8-10 months, with the rest of the year off.”

Now, in their early 30s, the couple has spent more time apart than

together. Rodrigo has moved up to be a marine 2nd engineer for cargo/bulk carriers.

“The hardest part of being apart from my husband is his safety. Whenever he goes onboard, I wonder if he will come back alive. Their work is very risky and sometimes there are incidents while he is onboard, aside from the possibility of pirate attacks.

“My son is very close to my husband. He is the one who suffers a lot whenever his father needs to go aboard a vessel. There are nights when he wakes up crying, looking for his dad. Whenever he sees another man who looks like his dad, he would also run and call him, ‘papa’ ‘papa’. He would sniff and smell his father’s clothes. I just explain to him that papa needs to work away from us, so we can have a comfortable life. That his papa will come back to us after his contract ends.”

“The distance just makes us stronger and yearning for each other. I would love to have my husband work here in our country,

but working abroad is a situation that we have accepted in our relationship, since 17 years ago. My husband is very dedicated to his profession. He is not just working for the money; he loves his profession.”

Rodrigo was fortunate to keep getting work contracts during the pandemic. It was sometimes a challenge for ship crews to rotate in and out of jobs, but the Blancas were grateful for the support they received from the government.

“Our government assistance on seafarers during the pandemic is excellent for us based on our experience. I would suggest them to offer seminars on financial literacy. This will help us on how to allocate and grow our hard-earned money, so when another pandemic hits us again, we know how to survive independently, and not rely only on our government.”

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Not Just a Place of Work **Migrant workers form lifelong bonds away from home**



Ixora Tri Devi

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There are about 260,000 migrant domestic workers in Singapore, many of them are from neighbouring countries like the Philippines and Indonesia. Finding heartwarming stories about employers and workers in a sea of migrant workers may seem like digging for precious gems. However, in today's digital age, the power of social media has made it easier to discover such stories.

These tales shed light on the profound and life-long connections formed between employers and their domestic workers. Stories shared on social media can show how compassion, respect, and open communication nurture these bonds and even shape attitudes towards migrant workers.

The ASEAN delves into the extraordinary relationships between Kelly Chua and Lolita Tabague, and Kimberlee Ang and Nurwati.

Kelly Chua and Lolita Tabaque

An unexpected reunion: Kelly Chua (right) overwhelmed with joy as Lolita Tabaque surprises her at her wedding

Seventy-three-year-old Lolita Tabaque had been working for a year in Chua's residence when Kelly was born. Growing up, Kelly found great joy in engaging in meaningful conversations at bedtime with Lolita, whom she affectionately called Yaya (a Filipino term meaning nursemaid or nanny).

The 30-year-old entrepreneur recalled how she could talk to her Yaya about anything and everything, knowing she would always listen and provide guidance. Yaya became a pillar of strength, offering comfort and support during the highs and lows of Kelly's life.

"I shared a room with Yaya all my life. She'd be one of the firsts to comfort me when I'm feeling down and to celebrate my milestones and achievements at school and work," Kelly recalled.

Lolita Tabaque worked with Kelly Chua's family for 27 years.

Kelly fondly remembers the times they spent together, running on the playground, taking walks in the park, and learning invaluable lessons about cooking. These experiences created a tapestry of shared memories that further strengthened their connection.

Yaya continued to work for 27 years with the Chuas, leaving behind her own family in Antique. Lolita returned home to the Philippines in 2018.

In April 2022, Kelly invited Yaya to her wedding, but Lolita initially declined due to passport renewal issues. But Kelly's brother orchestrated a surprise, flying Yaya to Singapore so she could be present for another milestone in Kelly's life.

When Kelly saw Yaya at her wedding, she was overwhelmed with joy and gratitude, cherishing the lifelong memories they had created together.

"Having watched me grow up, Yaya is like a second mother to me, and it'd mean the world to me for her to attend my wedding. Seeing her at my wedding was totally unexpected, and I was very surprised and happy to see her after three years. I had plans to visit her in the Philippines after she went back in 2018,

but I couldn't do so due to covid - I really missed her," Kelly confessed.

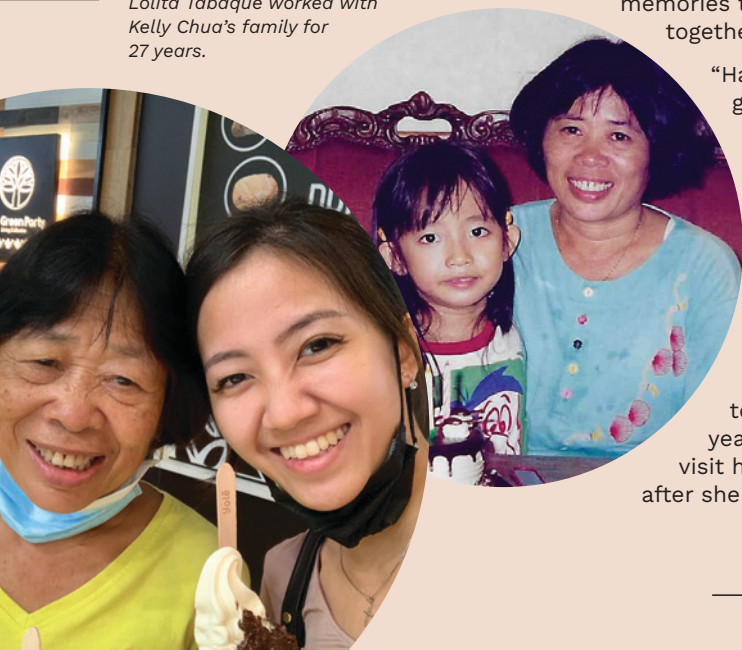
Kelly recognises that not all domestic helpers are fortunate enough to experience such a deep and meaningful connection with their employers. While many employers in Singapore do foster positive relationships with their domestic helpers, there are instances where strict rules and regulations hinder the development of genuine connections.

"I believe more can be done in our society to allow domestic helpers to enjoy a healthier and happier work environment in Singapore. After all, it isn't easy for them to leave their family behind in their hometown to take care of our family right here in Singapore. Everyone longs to feel at home, to feel respected and to feel like they belong," Kelly argued.

After their story went viral, Kelly received heartwarming messages from other employers who also considered their domestic workers as family.

"I am extremely blessed that our family crossed paths with Yaya, who has dedicated 27 years of her life to loving and caring for our family. No amount of words can express how grateful I am for all that she has done for us. Having the opportunity to share our story and inspire many domestic helpers around the world has been our greatest honour. This will forever remain a beautiful memory for us to look back on many years from now," she concluded.

Photo Credit: ©Kelly Chua



Kimberlee Ang and Nurwati

Honoring Passion: Kimberlee Ang (left) surprises Nurwati with BTS concert ticket

Thirty-year-old Nurwati, also known as Nur, has been working for Kimberlee Ang's family for about seven years. During those years, Nur made it obvious that she was a huge fan of a Korean boyband, BTS. When one of the BTS members scheduled to go on tour in Singapore, Kimberlee and her siblings made a pact to gift Nur a concert ticket.

Nurwati had expressed her desire to attend a BTS concert long before Kimberlee Ang and her sibling decided to make her dream come true.

So when we learnt that BTS member and rapper Suga's concert was happening, my siblings and I told her we would get her a ticket. As much as she is hopeful, she told us it will be extremely tough. Initially, she signed up for the Army presale, but when she saw the price later, she told me not to purchase the ticket as it was too costly. I just told her we would see how it goes, but my siblings and I had already decided to gift her an experience she longed for," Kimberlee recalled.

The 40-year-old businesswoman had no idea how intense the purchasing process would be. She was in line with thousands of people, trying to get their hand in the coveted ticket. Shaking and drenched in sweat, she couldn't believe it when she finally snagged a ticket.

"Until today, we were still laughing about how stressful this was. We are really lucky to be able to purchase the ticket, and we hope she has a great time partying at the concert with fellow BTS army," Kimberlee added.

The now-viral video captured the heartwarming moment they handed Nur her ticket. Kimberlee jokingly

suggested posting the video on social media to share a laugh with Nur. However, to their surprise, the video gained immense popularity overnight.

"I was joking with Nur that I'll post in TikTok and tag her. We were laughing at the idea because it was really just for fun and not as if we had a lot of followers, to begin with. We were still laughing it off, saying, 'It's okay, no one will see' until the next morning. I literally had the shock of my life," she conveyed.

Kimberlee chose the concert ticket as a gift to honour Nur's passion and interests. While she and her family do not share the same enthusiasm for K-pop, they respect Nur's love for BTS. The mother of two believes that the gift of this experience holds a special place in Nur's heart, and the viral response to the video supports this sentiment.

When asked about the employer-migrant worker relationship in Singapore, Kimberlee acknowledges the issue's complexity. She highlights the need for understanding both sides of the story before passing judgment.

"Every employer-migrant worker's relationship is like a coin; there are always two sides to the story, and without walking in their shoes, we cannot relate to the dilemmas both parties face. Too many times, when we read about the toxic relationship between the employer and migrant workers, we are quick to pass judgement without knowing the back story. Regardless, I believe that there

are great employer-migrant worker relationships around; just that we don't hear about them as often."

Kimberlee believes that open communication plays a vital role in fostering enduring relationships. Based on her experience, employers and domestic workers could avoid unnecessary misunderstandings and prevent emotional discord by encouraging honest and transparent dialogue.

"It is natural that one has expectations on the service we engage in while another has expectations on how they expect to be treated. At the end of the day, we are all human. We have to be mindful of our words and act towards each other," she assessed.

The views and opinions expressed in the text belong solely to the interviewee and do not reflect the official policy or position of ASEAN.

Photo Credit: ©Kimberlee Ang

The family joyfully celebrates the birthday of Nurwati and Kimberlee's eldest son in 2023

SNAPSHOTS

- Srun Rida, Cambodian Painter
ASEAN Artists Residency Programme
- International Day of Yoga
“One Earth, One Family, One Future”

Photo Credit: © ASEAN Secretariat



ASEAN Artists Residency Programme 2023

Image on Blue: Srun Rida's Artwork Calls for Environmental Action



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The ASEAN Artists Residency Programme (AARP) is a platform for young ASEAN artists to showcase their talents. For its fifth rendition, 31-year-old Cambodian Srun Rida was chosen as the artist for the month-long-residency programme, from 23rd May to 20th June 2023.



From Cambodian temples to global galleries

Srun Rida's talents for drawing showed at an early age during his school years. Even as an elementary school student, he began receiving commissions for his artwork from his peers and teachers. Teachers would ask him to create drawings of flowers and animals for class decoration, while his fellow students would commission him to complete their drawing assignments.

Growing up in Vrey Peng, Cambodia, Rida was surrounded by art. Whenever his parents, who worked as local farmers, took him to pray, he would be greeted by vibrant murals adorning the pagodas' walls depicting stories of Buddha. During one of these visits, he met a painter who inspired him to follow in their footsteps.

"At that time, I didn't want to be an artist. I just wanted to be a painter who could paint on the wall, on

paper, sell, and earn a lot of money," he confessed.

Aspiring for commercial success, Rida pursued a bachelor's degree in fine arts from Phnom Penh Royal University of Fine Arts. However, he was taken aback when he realised that going to art school included not only painting and technique but also learning about art philosophy, history, and theory.

Rida considered giving up because he believed the courses couldn't provide him with what he sought. Fortunately, he encountered professors who helped shift his perspective.

"As you build your portfolio as an artist, you stop thinking solely about money. When you only focus on money, you can't be an artist. I have met many people, different types of artists like dancers and musicians, and I realised they had the same reason for pursuing their passion. That became my reason too."

And so, Rida's journey as an artist began. His artworks have now

been exhibited in Cambodia and various parts of the world, including Thailand, Viet Nam, China, Japan, South Korea, and France.

AARP: Opening doors for young creatives

Five years after graduating, Rida proudly identifies as a full-time artist, part-time teacher, and employee. Alongside his work as an artist, he serves as an assistant professor at his alma mater and a part-time illustrator in a private company.

Despite his demanding schedule, he eagerly applied to the ASEAN Artist Residency Programme 2023. He was pleasantly surprised when he came across the open call on ASEAN's social media and website.

"For artists, finding opportunities to go beyond their countries is challenging. In Cambodia, usually, opportunities like this only come when you have a connection with

“

I loved every part of my residency. The program organisers are well-experienced. Imagine having more programmes like this, where not just one but probably five ASEAN countries participate simultaneously.



Srur Rida and a participant of woodcut printing workshop at the Galeri Nasional in Jakarta, Indonesia (8/6/2023)



From left to right, C asean Deputy Managing Director Sutthipun Nuijaya; ASEAN Secretary-General Dr. Kao Kim Hourn; Srur Rida; C asean Vice Chairman Pisanu Suvanajat; and Ambassador of Thailand to ASEAN Urawadee Sriphiromya at the 5th AARP Artwork Handover Ceremony (19/6/2023)

galleries or foundations. So, the opportunity isn't open to the public," Rida explained.

He also highlighted how the AARP opens doors for young artists in the region, stating, "Residency programs rarely cater to young artists like me. Usually, they look for experts or already famous artists."

Rida was ecstatic when he was chosen as the resident artist for AARP 2023. In addition to working on his project during the programme, he visited galleries, conducted workshops, and had an audience with ASEAN Secretary-General, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn.

"I loved every part of my residency. The program organisers are well-experienced. Imagine having more programmes like this, where not just one but probably five ASEAN countries participate simultaneously. Artists truly need these opportunities to hone their skills. Not only artists, but everyone practising arts," he argued.

A call for action against ocean pollution

For his project with AARP, Rida took inspiration from current issues surrounding him. With "Image on Blue," Rida aims to ignite discussions about the impact of ocean pollution.

"As we live today, we see the issue around us in the news, social media. People are talking about what they care about. I began to think that my artwork should be inspired by these concerns. Our activities, pollution, plastics, and climate change affect the ocean. It (the ocean) is a big part of us. They give life to us. If we do not take care of it, it will be dangerous for us."

Further, for the AARP project, the contemporary artist experimented with mixed media techniques that combined monotype print and acrylic painting.

"This is a new technique for me. I might create more pieces using this technique in the future. I usually use a machine press, and I used to employ sharper colours. So the colour and texture are different than what I have done."

For Rida now, being an artist is not only about creating artwork to earn money but also a journey of self-discovery. He wants to discover his own style so that people looking at his works could easily identify him.

"There is nothing new in arts, but I'm confident that I can make my own style... And one day, I hope that my artwork can be displayed in Pompidou Centre in France."

Finally, Rida hopes to encourage aspiring artists from the region to remain determined, practice diligently, and pursue their passions. "If you want to be an artist, you must nurture your passion," he advised.

"Image on Blue," is now the newest addition to the ASEAN Gallery's collection in Jakarta.



Yoga for Harmony & Peace

CELEBRATION OF

International



Photo Credit: Indian Mission to ASEAN

International Day of Yoga

at the ASEAN Secretariat

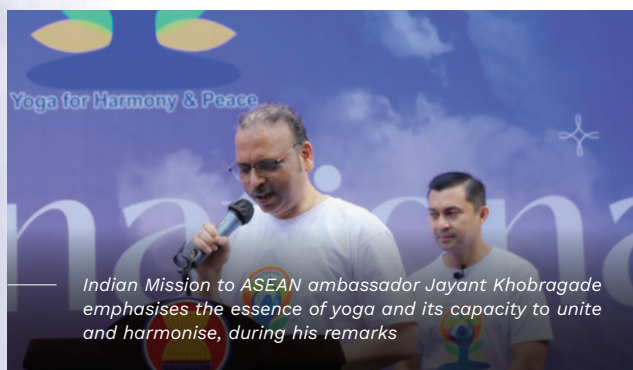


Ixora Tri Devi

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International Day of Yoga has been celebrated on 21 June since 2015. It is observed globally to promote Yoga as a way to find physical, mental, and spiritual harmony in our fast-paced modern existence.



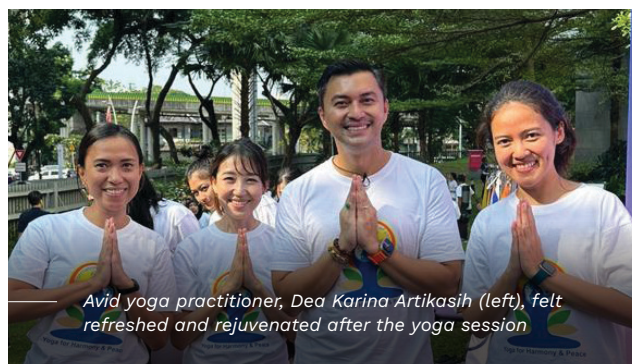
Indian Mission to ASEAN ambassador Jayant Khobragade emphasises the essence of yoga and its capacity to unite and harmonise, during his remarks



Irene Vivi Sidabutar (left), shares the transformative benefits of yoga with her enthusiastic colleagues at the ASEAN Secretariat



The ASEAN Secretariat staff and diplomatic community in Jakarta display their vibrant enthusiasm for yoga



Avid yoga practitioner, Dea Karina Artikasih (left), felt refreshed and rejuvenated after the yoga session

Photo Credit: ©Dea Karina Artikasih, Irene Vivi Sidabutar

For the first time, an International Day of Yoga celebration was held at the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta. The Indian Permanent Mission to ASEAN organised the event to promote yoga and its numerous health benefits for the body and the mind. Ambassadors and their representatives, Head of Organizations, and staff from the ASEAN Secretariat were invited to the event.

Under the shade of leafy trees, in the Secretariat's lush backyard, 80 participants gathered to begin their day slowly and peacefully. Leading the session was Anjasmara Prasetya, a famous Indonesian actor who has transitioned into an experienced yoga instructor. Both yoga beginners and enthusiasts dedicated themselves to a morning of mindful breathing, purposeful movements, and awakening muscles that often remain dormant.

This year's celebration highlighted the theme "Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam" a Sanskrit phrase, which translates to "One Earth, One Family, One Future." During his remarks, Ambassador Jayant Khobragade of India to ASEAN delved into the true

essence of yoga, highlighting its power to unify and harmonise.

"(Yoga promotes) unity between body and mind, between body and nature. We are also uniting ourselves with the past and cultivating forward," he expressed.

One of the participants, Irene Vivi Sidabutar, expressed her enthusiasm for the yoga session before starting her office hours. Although she had only been practising yoga for less than a month, Vivi has already experienced its transformative benefits. She was thrilled to see the interest of other participants, many of whom were her colleagues at the ASEAN Secretariat.

"The event was incredibly enjoyable. I was pleasantly surprised by the large number of people who joined. Considering that yoga has scientifically proven benefits for mental health and can help reduce work-related stress, I truly hope that we can have more yoga sessions at the ASEAN Secretariat. This way, all the staff can effectively manage their stress and emotions," Vivi expressed.

Similar to Vivi, Dea Karina Artikasih, an avid yoga practitioner,

was thrilled to learn about the celebration of International Day of Yoga at the ASEAN Secretariat organised by the Indian Mission to ASEAN.

"It's not every day you get to do yoga in the back garden of your office, together with people you would normally see only in meetings, and led by your high school celebrity crush. It is an unforgettable experience! Not to mention the tasty Indian cuisine they served afterwards. I left feeling refreshed and rejuvenated," she conveyed.

In a post-event interview with The ASEAN, yoga instructor Anjasmara expressed his heartfelt joy at witnessing an increasing number of individuals reaping the rewards of yoga. Actively involved with the International Day of Yoga event since 2015, he has observed a growing enthusiasm among participants.

"I hope that the celebration of International Day of Yoga will inspire countless more individuals to embrace yoga and harness its tremendous benefits, leading to a healthier population that can manage stress better and improve their quality of life," Anjasmara shared.

Bridges

EARLY HUMANS

in Southeast Asia



Joanne B. Agbisit

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Fossil discoveries in Indonesia, the Philippines, and just recently, the Lao PDR are altering our understanding of human evolutionary history. They suggest that diverse groups of ancient or primitive hominins reached and inhabited Southeast Asia much earlier than thought and coexisted with modern humans before they went extinct. It raises questions about the origins, migrations, and interactions between these groups.

Homo floresiensis

Between 2003 and 2004, archaeologists uncovered the bones of individuals belonging to a new hominin species at Liang Bua cave on the island of Flores, Indonesia. The species, named *homo floresiensis*, was discovered by a joint team of Indonesian and Australian researchers led by M.J. Morwood of the University of New England.

The archaeologists found the *homo floresiensis* anatomically different from other known species. Based on the fossil remains, they had short stature, standing at less than 4 feet tall; a small braincase, about a third

of the size of modern humans; thick and protruding eyebrow ridges; no chin; tiny collarbone; primitive wrist structure; and large and flat feet.

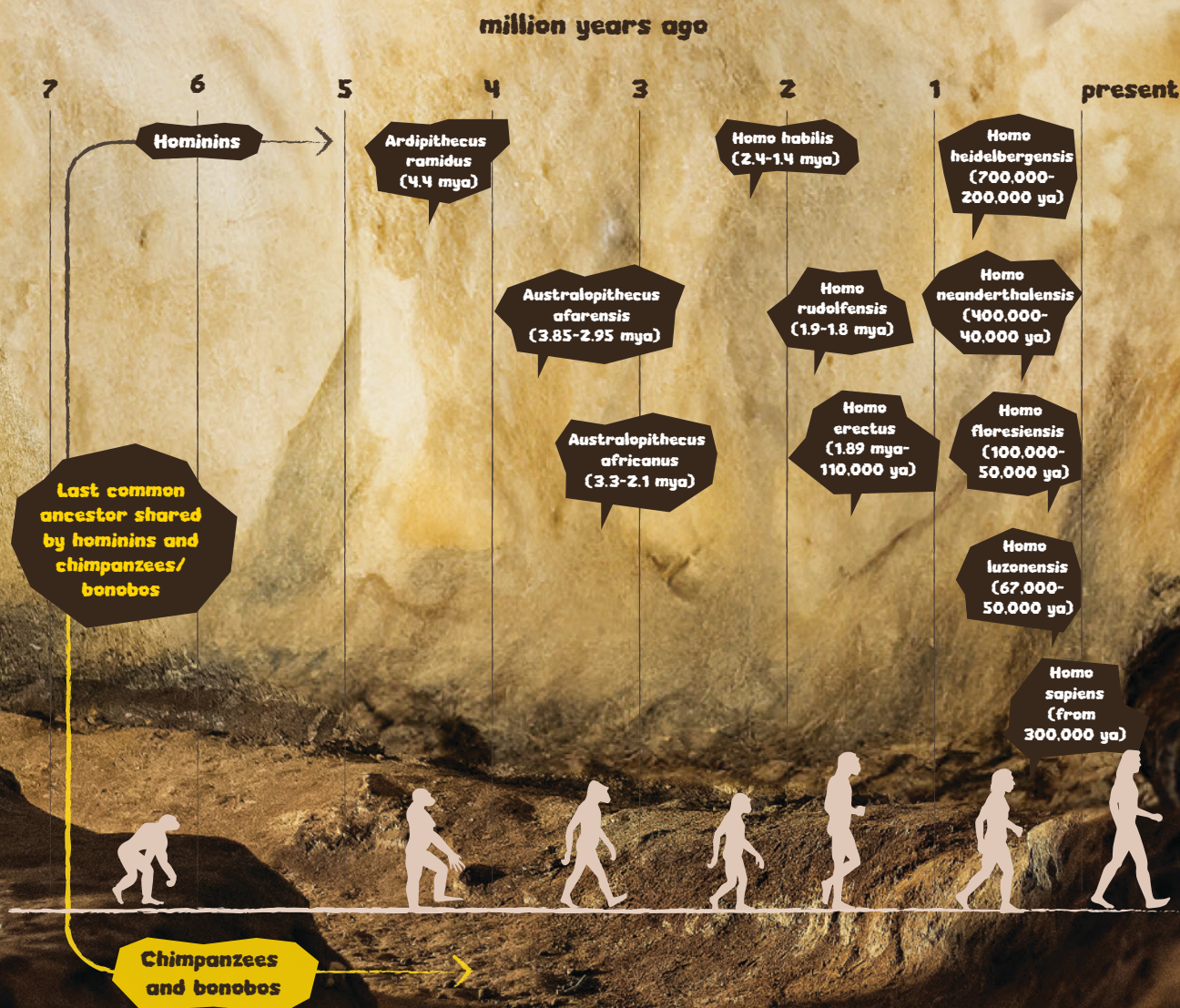
They share these features with *australopithecines*, a more archaic branch of hominins that appeared in Africa some three million years ago. But, *homo floresiensis* also bore more modern features, including a flatter face, reduced tooth size, and human-like pelvis, femur, and toes that support bipedalism.

Varying stone tools and animal bones, including those of elephant-like stegodon, were also found alongside the fossil remains. The presence of “charred bone and

clusters of reddened and fire-cracked rocks” indicate their possible use of fire. M.J. Morwood et al. concluded in their 2005 *Nature* article “that the area was a focus for a range of hominin activities and that *homo floresiensis* was capable of complex behaviour and cognition.”

Homo floresiensis inhabited Flores from at least 100,000 years ago to about 50,000 years ago. This means their existence overlapped with modern humans who arrived in Southeast Asia around 60,000 years ago. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that the two species ever crossed paths.

Human evolutionary family tree



Note: Hominins include all species, including side-branches and extinct species, on the human line after our last common ancestor with chimpanzees and bonobos. The chart is based on the estimated age range of fossil materials.



Sources: Smithsonian Institute. (2022). What does it mean to be human? <https://humanorigins.si.edu/evidence/human-fossils/species/>



Sources: Encyclopedia Britannica. (n.d.). The Human Lineage, <https://cdn.britannica.com/36/79536-050-BE1C475B/human-lineage-hominins-members-lineages-apes-interpretations.jpg>



Pontzer, H. (2012) Overview of Hominin Evolution. Nature Education Knowledge 3(10), 8. <https://www.nature.com/scitable/knowledge/library/overview-of-hominin-evolution-89010983/>

When and how *homo floresiensis* arrived in Flores are still highly contested. The team who discovered the species proposed that it descended from an early population of *homo erectus*, the first hominins that migrated out of Africa. The team further hypothesised that adaptation to scarce resources and the presence of very few predators or competing species led to the species' endemic dwarfism.

Another group of researchers proposed that the fossils were that of *homo sapiens* who suffered pathological conditions, such as microcephaly, that accounted for their unique anatomy. This theory has since been discarded by the scientific community.

Recent fossil finds from another area in Flores and a new analysis of a range of hominin species yielded another hypothesis. "The results suggest *homo floresiensis* is a long-surviving relict of an early (>1.75 million years ago) hominin lineage and a hitherto unknown migration out of Africa, and not a recent derivative of either *homo erectus* or *homo sapiens*," says Argue et al. in a *Journal of Human Evolution* article.

Although two decades had passed since the discovery of *homo floresiensis*, much more is still unknown about the species, including their behaviour, interaction, and extinction. How did they communicate and cooperate with each other? What factors led to their demise? These are some of the questions that continue to fascinate the scientific community and the public.

Homo luzonensis

In 2019, a multinational team of archaeologists and anthropologists led by Armand Mijares of the University of the Philippines and Florent Détroit of the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle announced the discovery of another species in the hominin lineage. A

foot bone unearthed in 2007 and additional bone fragments of at least three individuals uncovered in 2019 in Callao Cave, Northern Luzon indicate hominin presence in the Philippines dating back to 50,000 to 67,000 years ago.

"These specimens display a combination of primitive and derived morphological features that is different from the combination of features found in other species in the genus *homo* (including *homo floresiensis* and *homo sapiens*) and warrants their attribution to a new species, which we name *homo luzonensis*," the researchers note in their 2019 *Nature* article.

In particular, the species had small teeth that resemble those of more modern hominin branches, but their hands and feet look more like the *australopithecines*. The size of the remains also suggests that *homo luzonensis* may have been short, perhaps more similar to *homo floresiensis* in height. Researchers, however, cannot infer how *homo luzonensis* moved around or used their hands because the fossils are incomplete.

Like in the case of the *homo floresiensis*, it remains unclear how *homo luzonensis* evolved and how it was linked to other hominins that lived at the same time. The researchers say that more evidence and new discoveries are needed to shed light on how this species fits in the evolutionary tree.

New fossil finds in the Lao PDR

Archaeologists revealed this June that they found skull and shin bone fragments inside the Tam Pà Ling cave in Northern Laos. The skull fragment was about 70,000 years old, while the shin bone was about 77,000 years old or possibly older. A skull piece unearthed from the same site a decade ago was estimated to be 46,000 years old.

Archaeologists surmise that these bone fragments belong to *homo sapiens*, although the younger fossil, with a blend of archaic and modern features, might have come from an older wave. This raises the possibility that these groups of *homo sapiens* may have contributed to the gene pool of modern-day humans. The location of the fossil materials—an upland area in mainland Southeast Asia—also casts doubt on the assumption that modern humans' earliest travels were along coastlines rather than upland forested areas.

Archaeologists are continuing their exploration and hope to uncover more complete fossil remains that can unravel the origins and journeys of these modern human groups.

Implications of the Southeast Asian discoveries

The discovery of *homo floresiensis* and *homo luzonensis* suggests that species much older than *homo erectus* might have left Africa and reached Asia, challenging the prevailing notion that only more modern human groups could cross open waters and travel long distances. The presence of archaic and modern species in archipelagic and mainland Southeast Asia at overlapping periods also invites further inquiry into their possible interactions and adaptation to the region's diverse environments. There is still much to learn about the hominin family tree and it is clear that Southeast Asia holds many clues for understanding human origins and variation.

The references may be downloaded from the following link:



<https://shorturl.at/bhxGR>

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This collaboration reflects the shared commitment of ASEAN and India to disseminate knowledge and information on socio-cultural development in ASEAN.

The ASEAN

*International Day of Yoga Celebration
at the ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta,
Indonesia, 21 June, 2023*

Photo Credit: Indian Mission to ASEAN



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