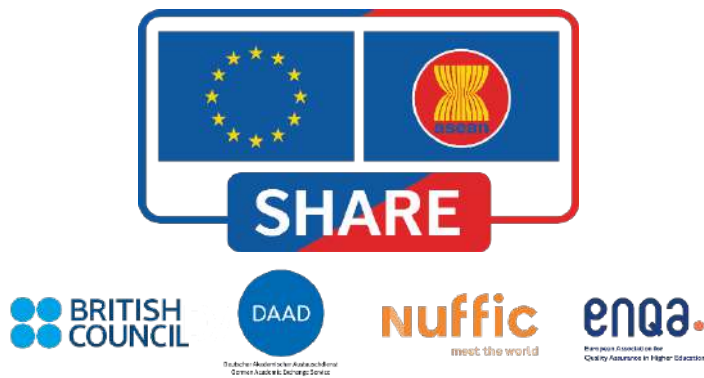


# Graduate Employability in ASEAN

The Contribution of  
Student Mobility







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## The Contribution of Student Mobility

European Union Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region  
Jakarta

**SHARE** – Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region – is a European Union (EU) Grant funded project with an overarching objective to strengthen regional cooperation, enhance the quality, competitiveness and internationalisation of ASEAN higher education institutions and students, contributing to an ASEAN Community. The main aim of SHARE is to enhance cooperation between the EU and ASEAN to create an ASEAN Higher Education Space.

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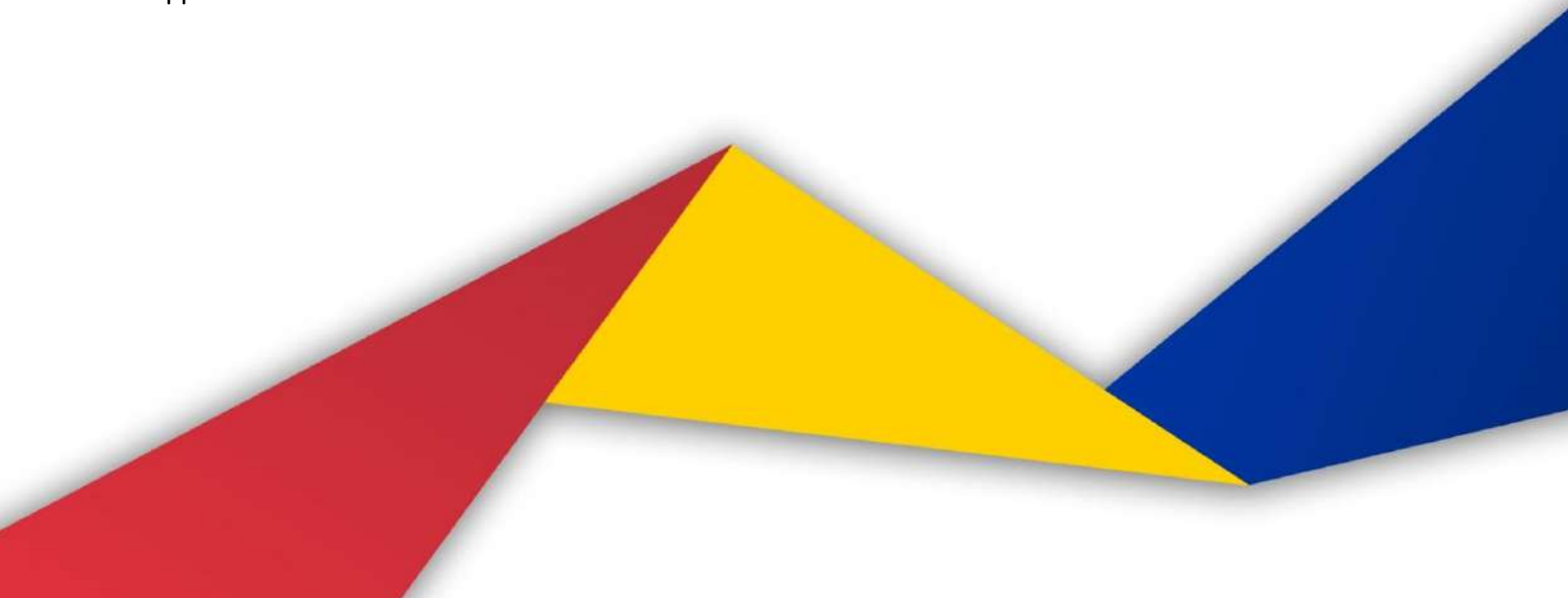
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# Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank	MPAC	Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity
AEC	ASEAN Economic Community	MRAs	Mutual Recognition Agreements
AHDO	ASEAN Human Development Organisation	NCP	New Colombo Plan
AIMS	ASEAN International Mobility for Students	OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
AQRF	ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework	PIS	Participant Information Sheet
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations	RO	Research Objectives
AUN	ASEAN University Network	RQ	Research Questions
BPO	Business Process Outsourcing	SEAMEO-RIHED	Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation Centre Specialising in Regional Higher Education Development
CEO	Chief Executive Officer	EU-SHARE	European Union Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region
CIMO	Centre for International Mobility	UIS	UNESCO Institute of Statistics
CLMV	Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam	UN	United Nations
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease	UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
ERASMUS	European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students	USD	United States Dollar
EU	European Union	UMAP	University Mobility in Asia and Pacific
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	VALERA	The Professional Value of Erasmus Mobility Study
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation	VUCA	Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous
HEI	Higher Education Institution		
HR	Human Resources		
ICT	Information and Communication Technology		
IIE	Institute of International Education		
ILO	International Labour Organisation		
ILMS	International Labour Migration Statistics Database ASEAN		
ISCO	International Standard Classification of Occupations		
KSAOs	Knowledge, Skills, Abilities and Other Characteristics		
LMR	Labour Market Representatives		
MOU	Memorandum of Agreement		

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# Executive Summary





# Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the EU-SHARE commissioned study entitled **'Graduate Employability in ASEAN: The Contributions of Student Mobility'**.

The report collates the qualitative data gathered from a review of literature and 83 qualitative interviews with relevant stakeholders (43 formerly intra-ASEAN mobile graduates and 40 labour market representatives hereon referred to as LMRs) from four countries (Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam) and three broad sectors (Engineering and ICT; Education; and Business, Social Sciences and Humanities). Overall, the study aims to map the student and labour mobility trends in the ASEAN region, examine the supply side and demand side perspectives on the value of intra-ASEAN student mobility on graduates' career outcomes, and provide recommendations to further enhance and understand the links between mobility and employability.

The findings of this report support the implementation of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 (MPAC 2025), specifically on the Strategic Area of People Mobility - Initiative 15 (Support higher education exchange across ASEAN Member States). It also contributes to the successful implementation of ASEAN Work Plan Education 2021-2025, particularly on the establishment of the ASEAN Branded Scholarship (Activity 3.2.4). Additionally, this study supports the promotion of inter- and intra-regional student exchange programmes (Activity 3.2.7), particularly through the provision of lessons learned from existing student mobility programmes.

The highlights of the study are as follows:

## Student and labour mobility trends in the ASEAN region

**There has been a significant increase in intra-ASEAN student flows in recent decades, yet outbound mobility largely occurs towards non-ASEAN destinations.**

The number of intra-ASEAN mobile students almost tripled between 1990 and 2019. However, intra-regional student mobility is still limited, only accounting for 9.4% of the total outbound mobility of higher education students from the ASEAN region. 2019 estimates revealed that Malaysia, Viet Nam and Thailand are the top three hosts of intra-ASEAN student mobility, although data from Singapore, Cambodia, and the Philippines were unavailable. Prominent student flows have been observed from Indonesia to Malaysia, Lao PDR to Viet Nam, and Myanmar to Thailand. The top 3 destinations for higher education students from the ASEAN were Australia, Japan, and the United States. Together, these countries accounted for about 59% of ASEAN outbound student mobility.

**There has also been a notable increase in intra-ASEAN labour mobility, yet it is concentrated in mobility corridors and low- or middle-skilled occupations.**

Intra-ASEAN labour mobility has shown an upward trend with a five-fold increase since the 1990s. However, migrant workers' origins and destinations have been relatively unchanged, with 90.5% of intra-regional migrants hosted only by three countries - Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. Migration flows prevail in specific migration corridors: Malaysia to Singapore,

Indonesia to Malaysia, and the CLMV countries to Thailand. Intra-ASEAN labour migration has also been largely middle- and low- skilled. This is particularly true for Thailand, where 91.3% of the total migrant worker population perform low-skilled jobs. Overall, mobility among professionals within the region is rather restricted, with evidence showing that Asian skilled workers tend to move outwards to OECD countries rather than intra-regionally.

## Supply- and demand-side perspectives on the contributions of intra-ASEAN student mobility on graduate employability

**Most graduates perceive their intra-ASEAN mobility to have a positive impact on their careers, enabling them to develop career-related resources, professional contacts, and other 'non-performance' related benefits.**

Around 75% respondents are of the view that their mobility has had a positive impact on their careers. They report having gained a wide range of knowledge, skills, abilities, and characteristics (KSAOs) as well as expanded their social-professional networks. As for KSAOs, relational domains involving communication (including English language proficiency), intercultural competence, and interpersonal skills were most cited. Meanwhile, adaptability and open-mindedness were also highly developed by the graduates. As for social networks, around a third of the respondents allude to gaining friends, acquaintances, and contacts during and through the programme, which suggests the formation of 'weak ties' that can offer professional opportunities in the future. Lastly, the graduates also reported other benefits that, while not directly related to the skills needed to successfully apply to and perform jobs, are equally important in expanding their career horizons, opportunities, and growth as individuals and professionals, thereby enhancing their long-term employability.

**It appears that the soft skills demanded by employers closely align with those developed by graduates through intra-ASEAN mobility.**

Following a comparison of the supply side and demand side perspectives, it was found that there is an overlap between the soft skills demanded by industries and those developed by the graduates through mobility. These soft skills mainly revolve around relational domains such as communication and language skills, intercultural skills, and interpersonal skills. Adaptability and open-mindedness are also highly sought after by employers and were attributed by the graduates to their study abroad experiences. Mobility appears to give candidates an edge in the labour market, albeit with some caveats. Many employers perceive mobility as an advantage when hiring employees, regardless of whether the exchange took place within the ASEAN or elsewhere. This potentially offers more possibilities for young people in ASEAN to access and reap the benefits of mobility through intra-regional student exchange programmes without leaving the region.

Formerly mobile graduates are believed to possess a number of desirable skills and characteristics valued in the job market, indicating a possible signalling effect. They are perceived to have enhanced communication and language skills, and they are seen as open-minded, adaptable, independent, resilient, and innovative. Mobility is also particularly valuable in certain scenarios, such as when specific languages are required in the role, when the skill set or domain knowledge required is not inherently available in the local context, or when there is an interest in expanding the company's presence to other Southeast Asian countries.

However, mobility appears to be a desirable yet insufficient factor in recruitment, given the role of non- mobility-mediated factors in the hiring decision. Such factors include (1) the precedence of job-specific skills, especially in sectors such as Engineering, ICT, and Finance; (2) the importance of work experience or evidence of applied knowledge; (3) the qualifications required for the job; (4) the goodness of fit of the candidate with organisational values; and (5) the issues around reputation and perceived educational quality of host universities/countries. Lastly, employers particularly look into graduates' capacity to

demonstrate and align the benefits they gained during the mobility with the actual job role, pointing to the importance of targeted support to enable graduates to structure and articulate the contributions of their mobility experience to their employers.

**There is a consensus among graduates and labour market representatives<sup>1</sup> on the need to enhance industry involvement in student mobility and higher education programmes.**

The respondents believe that greater industry involvement in the form of internships, community engagement activities, mutual agreements, and improved labour market intelligence are ways to further enhance mobile graduates' employability. Other recommendations relate to enhancing the visibility and awareness of intra-ASEAN mobility programmes, network building among the alumni and their sending and receiving universities, and additional structural and student support during mobility.

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<sup>1</sup> This document adopts the broad term 'labour market representatives' when reporting demand side perspectives, which are comprised of employers in top- and middle-level management, HR professionals, think tanks, and other representatives from public and private agencies. For simplicity, the terms 'labour market representatives' and 'employers' are used interchangeably.

Based on the study's findings, the following policy recommendations and future lines of research should be considered.

## Policy Recommendations

1. Embed the employability dimension into existing intra-ASEAN student mobility schemes through placements, internships, and career support for mobile students.
2. Pursue structured university-industry collaborations and dialogues to enhance the intra-ASEAN student mobility brand and raise employers' awareness of their value in the labour market.
3. Enhance intra-ASEAN students' networking opportunities with ASEAN companies and alumni to boost their long-term employability.
4. Develop mechanisms to monitor and ensure the attractiveness of intra-ASEAN student mobility programmes.
5. Generate more robust data collection and registration on intra-ASEAN mobile students and the outcomes of exchange programmes in the region.
6. Continue to enhance structural support towards the free movement of students, workers, and their skills in ASEAN.
7. Explore avenues to ensure the accessibility and sustainability of intra-ASEAN student mobility programmes.

## Lines of Future Research

1. Conduct more studies with a wider geographical, theoretical, and methodological breadth, possibly exploring the role of mobility characteristics and the differences in outcomes between countries and sectors.
2. Conduct focused research on specific outcomes such as the development of job-specific skills, the mechanisms through which graduates develop soft skills, and the durability of intra-ASEAN mobility's signalling effect.
3. Explore other forms of intra-regional mobility, including virtual and hybrid forms of mobility among teaching staff and researchers.
4. Investigate the entrenched issues of privilege, inequality, and social justice around international student mobility and employability.

# 1 | Introduction







# 1. Introduction

International student mobility has been a defining characteristic of international higher education for the past decades, bringing about significant personal, educational, economic, and societal benefits (Altbach & Knight, 2007). According to Choudaha (2019), the value of the 5.1 million international students in 2016 was worth over USD 300 billion to the global economy. At the meso and micro levels, cross-border exchanges are linked to increased revenue for higher education institutions, enhanced intercultural understanding, positive international relations, and improved personal and career outcomes for graduates (Munch & Hoch, 2013; Bracht et al., 2006).

In prior literature (for instance Demirkol, 2013; Toth, 2012; Stoeckel, 2016), international student and professional mobility contributes to the necessary intercultural and social awareness and understanding required in any community building project. These benefits have been exemplified by the European flagship programme ERASMUS, arguably the most prominent and long-standing student mobility project to date. Its success lies not just in consolidating a European identity and Higher Education space (Mitchell, 2012) but also in facilitating graduates' personal growth and professional readiness through the development of valuable skills such as openness, adaptability, and problem-solving (European Union, 2019).

Due to its multiple contributions, international student mobility has been fervently pursued by nations, institutions, and individual students alike. Worldwide, the number of international students has quintupled since the 1970s, growing from 0.8 to a total of 4.1 million in 2013 (UNESCO, 2015). This number has further increased since then, with the 2020 estimate being at almost 6.4 million (UIS, n.d.). Statistics also show that the total number of mobile students from ASEAN Member States reached 356,133 in 2020 (ibid.). According to Pedersen (2021), while it is difficult to ascertain clear and specific student outcomes of mobility, short-term mobility such as student exchange programmes is seen as 'a potential opportunity for

learning from contrast' that involves 'students' international understanding, abilities to reflect, personal confidence and maturity' (p. 293). These benefits may be useful for students' academic and general competencies (Cardwell, 2020; Teichler, 2017), including employability in an increasingly global marketplace (OECD, 2021).

## 1.1. Student Mobility Programmes in ASEAN

The regionalization process of higher education in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region has seen significant progress over the past two decades, including various initiatives toward the development of an ASEAN Higher Education Area or common space. The discourse around ASEAN higher education first started with a focus on higher education cooperation, then shifted to human resource development (within the context of human capital and the knowledge-based economy) and later to ASEAN Community building project from the mid-2000s (Chao, 2020).

As observed by Chao (2020), although the harmonisation of the ASEAN Higher Education Area follows the model of the Bologna Process and the various initiatives and frameworks that guided the development of the European Higher Education Area, 'the trajectory and development of the ASEAN Higher Education Area is unique and is developed within the context of the development of the Association of Southeast Asian region' (n.p.). Mainly influenced by historical, political and economic differences, ASEAN Member Countries' higher education systems demonstrate divergent strategies. For example, lower income countries such as Viet Nam, Lao PDR, Cambodia and Myanmar tend to focus on quantity, meaning the number of student enrolment, system expansion and infrastructure development. Low-middle income countries including Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia put their resources to quality improvement. The two high income countries, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam, are competitive global players that host well-renowned universities.

Enhancing intra-regional student (faculty, researcher and professional) mobility is believed to contribute to not only economic development but also the ASEAN community project (Chao, 2017). Furthermore, from the example of the ERASMUS initiative of the European Higher Education Area, intra-regional student mobility is expected to raise awareness of ASEAN-ness, the construction of the ASEAN identity and future ASEAN citizens,

entrepreneurs and leaders of the ASEAN community (Chao, 2020). According to Sirat, Azman & Bakar (2016), student mobility, besides credit transfers, quality assurance and research clusters, were identified as the four main priorities to harmonise the ASEAN higher education system. In lieu of student mobility's potential for driving social and economic growth, the ASEAN has bolstered its efforts to pursue student exchange within the region. High-level policy declarations, including the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Higher Education in 2015 and the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025, have identified cross-border exchanges as central to intercultural understanding and skilled labour development between Member States. Over the past two decades, a number of mobility programmes supported by scholarship offerings have been launched to attract participants to engage in intra-regional cross-border studies: the University Mobility in Asia and Pacific (UMAP), the ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS), the ASEAN University Network (AUN) Student Exchange Programme, and the EU-SHARE Scholarship (Atherton et al., 2020; Chao, 2020).

Information about the four programmes fostering intra-ASEAN student mobility can be found in Appendix 1. The EU SHARE is the flagship cooperation programme between the EU and ASEAN focused on three objectives: strengthening regional cooperation, supporting harmonisation, and boosting regional mobility. Scholarships are the main instrument to support these goals, especially in line with enhancing cross-border movement. Since its official launch in 2015, a total of 591 students from 8 Member States have been awarded intra-ASEAN mobility scholarships, with 32 universities participating in the programme (Delegation of the European Union to ASEAN, 2021). Although the aforementioned programmes aim to promote intra-ASEAN mobility, the result yielded was still limiting. AUN, for instance, has shifted their focus to quality assurance. Meanwhile, EU-SHARE mobility is project-based, meaning that its sustainability after project duration is left unknown (Chao, 2020).

For a region diverse in cultures, religions, languages, political ideologies and economic size like ASEAN, international student mobility can play a key role in developing a harmonised system of education and fostering a sense of shared purpose and common destiny in a highly globalised world. However, despite the growing interest and investment in student mobility initiatives, the empirical evidence on intra-ASEAN mobility's impact remains limited (Atherton et al., 2020), especially in comparison to the compelling body of research on similar initiatives in the European space (see Bryla & Domanski, 2014; Bracht et al., 2006; European Commission, 2014).

Prior literature has laid out some weaknesses of the development and implementation of intra-ASEAN mobility schemes (for instance Chao, 2020). One is that the majority of the intra-ASEAN mobility programmes are governmental or regional organisation driven and limited to short-term (one or two semesters) mobility. This leads to a lack in both scope and quantity of the mobility, especially when compared with the European ERASMUS programme.

Another concern is the lack of sustainable funding for mobility schemes. As outlined above, currently with multiple intra-ASEAN mobility programmes running within the region, it is a challenge to keep the sources of funding available especially when there are programmes that seem to be duplicated. The financial resources, in most cases, do not directly come from the ASEAN Secretariat or ASEAN countries and instead are joint efforts of institutions to enhance the collaboration through regional networks (Chao, 2020). Furthermore, the rationale for intra-ASEAN mobility schemes tend to focus more toward higher education cooperation in order to reinforce human capital and knowledge-based economy discourse. However, the question of how students participating in this intra-regional mobility scheme have used the resources accumulated during their time overseas in their employment advantage is left unsatisfactorily answered. As argued by Pham & Saito (2020), students might be unable to see the

immediate value of their experiences in such mobility programmes but may grow to be more appreciative after they have settled in the local context and labour market.

It is thus imperative to address this knowledge gap to allow the ASEAN to achieve a deeper understanding of the impact of its internationalisation efforts and lay the foundation for more research and informed policy action in Higher Education. As one of the desired outcomes of intra-regional mobility, this study will focus on exploring its links to graduate employability - a multidimensional concept that will be explained in more detail in Section 1.3.

## 1.2. Research Questions and Study Objectives

The main purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of students and LMRs on the contributions of intra-ASEAN higher education student mobility to graduates' employability. The qualitative analysis will focus on stakeholders from four ASEAN Member States (Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam) and three sectors (Engineering and Information and Communication Technology; Business, Social Science and Humanities; and Education). It is projected to provide a preliminary understanding of intra-regional mobility on graduates' career enhancement, serving as a basis for future analysis covering a wider geographical and sectoral scope in the ASEAN region.

The findings of this report support the implementation of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 (MPAC 2025), specifically on the Strategic Area of People Mobility - Initiative 15 (Support higher education exchange across ASEAN Member States). It also contributes to the successful implementation of ASEAN Work Plan Education 2021-2025, particularly on the establishment of the ASEAN Branded Scholarship (Activity 3.2.4). Additionally, this study supports the promotion of inter- and intra-regional student exchange programmes (Activity 3.2.7), particularly through the provision of lessons learned from existing student mobility programmes.

Overall, the study aims to answer the following research questions (hereon referred to as RQ):

- RQ1.** What are the current trends in student higher education mobility and labour mobility in the ASEAN region?
- RQ2.** What are the career-related resources (individual capacities in terms of skills, knowledge, attributes, and mindsets and social resources such as contacts, networks, and relationships) developed by intra-ASEAN higher education mobility programme graduates?
- RQ3.** What are the perceptions of labour market representatives in specific sectors regarding graduates who were formerly mobile within ASEAN and their career-related resources?
- RQ4.** How do graduates' developed resources match or differ with those valued in the ASEAN labour market?
- RQ5.** What can be done to improve intra-ASEAN mobility programmes' contributions to graduate employability?

To answer these questions, the study will be guided by the following objectives (hereon referred to as RO):

- RO1.** To provide an overview of intra-ASEAN student and labour mobility trends
- RO2.** To identify graduates' perceptions on the types of career-related resources they developed as a result of their intra-ASEAN mobility participation
- RO3.** To understand employers' perceptions of intra-ASEAN mobility graduates and their expectations of potential employees
- RO4.** To assess the similarities and differences between students' and employers' perceptions on the value of intra-ASEAN mobility on employability
- RO5.** To recommend lines of action on how to better align intra-ASEAN mobility programme offerings with labour market expectations

## 1.3. Conceptualising Employability

The concept of employability is highly fluid and ambiguous because, as researchers have emphasised, it is mainly a projective construct (Little, 2003) and not necessarily evidenced by real employment (Silva, Lourtie, & Aires, 2013; Saito & Pham, 2019). As such, it has been seen and discussed through numerous theoretical lenses. On the one hand, employability is often framed as a set of person-centred factors that increase the likelihood of employment. It has been defined by Yorke (2006) as ‘a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefit themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy’ (p. 4). This view alludes to the importance of an individual's capacity to rely on her abilities to meet the demands of the occupations.

Similarly, these demands are often not limited to the employee's performance in a specific role but to her overall potential to function in the workplace. As illustrated by Hinchliffe & Jolly's (2011) study on employability, employers' hiring decisions are based on graduates' values and personal qualities equally so than their potential to perform the job. Most notably, the employers reported assessing graduates' potential on the basis of some evidence of active engagement in the wider community through paid or unpaid work and an attitude of openness to unfamiliar situations. In this sense, the knowledge, skills and attitudes one possesses can be seen as assets that should be presentable and presented to employers and the context within which one works (Hillage & Pollard, 1998). The responsibility for acquiring these resources is often ascribed to educational institutions, with universities facing increasing pressure to effectively foster the skills, attitudes, knowledge, identities and mindsets that students need to thrive in the workplace (Pham & Jackson, 2020b; Tomlinson, 2017). Similarly, much of the employability literature makes a fine point on the need to develop both specialised and transversal skills such as communication and interpersonal skills in order to enhance students' job outlook

(Jones, 2013). Meanwhile, McQuaid and Lindsey (2005) also view qualifications, previous work experience, and labour market status as important individual factors that influence graduate employability.

For some authors, employability also goes beyond individual factors to include the social dimension. Tomlinson (2017) and Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth (2004) identify social resources as valuable for boosting one's chances in the labour market. They include relational elements that enhance or limit one's possibilities for securing and keeping a job - the networks, key contacts, relationships, and activities related to creating and keeping ties with others. In practice, social capital enables students to know about otherwise inaccessible job vacancies and opportunities, as well as increase their likelihood of getting a job through trusting and reciprocal relationships (Tomlinson, 2017). This aligns with the empirical evidence on the role of social capital in job search and acquisition (Batistic & Tymon, 2017). This strand of the employability literature points to the importance of enhancing the graduates' pool of resources not just by developing their individual assets (in terms of skills and personal qualities) but also their social and network capital. In order to boost said resources, higher education institutions have implemented support mechanisms and programs that can assist future graduates to achieve advantages in the labour market, including internships, work placements, and international student mobility (Clarke, 2018).

On the other hand, sociological and critical literature tend to treat employability not just as a question of skills development - as prevalent interpretations would suggest - but as a contextual and relational phenomenon (Forrier & Sels, 2003; Tomlinson & Tran, 2020). From this perspective, it is believed that there are many contextual determinants to one's employment success, which can be categorised into three main groups: (1) employability skills and attributes (personal competencies, basic transferable skills, qualifications, work knowledge and experience,

and personal conditions); (2) household circumstances (care responsibilities, other family duties, work culture, and access to resources); and (3) demand factors (labour market, vacancy characteristics, and employment policy). From this point of view, employability is seen as an outcome of the labour market conditions (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). When there are more demands of a professional area (for instance high-tech industries), more job opportunities will be available for graduates of this major.

Recently, researchers have also paid attention to the sustainability and meaningfulness of employment (for instance job quality, personal growth, and satisfaction) and see these factors as part of the notion of employability (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008; Pham & Jackson, 2020b; Pham, 2021). This perspective results from the globalisation process and the instability of the labour market (restructuring, delayering, downsizing, and harsh working conditions) that turn full-time work into a scarcity while making short-term work and self-employment preferable (Oliver, 2015; Pham & Jackson, 2020a).

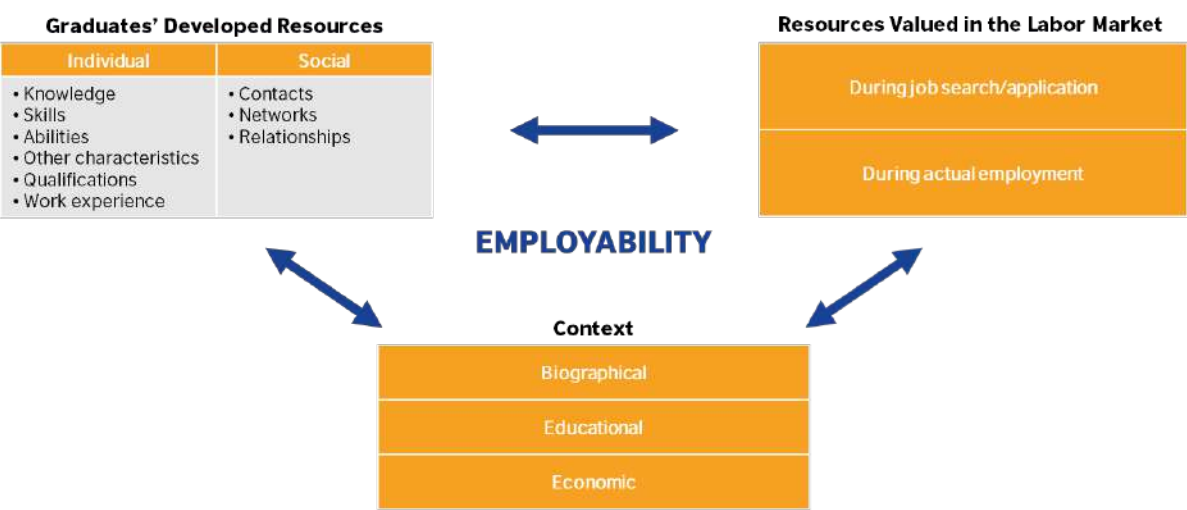
In light of the multidimensionality of the concept, our proposed study will consider employability as the interplay between graduates' developed resources, the labour market needs and expectations, and the biographical, educational, and socio-cultural contexts in which they operate.

Graduates' resources allude to their perceptions on the types of individual capacities (in terms of

skills, knowledge, attributes, and mindsets) and social resources (such as contacts, networks, and relationships) that they developed or acquired through their mobility participation and their career relevance. These resources will be compared to those valued by the labour market (employers, HR representatives, and sector leaders), evaluating the extent to which their perceptions overlap or differ. The framework to be employed in this study is depicted in Figure 1 below.

Synthesising these views against their biographical, educational, and economic contexts would allow us to provide a sound preliminary assessment of intra-ASEAN mobility graduates' employability and recommendations to inform policy and university actions in the ASEAN region.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study





## 2 | Methodology





# 2. Methodology

## 2.1 Research Design and Analytical Framework

The proposed study adopts a qualitative approach, which is deemed particularly appropriate for underexplored topics or phenomena (Miles & Huberman, 1994) such as the employability outcomes of intra-ASEAN student mobility. To achieve the study's objectives, both secondary and primary data will be collected. Secondary sources include policy documents, academic articles, published reports, and statistical databases, while primary sources involve 83 semi-structured interviews with graduates of intra-ASEAN mobility schemes (n=43), and LMRs (n=40). An overview of the planned data collection, analysis, and reporting methods are presented in Table 1.

## 2.2 Sampling and Eligibility Criteria

A combination of snowball and purposive sampling was employed. In this approach, the research team relied on existing contacts and networks (snowball sampling) in conjunction with a clear set of eligibility criteria in order to achieve the study objectives (purposive sampling). The eligibility criteria are outlined in Table 2.

**Table 1.** Analytical Framework of the Study

Data collection	Data source	Data analysis	Data reporting	Related questions and objectives
Review of secondary sources	Policy documents; Academic articles; Published reports; Statistical databases	Scoping review	Descriptive statistics; Country overview	All RQ/ROs
Semi-structured interviews	Graduates of intra-ASEAN mobility programmes; Graduates' current employers; Industry and sector representatives	Content analysis	Data matrices; Case vignettes (success stories)	RQ/RO2, RQ/RO3, RQ/RO4, RQ/RO5

**Table 2.** Respondents' Eligibility Criteria

Graduates	Labour Market Representatives
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, or Viet Nam;</li> <li>2. Spent time abroad as part of an intra-ASEAN exchange programme (SHARE, AIMS, AUN, or UMAP),</li> <li>3. Was hosted by a university in another ASEAN country, and</li> <li>4. Completed a programme of study related to any of these sectors: Business, Social Sciences and Humanities; Engineering and ICT; and Education</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Private enterprises, national or local government agencies, civil society organisations, think tanks, multilateral organisations;</li> <li>2. Works in the Business and Finance, Education, or Engineering and ICT sectors;</li> <li>3. Has a presence in either the ASEAN region or any of the four country contexts, and</li> <li>4. A top or middle-level manager or a Human Resource Professional who is knowledgeable of labour market needs and recruitment practices</li> </ol>

## 2.3 Recruitment Process

### Mapping of possible key informants and source of contact details (September 2021 - October 2021)

A web search and network mapping exercise were initially conducted by the team in September 2021 to identify possible informants and their sources. This was followed by a request for assistance from mobility programme secretariats (SHARE, AIMS, AUN, and UMAP) and a total of 68 participating higher education institutions (HEIs) in disseminating our call for participants.

### Direct and indirect recruitment (October 2021 - May 2022)

Possible respondents were contacted through direct and indirect methods. Direct methods included email and social media correspondence with the team's personal acquaintances, those who participated in related public events (e.g., The 13th SHARE Policy Dialogue), or those who appeared in contact lists and had given their prior consent to be contacted for research purposes. Meanwhile, indirect methods included referrals from other respondents and responses to public announcements by email and social media of participating HEIs and mobility secretariats (e.g., AIMS and AUN Facebook pages). The table that depicts the number of responses via direct and indirect methods is attached in Appendix 2.

## 2.4 Data Collection

Considering the health risks and travel constraints posed by the COVID-19 pandemic during the data gathering phase, data was collected remotely through a range of instruments. Each instrument aimed at responding to specific research questions and objectives, as described below.

### Desk research

To map student and labour mobility trends in ASEAN in relation to RQ1/RO1, a review of statistical databases and relevant reports was carried out, the results of which are discussed in Section 3. While the study strived to include a comprehensive and updated flow patterns in the ASEAN region, it should be noted that available databases do not provide complete data for all countries and years.

Different definitions are also employed for some indicators such as international students. For instance, statistics on international students presented here draws on UIS data, which only includes degree-seeking tertiary students and excludes those participating in short-term, credit-bearing, or exchange-type mobility programmes (Atherton et al., 2020; Migration Data Portal, 2020; UIS, 2015). Sources with a more comprehensive coverage of international students - such as the Institute of International Education's (IIE) Project Atlas database which includes both credit- and degree-seeking international students - have been excluded in this report due to the lack of data for all country cases. Definitions for 'skilled' labour also vary between the sources consulted, whereby skill level is estimated based on either occupation (using the International Standard Classification of Occupations, or ISCO<sup>2</sup>) or level of educational attainment<sup>3</sup>. ILOSTAT provides separate databases for these classifications, but this distinction is not consistently specified in the available literature on skilled labour. Additionally, there is a lack of intra-

<sup>2</sup> The ISCO-08 includes five broad skill levels: High (skills level 3 and 4), medium (skill level 2), low (skill level 1), armed forces, and not elsewhere classified. More details available at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/resources/concepts-and-definitions/description-employment-by-occupation/>

<sup>3</sup> The ILO differentiates between five aggregate levels of education: Less than basic, basic, intermediate, advanced, and level not stated. More details available at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/resources/concepts-and-definitions/description-employment-by-education/>

ASEAN disaggregated data on skilled migrants' origins and destinations, which poses a challenge in mapping the direction of skilled worker flows within the region (Papademetriou et al., 2015).

To further set the context for the interview findings and to address RQ/ROs 2, 3, and 4, a scoping review was conducted, the results of which are presented in Section 3. Web of Science and Scopus - two of the leading academic databases that enable access to high-impact academic literature - were consulted. Keyword search items include 'mobility AND employability' and 'international education AND employability' in order to map the existing empirical evidence on mobility's contributions to employability from the student and employer viewpoints. Only English articles in journals (excluding books and conference proceedings) were included. The preliminary list of records was further screened for relevance, including only empirical studies (excluding policy reviews) on physical mobility (excluding virtual mobility and transnational study arrangements) of university students (excluding those whose focus is on postgraduate-level mobility). A total of 77 unique records fall within the scope of the study, 32 of which are cited in this report. In addition to the academic literature, we also conducted a search on the Google Scholar database to identify grey literature (commissioned reports and employer surveys) that specifically tackle employer perspectives. A total of 10 employer-specific documents were reviewed.

### Semi-structured online interviews with graduates and labour market representatives

To document and examine graduates' and LMRs' perceptions on the value of intra-ASEAN student mobility to employability, individual semi-structured interviews were carried out remotely. Two rounds of interviews were conducted - the first occurring between November 2021 to January 2022 and the second between February and June 2022. In total, 83 participants were recruited. A total of 43 graduates were interviewed, representing all the four country cases across the three sectors (Table 3). Meanwhile, a total of 40 LMRs have participated in the study, representing demand- side views (Table 4). They involve employers (represented by top- and middle-level management as well as HR personnel), representatives of think tanks and multilateral organisations, and national and local government agencies.

Data were collected primarily by means of online interviews via Zoom/Google Meet and email interviews. A Participant Information Sheet (PIS) and online consent form were sent to the participants prior to their interviews. Interviews with Thai and Vietnamese participants were conducted mostly in the local language and were manually translated by the interviewers. Meanwhile, interviews with participants from Malaysia and the Philippines were conducted mostly in English with one interview in Malay requiring a live translation service.

**Table 3.** Number of Graduate Respondents by Country of Origin and Field of Study

	Business, Social Sciences and Humanities	Education	Engineering and ICT	Total
Malaysia	7	1	2	10
The Philippines	6	0	2	8
Thailand	4	6	0	10
Viet Nam	1	7	7	15
Total	18	14	11	43

**Table 4.** Number of Labour Market Representative Respondents by Type (with Examples)

	Cross-Sectoral (Government Agencies and Think Tanks)	Employers		
		Education Institutions	Engineering and IT	Other Sector
Malaysia	3	1	2	2
The Philippines	4	0	5	3
Thailand	1	2	1	6
Viet Nam	1	5	0	4

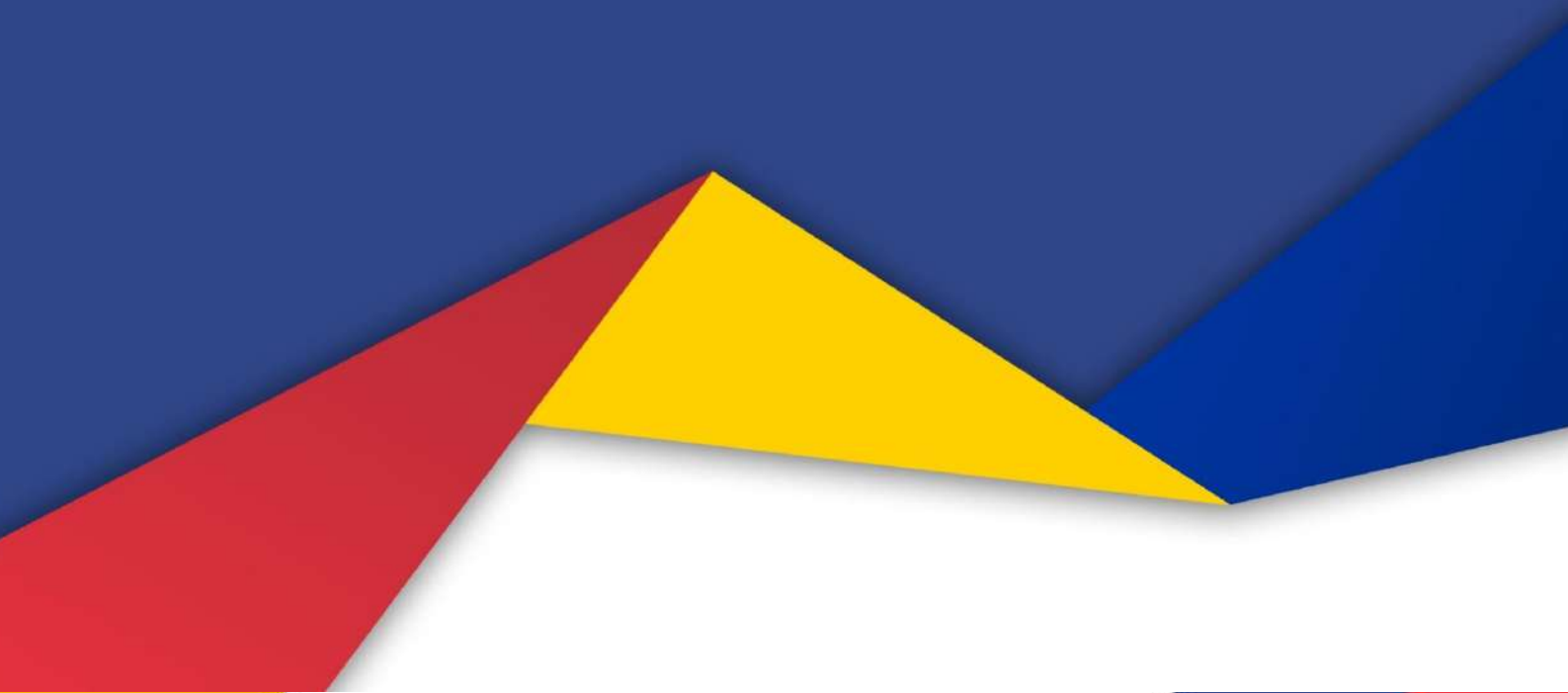
**Table 5.** Number of Respondents by Means of Interview and Language Used

	Interview language	Online interview	Email interview	Total
Malaysia	English and Malay	15	3	18
The Philippines	English and Tagalog	10	10	20
Thailand	Thai and English	19	1	20
Viet Nam	Vietnamese and English	25	0	25
Total		69	14	83





# 3 | Mapping Student Mobility and Labour Market Trends in ASEAN





# 3. Mapping Student Mobility and Labour Market Trends in ASEAN

Student and labour mobility serve as strategic instruments for people-to-people interactions towards ASEAN's goal of integration and connectivity (Kikkawa & Suan, 2019). This section specifically addresses RO1/RQ1, presenting an overview of the student and labour mobility patterns in ASEAN and a brief discussion of the economic and educational activity and trends in the four ASEAN country cases.

## 3.1. Student Mobility Trends

The years 1999 to 2018 saw intra-ASEAN student mobility grow by 270% from 7,643 to 28,333. Yet, despite efforts to increase intra-regional mobility through different initiatives, intra-ASEAN student mobility remains limited. In total, intra-ASEAN mobility only accounted for 9.4% of the total outbound mobility of higher education students from the ASEAN region which numbered 301,792 in 2018. In 2019, the top 3 destinations for higher education students from the ASEAN were Australia, Japan, and the United States. Together, these countries accounted for about 59% of ASEAN outbound student mobility. Since 2015, Viet Nam

has sent the most number of students abroad for tertiary education followed by Malaysia and Indonesia. In terms of inbound mobility, the top three ASEAN member states that hosted the most tertiary students were Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand in 2019.

As for intra-ASEAN mobility, the top 3 hosts are Malaysia, Viet Nam and Thailand, which respectively received 13,318, 7,076, and 7,037 tertiary education students from within the region (Table 7). It must be noted, however, that this ranking does not take into consideration inbound student mobility data for Singapore, Cambodia and the Philippines, which were unavailable during the writing of this report. Moreover, prominent flows between specific countries have been observed from Indonesia to Malaysia (9,902), Lao PDR to Viet Nam (6,227), and Myanmar to Thailand (2,690). Table 7 shows the number of intra-ASEAN mobile students by corridor.

**Table 6.** Top International Destinations among ASEAN Outbound Students, n.d. (UIS)<sup>4</sup>

Country of Origin	Top 1	Top 2	Top 3	Top 4	Top 5
Brunei Darussalam	Malaysia 842	United Kingdom 824	Australia 334	United States 53	New Zealand 45
Cambodia	Australia 1,877	Thailand 1,550	United States 799	Viet Nam 695	Japan 631
Indonesia	Australia 12,852	Malaysia 9,902	United States 8,039	Japan 4,722	United Kingdom 3,420
Lao PDR	Viet Nam 6,277	Thailand 944	Australia 327	Japan 214	Hungary 162
Malaysia	Australia 14,125	United Kingdom 13,470	United States 6,710	Japan 2,681	Indonesia 1,745
Myanmar	Japan 3,336	Thailand 2,690	United States 1,950	Australia 1,366	Korea, Rep. 692
The Philippines	Australia 10,082	United States 3,368	Canada 2,814	Japan 1,079	Saudi Arabia 896
Singapore	Australia 6,797	United Kingdom 6,322	United States 3,877	Malaysia 750	Germany 650
Thailand	Australia 6,819	United Kingdom 6,696	United States 5,775	Japan 3,140	Indonesia 996
Viet Nam	Japan 40,633	United States 25,183	Korea, Rep. 19,098	Australia 15,959	Canada 9,243

<sup>4</sup> UIS. (n.d.). Global flow of tertiary students. Retrieved October 20, 2022 from <http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow>

**Table 7.** Intra-ASEAN Higher Education Mobility, n.d. (UIS)<sup>5</sup>

To From	Brunei Darus- salam	Cambodia	Indonesia	Lao PDR	Malaysia	Myanmar	The Philippines	Singapore	Thailand	Viet Nam
Brunei Darussalam	a	...	12	n	842	n	...	...	8	n
Cambodia	n	a	25	48	145	n	...	...	1,550	695
Indonesia	58	...	a	n	9,902	5	...	...	410	8
Malaysia	116	...	1,745	n	a	n	...	...	245	13
Myanmar	n	...	20	9	428	a	...	...	2,690	46
Lao PDR	n	...	8	a	10	n	...	...	944	6,227
The Philippines	26	...	56	n	355	...	a	...	296	55
Singapore	29	...	57	n	750	n	...	a	31	n
Thailand	8	...	996	n	826	10	...	...	a	32
Viet Nam	n	...	55	235	60	n	...	...	863	a

... : missing data  
n : nil or negligible  
a : not applicable

The British Council (2018) projects that the growth of outbound mobility of international students will decrease from 5.7% on average from 2000 to 2015 to 1.7% annually through the 2020's to 2027 (British Council, 2018). While the impact of COVID-19 on this projected trajectory is uncertain, the disruptions caused by the pandemic could either further reduce student mobility overall or enable intra-ASEAN student mobility by discouraging students to fly out of the ASEAN and instead remain in the region (Atherton et al., 2020). That said, we can anticipate a more vibrant intra-regional mobility environment in the coming years.

Aside from contributing to the ASEAN internationalisation project, student mobility also fosters labour migration through skills development and the acquisition of qualifications recognized in the host country (ADB Institute, 2014). There is a growing desire in ASEAN to take a more proactive role to facilitate and foster labour mobility within the region. According to Kikkawa & Suan (2019), the first reason is that many ASEAN member countries have become more knowledge-based economies that require greater innovation. The second reason is that ageing populations and changing demographics require more efficient use of human resources through regional collaboration.

<sup>5</sup> UIS. (n.d.). Global flow of tertiary students. Retrieved October 20, 2022 from <http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow>

## 3.2. Labour Mobility Trends

Migration flows have been steadily increasing worldwide. Based on a recent estimate, there are a total of 281 million international migrants overall, showing an average of 2.4% annual growth over the last two decades (Migration Data Portal, 2021). The ASEAN region shows a similar pattern (see more in Appendix 3) with its total migrant stock<sup>6</sup> having increased from 2.9 million in 1990 to 10.2 million in 2019 (UN, 2019). Additionally, intra-ASEAN mobility has increased five-fold over the last three decades from 1.3 million in 1990 to 6.8 million in 2019 (ibid.).

For many years, ASEAN approached labour mobility mostly as an extension of open trade and investment, hoping to contribute to the vision of an integrated ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). ASEAN 2015 economic integration projects an economic growth path for all ten Member States of the organisation: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The goal of this economic integration, summarised in Caparas (2016), was to prevent external forces from invading and penetrating the power vacuum of massive decolonization, serve as a mechanism to demonstrate unity of member countries in their ability to push for economic independence and viability, and is directed toward establishing an economic community that is capable of global trade and inclusive growth despite markets' volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (p. 150).

Despite the overall upward trend in intra-ASEAN migration, labour mobility patterns remain relatively unchanged in the region. Since 1995, the majority of intra-regional migrants have been hosted only by three countries - Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore - accounting for 90.5% of the total intra-ASEAN migrant share in 2019. Of the three, Singapore receives the largest share of non-

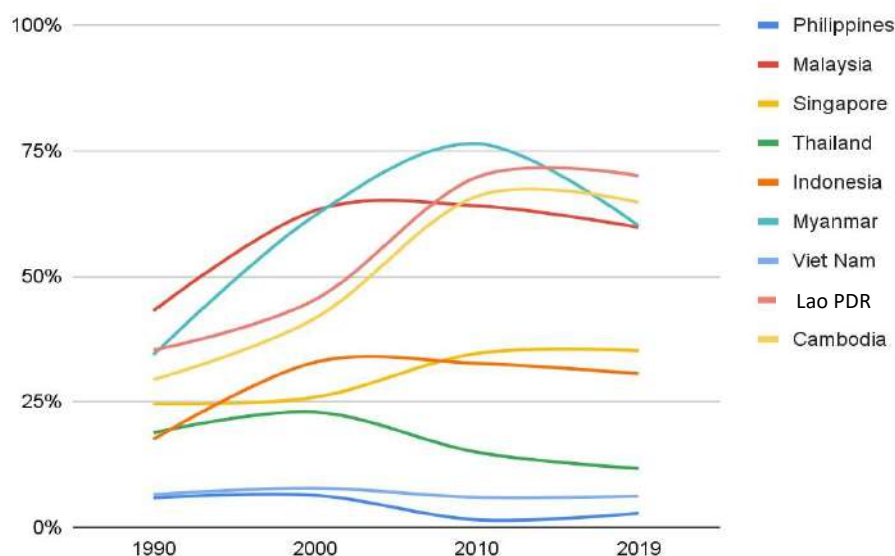
ASEAN migrants, accounting for 48% of its total migrant workforce. Meanwhile, Thailand's migrant stock is largely comprised of ASEAN nationals - accounting for 96.1% of the country's migrant population.

While the Philippines and Viet Nam are among Asia's top origin countries of migrants worldwide, their contributions to intra-ASEAN mobility are among the lowest at 5.9% and 6.5% in 2019, respectively (Figure 2). Instead, Filipino and Vietnamese migrants mainly reside in the United States, the Middle East, and other Asian territories (Kikkawa & Suan, 2019).

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<sup>6</sup> According to the World Bank, international migrant stock refers to the number of people born in a country other than that in which they live, including refugees. <https://databank.worldbank.org/metadataglossary/jobs/series/SM.POP.TOTL.ZS>

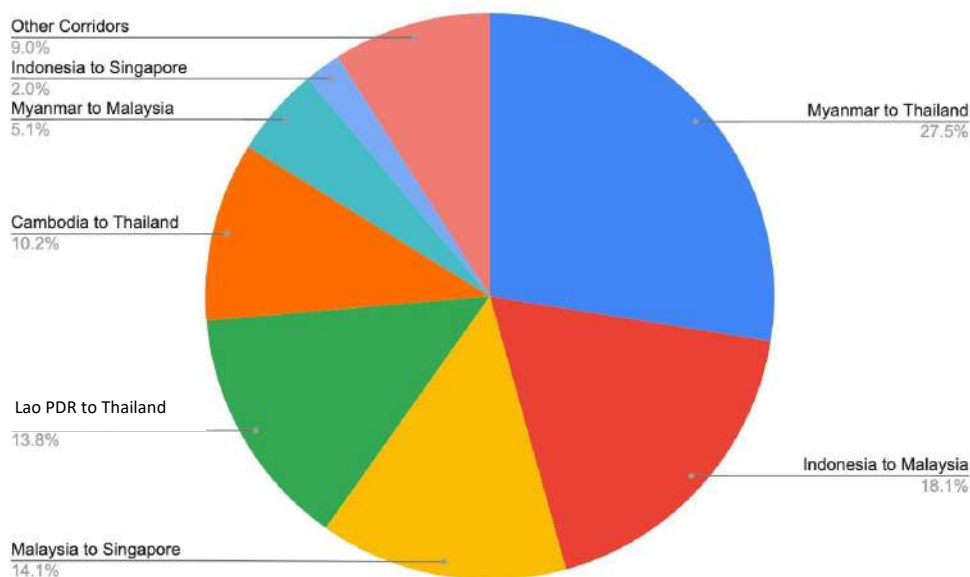
**Figure 2.** Intra-ASEAN Share of Member States' Total Nationals Abroad, 1990-2019 (UN)<sup>7</sup>



As for intra-ASEAN migratory patterns, prominent flows between specific countries (also referred to as 'migration corridors') have been observed from Malaysia to Singapore, Indonesia to Malaysia, and

the CLMV countries<sup>8</sup> to Thailand (Kikkawa & Suan, 2019; Papadimitriou et al., 2015; Sugiyarto & Agunias, 2014). Figure 3 shows the proportion of intra-ASEAN migration stock by corridor in 2019.

**Figure 3.** Proportion of Intra-ASEAN Migration Stock by Corridor, 2019 (UN)<sup>9</sup>



<sup>7</sup> United Nations. (2019). Retrieved on September 21, 2021 from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock>

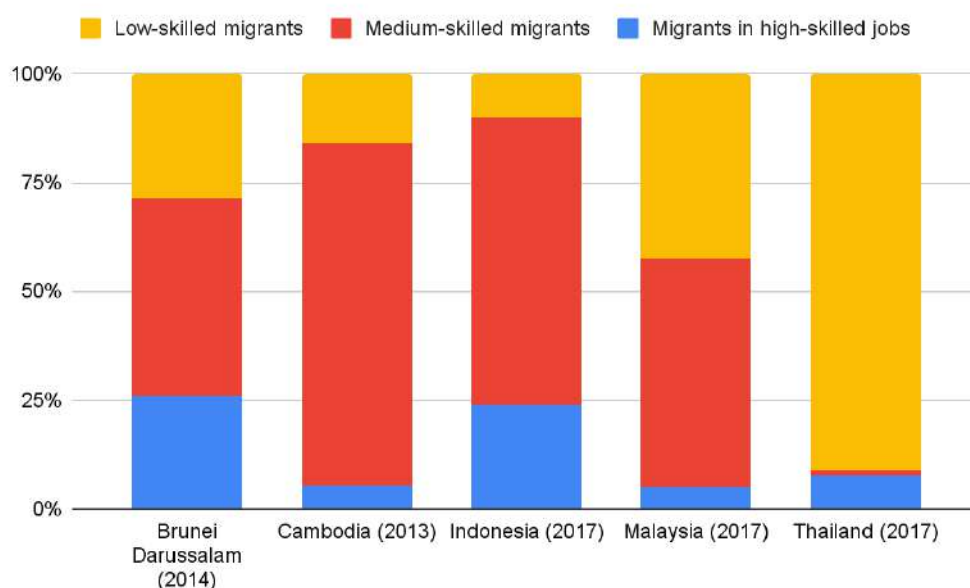
<sup>8</sup> The CLMV group includes Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations. *Ibid.*

In general, intra-ASEAN migrant flows within the ASEAN region mainly involve low- and medium-skilled workers in the informal economy (Papademitriou et al., 2015; ILO & ADB, 2014; Orbeta, 2013). Based on recent estimates depicted in Figure 4 below, a significant share of ASEAN countries' stock of migrant workers occupy middle- and low-skilled positions. This is

particularly true for Thailand, where 91.27% of the total migrant worker population perform low-skilled jobs. Overall, mobility among professionals within the region is rather restricted (Orbeta, 2013), with evidence demonstrating that Asian skilled workers - including those from the ASEAN region - flow outwards to OECD countries in North America, Western Europe, and Oceania (ADB, 2014).

**Figure 4.** Share of Employed Migrants in ASEAN Countries by Occupational Skill Level, Various Years (ILMS<sup>10</sup>)



*Note.* Statistics from different years were used based on the most recent available data at the time of data retrieval. Data on migrants' occupational levels were unavailable for Lao PDR, Myanmar, Singapore, the Philippines, and Viet Nam.

Labour exchange between ASEAN member countries depends largely on the needed skills or specialised areas of expertise labour-importing countries need for their development agenda. Intra-ASEAN labour exchange, as argued by Caparas (2016), is highly dependent on the market characteristics and forces of ASEAN. However, colonial histories, cultural differences, indifference to or lack of awareness about 'One Asia', language barriers, needs differentials, skills set and expertise differentials, and the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) market pose a major hurdle for entrepreneurs, government leaders, and nationals of ASEAN (Caparas, 2016, p. 154).

Despite its challenges, promoting skilled labour migration in ASEAN offers important benefits for the region, including addressing high youth unemployment rates in Member States such as the Philippines and Indonesia (Sugiyarto & Agunias, 2014), alleviating skill shortages (OECD, 2008), and invigorating the ASEAN economy, where a total of 25.6 million skilled jobs run the risk of remaining unfulfilled by qualified workers by 2025 (ILO & ADB, 2014). As such, policy initiatives such as the ASEAN Connectivity Agenda, MPAC 2025, has identified freer skilled labour mobility within ASEAN as a priority in the coming years (ASEAN, 2017). Fostering intra-ASEAN student mobility could reinforce the achievement of this vision,

<sup>10</sup> ILO. (June 2018). International labour migration statistics database in ASEAN. Retrieved on September 20, 2021 from <https://apmigration ilo.org/asean-labour-migration-statistics>



especially when graduates are eventually retained in the host country through the acquisition of relevant career-related resources and mobility capital.

### 3.3. Economic and Educational Background of the Cases

The ASEAN Economic Community has undergone massive developments in the last decade. Its combined gross domestic product (GDP) grew twice as much since 2007, while the region's average GDP per capita increased by 80% (Kikkawa & Suan, 2019). The services sector continues to be the largest contributor to the ASEAN economy steadily growing from 46.6% in 2005 to 50.1% in 2018. The Asia Foundation (2020) reports that the shift from an agriculture-based economy to one increasingly supported by manufacturing and services has resulted in high inflows of foreign direct investments. Such gains can only be sustained if ASEAN economies are able to continue their evolution toward knowledge-intensive service industries, especially those delivered through global digital platforms (ibid). The Asian Development Bank (2021) however maintains that even as more workers transition to nonagricultural employment, the agriculture sector is likely to remain a significant employer. More information about the shares of main economic sectors to total ASEAN GDP from 2005 to 2018 can be found in Appendix 4.

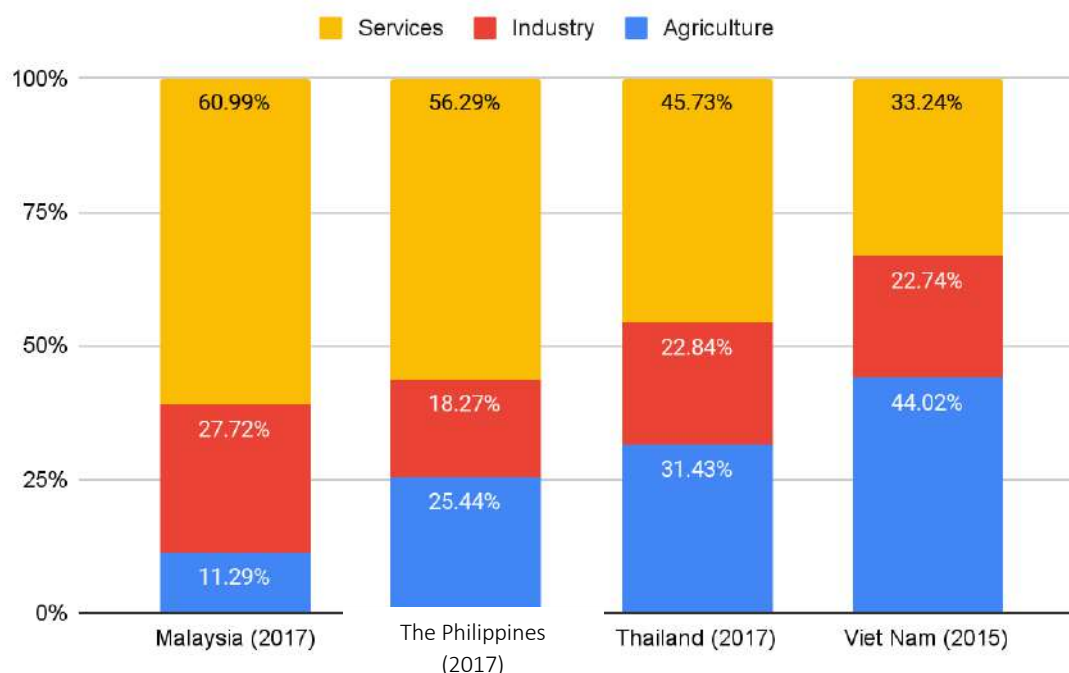
More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital technologies in Southeast Asia's economy, paving the way for increased activity and improved job outlook in related sectors such as e-commerce, e-gaming, communication technology, and e-healthcare (ASEAN Secretariat, 2021). According to a recent study by LinkedIn's Jobs on the Rise Report (n.d.), e-commerce in the region grew by 63% in 2020, resulting in the increased need for workers in logistics and supply chain management. The healthcare and education sectors, which had been largely delivered through traditional face-to-face modalities, have also seen a shift to the online

setting, boosting the demand for workers in the HealthTech and EdTech industries (ibid.).

**Malaysia's** economic activity largely resides in the services and manufacturing sector, representing 54% and 37.5% of its total GDP in 2018, respectively (Asean Secretariat, 2019). These sectors' GDP contributions starkly contrasts with that of agriculture, which represents a modest 7.3%. This distribution is mirrored in Malaysia's total workforce participation, whereby the majority occupy services-related jobs (61%), followed by manufacturing (27.7%) and agriculture (11.3%) (Fig. 5). Malaysia is projected to continue to see a rise not only in its traditionally prevalent sectors such as services and manufacturing, but also in digital sectors (MDEC 2021). LinkedIn (n.d.) reports that Malaysia has become a hotspot for jobs in digital content and marketing, e-commerce, customer service, business development, and supply chain management as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the four cases, Malaysia shows the highest share of medium- and high-skilled workers, at 60% and 28%, respectively (Figure 5).

In the **Philippines**, structural transformation has been taking place over the past decade with more jobs created outside of agriculture (World Bank 2020a). In 2018, the share of the total labour force working in agriculture declined from 35% in 2006 to 26% (ibid). Meanwhile, the share working in the Industry and Services increased from 15% to 18% and 50% to 56% during the same period. Services, particularly Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), information technology, and e-commerce are expected to lead growth recovery as the country navigates its way out of the COVID-19 pandemic (Oxford Business Group, 2020). According to the World Bank (2020b), the skills of the country's current workforce is above regional peers' average but are not fully ready for a digital future. With young people aged 34 years and under making up 67% of its population, the Philippines will only be able to take advantage of its young workforce insofar as education in the country is able to meet the evolving needs of its economy.

**Figure 5.** Percentage of Study Cases' Total Workforce by Economic Sector, Various Years (ILMS<sup>11</sup>)



In **Thailand**, developments in agriculture since the 1960s have supported its transition to an upper middle-income economy. In 2019, the OECD (2020) reports that the agriculture sector supplied 31.5% of total workforce while accounting for 8% of GDP. Meanwhile, the country's industrial sector, owing to its developed automotive and precision engineering clusters, accounted for 33.4% of economic output. In terms of services, of which the hotel and restaurant sub-sector is the fastest growing, contribution to GDP was at 58.6%. Population ageing and resulting skills shortages in the country has resulted in considerable inflows of immigrant workers from neighbouring countries especially in low-skilled occupations (OECD, 2020). Likewise, the increasing number of foreign companies in Thailand has led to the migration of skilled labour, especially in the managerial and technical positions (ibid.).

In **Viet Nam**, agriculture continues to represent an important share of the workforce at 44.02%. While almost half of the total working population in Viet Nam works in agricultural jobs, data from the Asian

Development Bank (2021) show that this pattern seems to be slowing down as the industry and services sector continue to rise.

Viet Nam is emerging as an alternative export manufacturing base to China, especially in electronics, textile and garments, and furniture. In terms of its labour force, Viet Nam has become increasingly skilled since 2008 even if it continues to have the highest share of low-skilled employment among the four cases. According to the Gentile (2019), Viet Nam encourages the dispatch of high-skilled workers for overseas employment in some foreign labour markets. Measures to encourage the dispatch of workers with professional and technical skills for overseas employment have focused on a number of sectors and regions.

While the demand for high-skilled workers has grown over the last decades, an oversupply of graduates can lead to employment difficulties, as has been observed in the nursing and information

<sup>11</sup> ILO. (June 2018). International labour migration statistics database in ASEAN. .Retrieved on September 20, 2021 from <https://apmigration ilo.org/asean-labour-migration-statistics>

technology professions in the Philippines (UNESCO, 2012). As such, the share of tertiary enrollment by discipline is an important consideration when Law take the highest share of tertiary graduates in Thailand (20.5%), the Philippines (28.8%), and Viet Nam (29.2%). Engineering, Manufacturing, and Construction programmes are also popular across four countries, representing the highest share of tertiary students in Malaysia (28.6%) and the third highest in Thailand (19%), the Philippines (15.3%), and Viet Nam (19.9%). Education represents a

analysing graduate employability. Based on WorldBank Edstats, Business, Administration, and

major share of tertiary students both in the Philippines (18.4%) and Viet Nam (25.7%). Other popular programmes include Arts and Humanities (Thailand and Malaysia) and Services (Malaysia and the Philippines). Enrollment in Information, Communications, and Technology (ICT) programmes is also notable in the Philippines (12%) and Malaysia (6.9%).

**Table 8.** Top Five Highest Enrollment Tertiary Programmes across the Cases, Various Years (WorldBank EdStats)<sup>12</sup>

Malaysia (2019)	The Philippines (2017)	Thailand (2016)	Viet Nam (2016)
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction (28.6%)	Business, Administration and Law (28.8%)	Business, Administration and Law (20.5%)	Business, Administration and Law (29.2%)
Business, Administration and Law (26.1%)	Education (18.4%)	Social Sciences, Journalism and Information (19.3%)	Education (25.7%)
Services (8.3%)	Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction (15.3%)	Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction (19%)	Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction (20%)
Arts and Humanities (7.4%)	ICT (12%)	Education (8.6%)	Health and Welfare (6%)
ICT (6.9%)	Services (7.1%)	Arts and Humanities (7.3%)	Agriculture (4.5%)

<sup>12</sup> World Bank EdStats. Retrieved on November 5, 2021 from [https://databank.worldbank.org/indicator/UIS.MSEP.56?id=c755d342&report\\_name=EdStats\\_Indicators\\_Report&populartype=series](https://databank.worldbank.org/indicator/UIS.MSEP.56?id=c755d342&report_name=EdStats_Indicators_Report&populartype=series)

There has been a growing concern for enhancing employability in recent decades, especially in a contemporary context marked by shifting work demands and employment relationships, increased competition for jobs, and an overarching discourse for economic competitiveness and sustainability. In this scenario, incorporating an international dimension through student mobility has been put forward in order to enhance students' employment prospects. However, the available literature on the topic remains particularly disjointed, which warrants the need for a holistic understanding of the links between mobility and employability. For this, and to address RQ/RO2 and RQ/RO3, a literature review was employed in order to map the extent of existing knowledge in the field, collate and summarise relevant studies' findings, and to identify gaps in the literature that can be filled by the SHARE employability study. A number of key findings from the literature reviewed are presented and summarised below.

### 3.4. Literature Review: Mobility's Contributions to Employability

Outbound student mobility has increased rapidly over the past two decades. At the macro level, student mobility has been instrumental in enhancing public diplomacy and human capital for nation-states. At the institutional level, the participation of institutions in student mobility programmes not only helps them and their programmes to be more attractive to students in general, but their partnerships with other institutions will also be created and strengthened, and their visibility and possibly university ranking in the international and regional education areas will increase. Besides, from the institution perspective, their students will benefit most from such mobility programmes since they will acquire skills that they may not otherwise do (Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study, 2019).

This trend of outbound student mobility is argued to be critical in developing students' global outlook, intercultural understanding and employability. Employment stands out as an overriding motivation for studying abroad (Potts, 2015; Trapani & Cassar, 2020; Tran et al., 2021b). Specifically, the mobility experience is believed to provide students with a variety of advantages in the form of 'soft skills', including linguistic improvement, self-dependence, intercultural competence, problem-solving, teamwork, adaptability, and global awareness, which are perceived as contributing factors to graduate employability (Crossman & Clarke, 2010; Jacobone & Moro, 2015; Ling & Kui-Ling, 2019; Potts, 2021; Soares & Mosquera, 2020).

Even in short-term international exchange programmes, the benefits that graduates might gain for their career advancement are noted. Hains-Wesson and Ji (2020) suggest that via a short-term study tour model, students can develop certain inexplicit employability skills, namely managing complexity, developing agility and creativity. International student mobility also equips graduates with networks and connections that will aid their transition to the labour market (Crossman & Clarke, 2010), although study abroad may also weaken students' domestic social capital (Singh & Fan, 2021) and requires an active approach to maintaining networks at home during their overseas education (Tran et al., 2021b). Additionally, a stay abroad is believed to offer an exceptional and unique space for young people for their self-development and realisation of their potential and time of future redirection (Pham & Phan, 2022; Tran et al., 2021b; Jonbekova et al., 2021; Tran & Bui, 2021; Trapani & Cassar, 2020; Lin-Stephens, Uesi & Doherty, 2015).

In various contexts, researchers have looked into the interplay between students' academic mobility and employability. The global exemplary mobility scheme from Europe, the ERASMUS programmes, has also demonstrated through multiple studies and surveys how students' participation in such programmes was beneficial for their job seeking and career development (Jacobone & Moro, 2015). According to the Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study (2019), enhancing student employability through their engagement with mobility is a key trend. In Europe, ERASMUS

graduates were more likely to be employed and the unemployment rate among this cohort within five years after graduation was also lower than their peers who did not go abroad. Their career mobility also shows better prospects for progress. After five years, 57% of Erasmus students were in managerial positions compared to 53% of non-Erasmus participants. The statistics reflect how the policy rationale for the ERASMUS programme has shifted to be in line with the knowledge economy discourse and the emphasis on employability, as well as the needs of business and regional economic competitiveness. In brief, the year abroad has contributed to filling the 'ambiguous position between the academic and the "real" world of employment' (Courtois, 2019, p. 192). Additionally, Di Pietro (2015) found that formerly mobile students are more likely to stay in employment within the first three years after the completion of their degree, even for students from disadvantaged<sup>13</sup> backgrounds.

The effect of student mobility is stronger concerning the future career of graduates in horizontal dimensions, meaning that the mobility seems valuable for those who work in international organisations and/or have international tasks (Petzold, 2021; Soares & Mosquera, 2020). However, Pinto's (2020) study of international students in Spain suggests that mobility does not have much weight in the vertical dimensions of the career, such as on the probability of employment, having a permanent contract, or a high-skilled occupation. Jonbekova et al. (2021) reported that in Kazakhstan, graduates' employability and career success are impeded by an intersection of socioeconomic and cultural factors, intergenerational clashes and scholarship programme regulations. In other studies undertaken in Europe, formerly mobile graduates are found to receive higher wages in their country of origin compared with their non-mobile counterparts (Wiers-Jenssen, 2011). They also experience steeper wage growth in their early careers and have better access to large and/or multinational companies (Wiers-Jenssen, 2011, 2013).

In Australia, one among the most popular mobility programmes is the New Colombo Plan (NCP) initiative in 2014 which aims to boost Australian undergraduate students' employability and broaden their knowledge about the Indo-Pacific region. From the Australian government's point of view, the NCP is regarded as a tool of public diplomacy to foster and strengthen Australia's connections with the Indo-Pacific (Asia, the Pacific and the subcontinent region) through the mechanism of student mobility (Tran, Do, & Bui, 2021c).

Meanwhile, the mobility programme is also expected to provide Australia's young people with a 'rite of passage' into their future life and career. In their study, Tran and colleagues (2021c) conceptualised the notion of 'employability in context' to explore Australian undergraduate students' perception of how their employability has been fostered not only in terms of soft skills and disciplinary knowledge, but also through affording different perspectives, connections and opportunities shaping their career directions as a result of the short-term exchange via the NCP. Specifically, the students' employability and career directions are shaped by factors specific to their context of exchange such as connections to the host communities, their regional experience, changing perspectives and increased knowledge about the Indo-Pacific (Tran et al., 2021c). Potts' (2015) study also suggests that the exposure to new cultures and environments in other countries even marks a shift in graduates' motivation and passion for their chosen career directions. She also confirms that the students were positive about the perceived benefits provided by their international study experiences in terms of their employment outcomes and employability skills development (Potts, 2021). Moreover, students also see their mobility experience as what distinguishes them from their non-mobile peers.

In Asia, Chinese graduates with international education are generally perceived to be employable because they have English competence, cultural exposure, global mindsets, communication skills, teamwork spirit and independence, all of which are often referred to as

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<sup>13</sup> The author considers a student to be from a disadvantaged background if at least one of her parents has a secondary diploma. Meanwhile, advantaged students refer to those whose parents hold university degrees, and very disadvantaged students to those whose parents have basic or no education.

21<sup>st</sup>-century ‘soft’ skill sets favoured by multinational corporations (Tran et al., 2021c; Singh & Fan, 2021; Kiong, Cheng, Pei, & Siew., 2019; Ling & Kui-Ling, 2019; Mok, Han, Jiang, & Zhang, 2018; Li, 2013;). Despite the well-recognised benefits of international education on employability, a number of studies have reported that graduates might be disadvantaged in navigating the home labour market while expecting a high salary and quick promotion (Jonbekova et al., 2021; Pham & Saito, 2020; Cai, 2014).

Meanwhile, the intercultural identity that could gain them advantage in the labour market might not be recognised as ‘a valuable resource of innovation’ (Tran et al., 2021b, p. 3; Jonbekova et al., 2021). The Vietnamese graduates in studies by Pham and Saito (2020) and Tran & Bui (2021) faced a range of barriers hindering their career progression in the Vietnamese labour market, including ‘the rigid working culture’ or ‘stereotyped perceptions about Australian qualifications’. Furthermore, it is concluded by Pham and Saito (2020) that there was not a simple answer to whether the international diplomas from Australian universities were useful and applicable in Viet Nam or not since it was dependent on the extent to which the graduates could be able to use their overseas skills and knowledge in their work.

Of the articles reviewed, only two were found to specifically examine the employability outcomes of formerly intra-ASEAN mobile graduates. Nordin et al. (2020)’s quantitative study involving 146 AIMS alumni found a correlation between studying abroad and being hired in international companies. Acquiring transversal skills (more specifically better understanding of cultural differences, making new friends, and being independent) scored the highest mean score of all the mobility benefits identified, while having job prospects both at home and abroad received the lowest. These results suggest the need to more closely examine the gap between skill acquisition and a positive job outlook. Meanwhile, Ismail et al.’s (2020) mixed-methods study explores the most prominent themes captured by student reports on their AIMS mobility experience, concluding that positive staff-student relationships contribute to participants’ development of personal qualities (such as

resilience and adaptability) and social competencies such as building new relationships with others. This points to the importance of fostering positive curricular experiences in order to reap the benefits of student mobility.



### 3.5. Literature Review: Employers' Perspectives of Mobile Graduates

International students are viewed as a source of skilled migration and employers have been reported to value the global experience of their employees, although they expect graduates to have the ability to translate what they gained from the mobility schemes to their work performance (Crossman & Clarke, 2010; Tran et al., 2021c). Employers consider candidates who studied abroad as having strong interpersonal skills (Sutherland, Thompson & Edirisingha, 2021). It is believed that study abroad experiences enhance students' independence, maturity, ambition, problem solving, self-management and curiosity. Due to exposure to another culture, students are expected to also have adaptability, cross-cultural communication, teamwork competence to work in a diverse, multi-cultural team, and the ability to think outside the box (Nilson & Ripmeester, 2016).

In another study, Bracht et al. (2006) conducted a questionnaire distributed to employers of former ERASMUS students as part of the study 'The Professional Value of Erasmus Mobility' (VALERA). The result is that more than 40% of these employers report that internationally mobile graduates are likely to take over professional assignments with high professional responsibility. Several years later, having higher responsibility at work among ERASMUS participants increased by 51% compared to the VALERA study, and that 30% of employers were found to treat international experience as a recruitment prerequisite rather than a competitive advantage (European Commission, 2014).

In her study that seeks the opinions of HR managers in various countries including Poland, UK, Netherlands, and North America, Ripmeester (2014, cited in Nilson & Ripmeester, 2016) report that recruiters see education mobility as proof of potential employees' capability of stepping outside of their comfort zone who strive for innovation and can handle changes. Furthermore, the globalisation process means that local companies do not serve just local markets. They can extend

their activities to a global scale. In that sense, the skills and dispositions gained from education mobility of graduates make them a preferable cohort of recruits. This trend can be well observed in booming economies that are more internationalised and dynamic such as China (Tran, Phan, & Bellgrove, 2021a; Singh & Fan, 2021) or Indo-Pacific area and Asian countries (Tran et al., 2021b).

Although international exposure is an asset and may make a candidate stand out, it is not a prerequisite to getting a job and the added value of international experience is not always evident to many companies. This is exemplified by Green, King, & Gallagher's (2019) interviews with employers, which reveals that they tended to underestimate the value of international student mobility and became more reflective as the interview progressed. Besides, since the duration of stay varies from short-term of several months to long-term of several years, HR managers expect graduates to have the ability to articulate what and how the time abroad can contribute to their work and the organisations they work for (Nilson & Ripmeester, 2016). In that sense, 'employers do not merely screen applications for foreign experience but also take differentiating factors with regard to that experience into account' (van Mol, Caarls, & Souto-Otero, 2020, p. 4).

A comparative study by van Mol (2017) among 31 European countries also shows that study and internships abroad are particularly valued when good foreign language and decision-making skills are among the main recruitment criteria, but not the other skills. Employers who have positive experiences with (formerly) international students will also be more likely to value study or internships abroad. Likewise, van Mol (2017) found that only a minority of European employers rated international student mobility as important, with employers placing a higher value on internships.

In Tran et al.'s (2021a) observation, while employers' perceptions of international graduate employability in the host country have been researched (such as in Blackmore, Gribble, & Rahimi, 2017; Huang, 2013; Cai, 2012), less is known about how local employers from home countries view the employability between international graduates and local graduates. In a recent study, Tran et al. (2021a) attempted to address this gap by analysing the ways in which foreign credentials were valued by large, medium-sized, and small business employers in the field of accounting in China and India through interviewing 14 key stakeholders: employers, returning graduates, and policymakers.

Contrary to the results of previous research which suggest that Chinese returnees might have a competitive advantage on the local labour market since they possess foreign language competence, capacity to learn quickly, and familiarity with foreign environments, the findings in Tran et al. (2021b) reveal that graduates lack the ability to adapt to the local workplace, or in the words of HR professionals in China, they are not localised enough.

Simultaneously, local employers raise concerns about graduates' insufficient localised knowledge and also their long-term commitment to local small or medium-sized companies because they are seen only as a stepping stone in the graduates' work history. Similarly, the findings in Singh and Fan (2021) reveal that while international Chinese students may possess cultural, linguistics or human capital to facilitate their employment on their return home, they still lack social capital, which is critical in the Chinese labour market. In the British context, there is also evidence of employers' negative stereotypes with regard to international graduates' willingness to apply in smaller companies as opposed to multinational ones, their capacity to acclimatise in the new geographic and organisational context, and the adequacy of their English communication skills to compete with domestic students (Sutherland et al., 2021).

Cultural stereotypes and exclusionary practices (such as excluding applicants with non-Western-sounding surnames and perpetuating a monolithic organisational culture) have also been pointed out as barriers to international students' employment in the host country (Blackmore & Rahimi, 2019).

Besides, non-mobile students can now gain similar attributes as their mobile counterparts, such as foreign language skills, considering the trend of internationalisation at home, transnational education, and the internationalisation of curriculum. In other words, the advantage that mobile graduates used to enjoy several years ago may no longer be evident in contemporary society. Thus, employers and HR professionals are inclined to treat these two groups of potential recruits, mobile and non-mobile graduates, more equally (Tran et al., 2021b). This sparks a debate as to what extent international education is contributive to graduates' employability as they enter their domestic labour market.



# 4 | Findings





# 4. Findings

Building on the desk research findings in Section 3, Section 4 presents the empirical findings gleaned from 83 interviews among graduates and LMRs on the contributions of student mobility to employability. It begins with a discussion of graduates' and LMRs' perspectives separately, followed by an integrated analysis of the match between skills demand and supply as well as the factors and considerations that mediate mobility's value in the labour market.

## 4.1. Supply Side: Graduates' Developed Resources through Mobility

**Most of the graduates developed a range of knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) as a result of their mobility**

Around three in four (n=32) of the graduate respondents view their mobility experience as having a **significant or very significant impact** on their careers primarily as it enabled them to develop a range of resources that enhanced their personal and professional lives, especially transversal or soft skills (n=42). The most highly cited benefit of mobility is the graduates' **skills and confidence when communicating with others** (n=26), mainly in English but also in the host country's language. Similar to what is shown in a study by Cubillos and Ilvento (2012), exchange students in this project were more confident in their language ability after a quick sojourn. When abroad, students more frequently used a foreign language in a range of academic and social contexts than in their home country, leading to their enhanced language competence and confidence in using the language.

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*'I would say I got used to speaking English during the mobility as I had to speak English the whole time.'* (G5, the Philippines)

*'I am not limited to learning sources only available in Thai but through UMAP, I am exposed to information that is presented in a universal language (English) and I can be more rounded.'* (G28, Thailand)

*'In Viet Nam, English is a foreign language. Even though I could speak English, I didn't get a chance to use it in my everyday life, not as much as when I was in Malaysia. In Malaysia, English is a second language, and people use it every day. So when I was there, I had to use English, even when I was in class, when I hung out with my friends or cooking. Hence, my proficiency increased a lot.'* (G10, Viet Nam)

*'The experience from the programme somehow helped improve my communication skills. Not that I could speak fluently right away but it did remove 'the wall' or some kind of fear of speaking the language. Anyway, the mobility was only four months - I didn't improve that much in terms of speaking but it definitely made me more confident to speak.'* (G38, Thailand)

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Enhanced English communication skills are highly appreciated by the graduates not just because they are believed to enhance their labour market prospects overall but also because they coincide with improved **interview skills**. According to G8 and G37:

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*'I became more confident and more mature in the way I answered the interview questions.'* (G8, Viet Nam)

*'Whenever I join an interview, it's all conducted in English. That is how the communication skills that I learned and developed during the mobility program help me... I became more confident speaking in English compared to before.'* (G37, Malaysia)

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*understanding other people's backgrounds, and trying to mix around and collaborate with one another.'* (G32, Malaysia)

*'I had to live in the same house with people who were from different programmes and each one of us was so different and of different personality. Having experience of living with other students helped me a lot with my work because I have to deal and work with people who have different opinions.'* (G41, Thailand)

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Another widely developed skill among the respondents is **intercultural competence**<sup>14</sup> (n=18), which graduates attributed to both formal learning arrangements (e.g., by being with local and international classmates) and informal learning experiences (e.g., living with people from other nationalities). As many of the respondents' jobs involve working with people from different cultures and backgrounds, intercultural competence has become a largely relevant skill. According to the graduates:

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*'What I mostly learned from my exchange was soft skills like being able to cooperate with people who come from diverse backgrounds and have very different working styles. I realised that this does not come naturally to anybody. It comes from your background and from the things you have been exposed to.'* (G4, the Philippines)

*'The five months when I was there, it's like getting more exposure, more experiences, and more life skills, I can say. And you deal with your daily life out of curiosity, of learning new things. So it's a very significant impact, especially on my career right now. [...] The communication skills, interpersonal skills, mixing with other people, understanding their cultures,*

Another relational domain that graduates were able to develop through mobility was interpersonal skills, including being more sociable and extroverted (G3 and G9). For instance, G9 from Viet Nam relates:

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*'Before becoming a scholarship student, I was so introverted. After that, I became an extrovert and many many employers, when they looked at my CV, they can actually understand that I'm an extrovert, I am sociable. This is the personality required for many jobs, not only in English teaching but also in jobs that require interacting with others.'* (G9, Viet Nam)

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Meanwhile, the graduates were also satisfied with the fact that their mobility made them learn to become **adaptable** (n=14) to different situations and social contexts, which was a skill they brought to their work and one that they thought would be an asset to their long-term careers and employment. Besides being immersed in an unfamiliar environment, G23's experiences also point to the role of the learning opportunities embedded in the study programme in developing this skill.

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<sup>14</sup> There is a well-developed scholarship on intercultural competence, and a variety of definitions and frameworks exist alluding to the term. For the purposes of this report, the definition provided by Bennett & Bennett (2004) is employed, whereby intercultural competence is understood as 'the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts' (p. 149).

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*'Being adaptable and knowing how to communicate effectively are the top skills I developed from the mobility experience that help me with my work at the moment. Having had international experience, I did not find it difficult to adapt to the culture in the organisation that I currently work in.'* (G6, the Philippines)

*'Also thinking on your feet and being adaptable. We got this skill from being exposed to documentary filmmaking where we can't plan out what happens or how subjects would respond. Or if you suddenly run out of daylight. We have to think on our feet.'* (G23, the Philippines)

*'So not only did I learn their language but I can also mingle and adapt to the situation that I have to face at that moment ... I'm all alone there and it taught me how to adapt to that kind of situation... when I'm in the workplace, in a different environment... you can put me anywhere and I can adapt with the situation.'* (G35, Malaysia)

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Several graduates alluded to developing characteristics such as independence and autonomy (n=9) as a result of their mobility. G4 from the Philippines, now working as a supply chain network operator in a logistics company, said:

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*'The qualities that I developed from the exchange program and are relevant in my work now are being independent and doing well alone, and being autonomous and working with little supervision which is something you don't learn in the classroom or at home. I have noticed that these are common traits among my colleagues who have also lived and studied abroad.'* (G4, the Philippines)

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The following graduates from Malaysia and Thailand shared a similar viewpoint:

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*'One of the abilities and skills that I developed during mobility experiences is being independent. Now, I can do my work independently with minimum supervision.'* (G34, Malaysia)

*'[The exchange] was truly beneficial in my career as I am able to learn it faster and be a great team player in my team. Working in a fast-paced environment, you need to learn independently and quickly finish the task precisely.'* (G36, Malaysia)

*'This program somehow removed my fear or the limitations I set for myself. I was able to step outside of my comfort zone.'* (G38, Thailand)

*'Having been a student abroad, I had to do everything by myself. I think I have become more self-organised and managed my time better.'* (G40, Thailand)

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In summary, the graduates reported significantly developing a range of soft skills and characteristics that are relevant to the labour market, which mirrors what has been found in the literature (e.g., Sisavath, 2021; Farrugia & Sanger, 2017; Potts, 2015; Cubillos & Ilvento, 2012; Crossman & Clarke, 2010). The engagement with academic and cultural activities held within and outside the campus, such as working in groups for presentations, cultural exchange events, and extracurricular activities allowed graduates to become more familiar and frequently interact with their fellow students from different countries, as well as local people. Such experiences enabled them to not only develop communication skills but also problem-solving and analytical skills, independence and adaptability, which they reiterated were essential skills to survive and thrive in the world of work.

This finding resonates with what Yorke (2006) defines as 'a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations' (p.

4). In that sense, studying abroad was a life-changing experience that made the graduates both personally and professionally more mature and confident. They also believed that the mobility experience could convey the information to employers that graduates were, to an extent, outstanding, able to overcome challenges, adapt to workplaces, and take responsibility. This in turn would create a competitive edge for mobile students compared with non-mobile students in the labour market and incentivise employers to hire them.

### Graduates were able to expand their social networks and contacts, especially in the form of 'weak ties'

The mobility allowed graduates to enhance their social assets by developing a **network of friends and acquaintances** through the program (n=12). Although not all graduates (G3, G16, G22) found it possible to maintain the network they had in the host country, these relationships can be considered '**weak ties**', which have been shown to be instrumental for job hunting and career progression. Weak ties provide people with access to information and resources beyond those available in their own social circle (Granovetter, 1983). This is true for G1, who was able to engage in 'business endeavours with different friends apart from getting employment'. Graduates like G32 and G37 are also optimistic about how the network they created during their mobility can offer new professional opportunities and collaborations in the future:

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*'I hope that sometime in the future I will get to make use of the connections with the teachers/ university that I have established back then. For example, if my school has any program to bring students to study or go on an excursion abroad, I could ask to do a field trip or a short-term program there. Or in the case of the foreign friends I made, from the Philippines, China, Taiwan...for example, I could ask my friends for some help to take care of my Thai students if they ever travel abroad alone to those countries so that the students feel supported. They feel like*

*they have someone who can help them.'*  
(G30, Thailand)

*'I actually went to Thailand two years ago to visit my friends there, and sometimes we discuss jobs or business opportunities. Of course, we haven't realised it yet, but who knows?'* (G32, Malaysia)

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For the graduates, the networks and friendships they established since the exchange have been supported by social network platforms like LinkedIn (G32, G33), and they foresee a future where international job opportunities can be shared among these networks. Some examples are as follows:

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*'I still connect and talk with my Korean friends, with my overseas friends. And actually, we are also sharing jobs as well, like if there are opportunities. Oh, this one, we have this in Thailand. You can try here. They need a Malaysian speaker. They need an Indonesian speaker. So we can also try. I think it influenced me a lot because we are still connected. We still keep in touch. So yeah, I think my network is getting bigger and bigger.'* (G35, Malaysia)

*'In terms of being employable, I would say that we still connect on LinkedIn and sometimes, I did have a job offer from one of my friends in Indonesia that I could write for because I think that the local Malaysian media that employs Indonesians for people to go there, so we did have a chat on LinkedIn because it was like we're the same connection. I wouldn't say it happens a lot, but it has happened.'* (G33, Malaysia)

*'I met amazing friends there (Cambodia), and they always encourage me to get out of my comfort zone. Besides that, they also share if there's an opportunity that I can try.'* (G34, Malaysia)

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Likewise, G2 reports that it has become easy for her to **kickstart collaborative projects** between her school and other alumni from her host country Cambodia, while G12 was able to invite international friends to teach students learning English in her workplace. The exchange programme also allowed the graduates to establish contacts that led to job opportunities, for example, G37 said:

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*‘Actually, my career now is from my friends. She did share with me the vacancy available in the company, and I tried and was glad that I secured this job.’ (G37, Malaysia)*

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For G6, the contact with the mobility programme and her continued involvement in the activities opened new professional opportunities and further widened her professional network:

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*‘The opportunities that the mobility opened, I think are also helpful. After the mobility, I had the opportunity to intern at the SHARE consortium and work at the backend. I was also given the opportunity to help organise policy dialogues. I was able to widen my network during these events.’ (G6, the Philippines)*

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The analysis shows similarities with prior research in terms of the social resources accumulated from the mobility experience as a valuable resource for boosting one’s chances in the labour market (Sisavath, 2021; Tomlinson, 2017; Batistic & Tymon, 2017; Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth, 2004). The networks, key contacts, relationships, and activities related to creating and keeping ties with others can enhance the graduates’ possibilities to find a job, or even create jobs among themselves. The findings in this study also highlight the potential strength of weak ties (Tumen, 2017) in graduates’ employability through the circulation of useful information as well as new career windows.

### Graduates also found their mobility experience as a gateway to new career horizons and interests

While not directly related to KSAOs and social networks, graduates found value in the mobility experience in that it has helped a number of them **expand their professional interests and horizons** (n=10). By being allowed to take courses they were interested in outside of their major, students had an opportunity to explore a new possible career track or consider entrepreneurial pursuits. Below are some of the interview excerpts that illustrate the points:

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*‘The SHARE scholarship was a stepping stone for me, leading me to another job that I hadn’t even thought of. In the beginning, I thought I would work in an industrial park or a garment factory in alignment with my major. But after the SHARE programme, I developed a lot, including confidence and English skills, and I thought I possibly wanted to do something related to Business in the future.’ (G14, Viet Nam)*

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*‘Thanks to the programme, I found a passion for Anthropology, a change in my professional career and academic development trajectory.’ (G21, Viet Nam)*

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Additionally, this freedom to choose elective courses **broadened the graduates’ academic horizons**, allowing them to **gain exposure to alternative ways of learning**. According to G18:

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*‘As I took the courses that were not my major, I had a chance to learn what they taught in other disciplines, and what it was about. There were some courses that mostly Indonesians attended, so I could learn how they studied, how they thought, and what made them think that way.’ (G18, Viet Nam)*

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For some others, the mobility experience provided them with **professional clarity and affirmation of their career choice** (n=7). The following interview excerpts highlight this point.

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*'My experience at IPB University made me more interested in agriculture which is very much in line with my values since food comes from agriculture first before anywhere else.'* (G1, the Philippines)

*'During the exchange time, I found the motivation to study, my real passion. I had a clearer picture of what I was learning and became more excited about it.'* (G22, Viet Nam)

*'UMAP helped me to be clear about my professional trajectory.'* (G15, Viet Nam)

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Thanks to the positive experience during the exchange programme, some graduates also **engaged with further mobility in various forms (employment, workshops, and conferences)** (such as G1, G6, G27) or were inspired to **further their studies overseas** (such as G4, G19, G21) (n=12). For instance, G21 from Viet Nam was inspired to look for a master's programme scholarship abroad, while G1 from the Philippines 'kept going abroad because of invitations to events and competitions'. The following excerpts allude to these benefits:

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*'I believe that my mobility experience contributed to getting me accepted to a master's program abroad (Spain). So for me, study abroad experiences are important not just for employability but also if you want to pursue further studies.'* (G4, the Philippines)

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*'SHARE had a big impact on my professional development trajectory, finding interest in doing research, and feeling inspired to study further overseas.'* (G19, Viet Nam)

*'It opened me to new realities and new ways of thinking that would definitely inform my decisions in the future. Just the fact that I am now working in another foreign land is already a product of my mobility experience because I learned that I can do it and that I want to do it.'* (G27, the Philippines)

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In accordance with existing literature, the mobility experience also provided the students in this study with opportunities to enhance their 'soft skills', including linguistic improvement, self-dependence, intercultural competence, problem-solving, teamwork, adaptability, and global awareness (Potts, 2021; Soares & Mosquera, 2020; Ling & Kui-Ling, 2019; Jacobone & Moro, 2015; Crossman & Clarke, 2010). These attributes were acknowledged by the graduates to help them perform well at work and developed as well-rounded individuals. Further, the mobility experience was regarded as valuable for those who wanted to work in international organisations and/or have international tasks (Petzold, 2021; Soares & Mosquera, 2020).

A stay abroad, though for a short period of time, offered an exceptional and unique space for young people to realise their potentials and capabilities, as well as orientation for future development. In prior research, similar findings have been noted (Tran et al., 2021b; Tran & Bui, 2021; Jonbekova, et al., 2021; Trapani & Cassar, 2020; Lin-Stephens, Uesi & Doherty, 2015). The intra-ASEAN mobile students were able to not only foster their soft skills and disciplinary knowledge, but also have different perspectives, regional knowledge, and connections which in turn shaped their career directions and personal development. This is similar to the Australian students in a study by Tran et al. (2021c) who had exchange experiences in Asia through the New Colombo Plan. The findings in this study extend the scholarship of international



student and regional student mobility by highlighting how a mobility experience allowed the students to gain an in-depth understanding of the career they would pursue or see the future career in a new light. A display matrix of graduate respondents' developed resources is attached in Appendix 6.

### Despite mobility's contributions to the development of employability-enhancing resources, some of its career benefits were not immediately accessible to some graduates

Some of the respondents (n=9) felt that the mobility experience led to **more positive changes in their personal development** rather than career enhancement (for instance, G5, G34, G28 and G35), which runs parallel with Potts' (2015) findings. As G5 and G28 share:

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*'Most of the skills needed in my career, I learned by self-studying or learning on the job. Maybe the only thing that is helpful to my current situation which I got from the mobility is knowing how to live away from my family.'* (G5, the Philippines)

*'It had little impact on my career. It opened me to new realities and new ways of thinking that would definitely inform my decisions in the future. [...] However, I think that one semester of mobility is too short for it to create more significant changes in my career.'* (G27, the Philippines)

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Another reason is that the graduates assumed the mobility experience would be more suitable when **pursuing an international career** (G35, Malaysia), implying its particular relevance and desirability for multinational companies and those with a large foreign clientele. Interviews with some graduates also suggest that employers were **more focused on job-specific skills and knowledge** and **did not show enough interest** in the experience of mobility, especially during recruitment (for instance, G3, G5,

G24, G25, G28, G34). As some of the graduates explained:

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*'When the interviewers were reviewing my resume and they saw that I've gone to a mobility program, they'll be like, oh, interesting. How long did you do it, one semester? And they will not indulge more in that topic. The conversation just stops there. [...] Recruiters tend to focus more on my technical skills and not my soft skills.'* (G3, Malaysia, Engineering and ICT)

*'During my interviews, the employers immediately asked about my experience abroad, especially my internship experience in Viet Nam. It's also worthy to note that they didn't really ask about my academics abroad. They focused more on internship programs. It makes me wonder if they still would have considered my application without that internship abroad.'* (G24, the Philippines, Social Sciences and Humanities)

*'They didn't ask me anything about my mobility. They already had a fixed set of questions that they planned to ask each candidate. So they didn't go out of the topic and talk about it.'* (G28, Thailand, Education)

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These opinions are not peculiar. In Pinto's (2020) study of international students in Spain, it is found that mobility does not have much weight in the vertical dimensions of the career, such as on the probability of employment, having a permanent contract, or a high-skilled occupation. However, evidence from the study has shown that intra-ASEAN mobility experience brought a range of benefits by allowing graduates to develop valuable KSAOs for job performance, gain professional contacts, open new career horizons and interests, and facilitate their overall personal and professional development.

**Box 1.** Case Vignette of Mobile Graduate from Malaysia

## Expanding Horizons

Julia (G33) was a Journalism and Public Relations undergraduate student who always had her sights set on studying abroad, so when she heard about the SHARE mobility programme from her university's mobility counsellor, she and her best friend decided to apply. Looking for an immersive experience, she decided to go to Indonesia due to the cultural and linguistic proximity of the country. Her undergraduate programme also allowed her to choose elective subjects, and she was able to achieve a balanced mix of humanities and business-oriented courses to expand her interests and academic repertoire.

During her five-month mobility in Indonesia, Julia picked up Bahasa Indonesia and became conversational in the language in a matter of weeks. After graduation, she landed a job as a food editor at a local media company that had plans of expanding to Indonesia. Her ability to speak the local language coupled with her knowledge of the food scene that she gained as a mobility student in Indonesia made her just the right person for the job. Julia was able to play to her strengths and specifically go for opportunities that she believes particularly match her skill set.

Julia currently works at a multinational bank in Malaysia as a content specialist. Her mobility experience allows her to interact more meaningfully with her Indonesian colleagues, relating her experiences and the places she has been to in their country to establish rapport and connection. Julia feels that she has become better at interacting with people from different backgrounds. Due to her experience being a foreigner during her mobility stay in Indonesia, she understood the importance of being both interesting and interested in the new people she meets.

Julia feels that job opportunities await her not just in Malaysia but also elsewhere. She would be interested to work in Indonesia, in the Philippines, and in Singapore. She feels more confident and competent to work in another country because she has already been previously exposed to mobility. She shared that employers seem to value her international profile and view her previous mobility experience as a sign of maturity and willingness to go out of her comfort zone.

**Box 2.** Case Vignette of Mobile Graduate from the Philippines

## Business Savvy

Maya (G1) was in her sophomore year as a Food Technology student at the University of Sto. Tomas when she met Tanya who was an exchange student from Indonesia. With some encouragement from her newfound friend and the desire to explore other career possibilities in food manufacturing, Maya applied for a SHARE scholarship to spend a semester at the Bogor Agricultural Institute (IPB) in Indonesia.

A myriad of learning experiences awaited Maya at IPB. She was introduced to a variety of agricultural food products and different ways of food preparation. She also had the opportunity to work on a second thesis which later helped her secure an internship at the International Rice Research Institute.

Yet, perhaps the most enriching experience Maya had came when she and Tanya were given the opportunity to operate a small business that supplied sandwiches to the local community store in the university. Looking back at this experience, Maya learned that strong connections with the right people can help turn an idea to a reality. She believes that simple items that are easy to make can be a good business opportunity as long as it is executed well and fits the target market.

After completing her degree in Food Technology at UST, Maya went on to work as an assistant manager for the family business where she was able to apply efficiency maximising processes for soybean curd production – knowledge she had acquired from her exposure at IPB.

## Finding Meaning in a New Sector

Ocean (G31) was a female undergraduate from Chiang Mai University who participated in AUN programme at the University of the Philippines (UP) in 2017.

Despite having studied psychology, Ocean yearned to explore other options at that stage of her life. She knew that she loved nature and marine biodiversity, so she took up an introductory course in marine science called 'Oceans and Us' at UP to explore her passion and gain new knowledge. Later, she decided to spend her time in the Philippines learning how to dive and eventually got a diving certificate. Ocean also got to know a marine biologist, the Assistant Professor of her course at UP, who contacted her later when she was back home in Thailand to tell her about a volunteer opportunity in the humpback whale research in the Babuyan Islands, where she spent 8 hours daily on a boat surveying, documenting locations of humpback whales, and gaining more knowledge in the new field.

Thanks to her improved English and awareness of environmental issues, upon her return to Chiang Mai, Ocean started engaging in an international community and built up networks via different social activities. She met a Singaporean friend and together founded a small environmental club called 'Less Plastic is Fantastic' to educate people in her community

to reduce the consumption of single-use plastic through workshops, dialogues, and organised events with schools, local business owners, and organisations. She also met her partner in the international community and moved to Spain in 2019.

Since then, Ocean has never stopped improving herself. She has taken the opportunity of living in Europe to gain life experiences and keeps learning in the new field. She took up a divemaster course in Tenerife, and went to work on a tourist boat in Djibouti for six months. Later, she started engaging in learning opportunities through different projects and volunteer programmes, some of which were funded by organisations such as the European Solidarity Corps, Erasmus Plus, and SEO Birdlife (Spanish Ornithological Society).

At the moment, she lives in Coma-Ruga, Spain, where she works as a paid volunteer facilitator in an Erasmus Plus project in marine conservation. She believed that the main reason for her successful application came from her AUN mobility: the connections she made, her basic knowledge and skills in the related field, her improved English and international exposure, and her active community engagement in environmental issues.

**Box 4.** Case Vignette of Mobile Graduate from Viet Nam

## Thriving at Work

Harry (G8) was a student in Control Engineering and Automation. He applied for the SHARE scholarship to have an exchange semester in, as he described, a top university in Indonesia. Besides, Harry believed that the involvement of prestigious organisations like DAAD and EU Education Agency were the signal and guarantee of the credibility, prestige, and professionalism of the SHARE scholarship. Harry expected to gain meaningful experiences during this mobility and meet new friends from different cultures.

The exchange lived up to Harry's expectations. It allowed him to engage with a wide network of students from many universities worldwide. He met people coming from all corners of the world such as the Netherlands, Germany, Japan, Brazil, and the Middle East. The diversity was what made him stand out compared with his peers, and what he could not find in his home university and country. His perspectives were widened, and he became more open to differences.

The exchange and other social activities (such as attending workshops and conferences) that he engaged in during a semester in Indonesia had a significant impact on how Harry conceptualised his career trajectory, as well as his personal and professional development. He had, in his words, an 'ambition' to become 'a global leader' in his field. The reason was that he learned to value leadership in an international environment.

Harry landed his first job as an engineer for Intel, an international corporation in technology, right after returning to Viet Nam from his exchange. He has been working in this organisation for the past four years.

As he had experience networking with international friends from different countries, Harry was confident when he collaborated with colleagues from Europe, the US, and Asia. From his experience, what made him stand out in his workplace was his communication and negotiation skills, as well as the ambition to strive for better and become a global leader, which he described as 'my guiding light of professional development'.

## 4.2. Demand Side: Resources Demanded by Labour Market Representatives

Employers largely demand a range of job-specific and soft skills, especially communication, interpersonal, critical thinking, and digital skills

Information gleaned from interviews with LMRs (n=40) shows that the most commonly cited factor for recruitment is the potential employee's job-specific or technical knowledge, skills, and abilities (n=22). Examples include computer programming and software development (Engineering and ICT), data analytics (Business, Social Sciences and Humanities), and teaching competencies (Education). The following interview excerpts illustrate this point.

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*'It comes down to the position and scope of work we expect from the employee...Almost all the companies we are working with are accepting our learners without qualifications and experience. They focus on the technical skills and social skills that are needed for that particular role.'* (L15, Thailand)

*'To me, the most important factor is their professional knowledge and work capacity. For instance, good pronunciation, many of the courses in our school focus on speaking skills, so pronunciation is important.'* (L4, Viet Nam)

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*'We are looking for job-specific skills.*

*Education background is great but certification is more important. We could be talking about anybody from a top tier university but if that person does not have the industry's required skills, say project management, then the candidate with needed skills from a lesser-known university would be chosen.'* (L11, the Philippines)

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Communication skills (oral and written) which include language proficiency, are the second most-cited resource needed by employers (n=20). The following employers from the Philippines and Malaysia highlight this point.

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*'Another important skill is quality verbal and non-verbal communication. In any job, you will be interacting with other people: whether it may be your coworkers, your boss, or even your clients. It is critical that you are able to communicate your thoughts and ideas into quality work that is required of you.'* (L34, the Philippines)

*'I've heard some HR directors and hiring managers talk about the quality of English as well. When they see that you're a foreign graduate on a CV or that you had mobility in those Western countries, that your quality of English and communication are higher. I think that's the perception. And communication these days, that skill set is so important because it's something that people here feel that's really lacking in the talent pool.'* (L22, Malaysia)

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LMRs also reveal the importance of a range of soft skills when deciding who to hire. The most cited among these are the ability to work in groups or interpersonal skills (n=8), problem-solving, critical thinking and decision-making skills (n=7), and digital literacy (n=7). The following are interview excerpts on the importance of interpersonal skills:

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*'Second is teamwork. The jobs for which we hire require coordination skills. They work on one project but that project involves multiple teams. So I expect they can work well in teams and are able to coordinate.'* (L9, Viet Nam)

*'People from our country are naturally sensitive. Like when you reprimand an employee for not hitting targets, they are, they get so emotional to the point that they become defensive. But I've seen the difference with those who were exposed overseas and worked with foreigners who don't take things personally. It's just work.'* (L13, the Philippines)

*'Based on the Jobs Fit Labour Market Information released in December 2021, there is a high demand for workers with the following skills: 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, effective communication and collaboration.'* (L32, the Philippines)

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Candidates' qualities like adaptability and open-mindedness (n=12), showing commitment and passion for the job (n=5), curiosity (n=4), and creativity (n=4) are also valued by the respondents. The data analysis bears strong resemblance to what has been reported in existing literature (e.g. Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011) in which employers' hiring decisions are found to be based on graduates' values and personal qualities as much as their potential to perform the job. The high value placed on communication skills has also been identified in employer surveys as outlined in several studies (CIMO & Demos Helsinki, 2014; Brandenburg, Berghoff, & Taboadela, 2014).



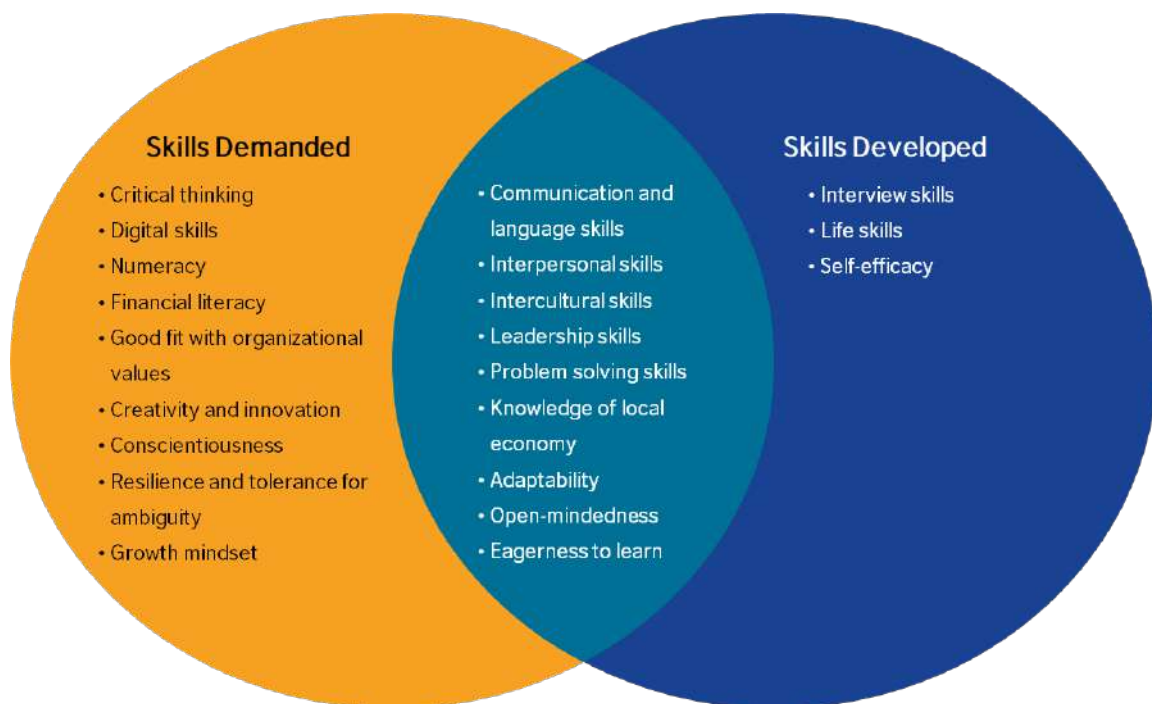
### 4.3. Supply and Demand

#### Side Factors: Mobility's Value in the Labour Market

There are overlaps between the skills demanded by employers and those developed by graduates through mobility. Following a comparison of the skills developed by graduates through mobility and those required by employers, the study's findings suggest a close alignment between the supply- and demand-side dimensions (Figure 6). Job-specific skills, while mentioned by both employers and graduates, are highly specific to certain roles and are therefore not included in this figure. As such, Figure 6 below primarily alludes to the overlaps in transversal or soft skills. It was found that the highly demanded and developed skills through

mobility revolve around relational domains such as communication and language skills, intercultural skills, and interpersonal skills, as well as characteristics pertaining to adaptability, open-mindedness, and eagerness to learn. This aligns with the findings of CIMO & Demos Helsinki (2014) among Finnish employers, who found that some of the sought-after attributes among new hires (e.g., curiosity and problem-solving skills) match those that they associated with international experiences. A display matrix of the KSAOs needed in the labour market is attached in Appendix 7.

**Figure 6.** Skills Demanded by Employers vs. Skills Developed by Graduates through Mobility





For graduates, an **improvement in English proficiency** also translated into **enhanced confidence** in attending interviews with employers, which proves valuable in the labour market. As several employers alluded to, **communication skills** are important for graduates not just to perform well on the job but also signal their skills and their values to the employers. According to L22, an employer from Malaysia:

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*'I think the important thing is to be able to speak to that (mobility) experience and to demonstrate it in the interview because sometimes we go through programs and we go through experiences, but maybe we didn't make full use of those experiences and everything that it can offer. And so while yes, it would pique our interest, I think where the real value is can you speak to that experience? Can you articulate what you've learned, how it's changed you, and how you've made an impact on other people? I think that's really where the value is.'* (L22, Malaysia)

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### Many graduates found that the skills they developed through their intra-ASEAN mobility experience were relevant or useful to their current or past work roles

Several graduates alluded to specific skills developed as a result of their mobility experience that they are able to apply in their current or past work roles. One of the most highly cited ones is **intercultural competence** (n=10). Incidentally, many of the interviewed graduates were working in either locally operated companies with ethnically diverse colleagues or in organisations with a presence in multiple countries in the Asia Pacific. As the graduates share:

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*'I found this program to be significantly useful to my job because I can apply the knowledge and skills I have gained there in my real job. Like communicating with foreigners. I feel more confident, I worry less about grammar issues but I care more about understanding each other.'* (G29, Thailand)

*'Right now I work in a bank and I need to work with many people from different backgrounds because in Malaysia we have Chinese, Indians and other foreigners as well. It's really those five months in Bandung, Indonesia that have been so helpful to reach a compromise when I work with my colleagues... To be able to understand other people's perspectives, and why they give their opinions like that. You try to be receptive to the way that they deal with their work and all that, and we try to look at things with a very holistic approach. I think if I did not join the programme, I think that I will only learn how to adjust as I start to work.'* (G32, Malaysia)

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For some graduates, gains in intercultural competence were coupled with improved **communication and interpersonal skills**, which allowed them to either relate better with their colleagues or do better at their jobs.

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*'During the mobility, I had to learn how to communicate with locals and peers who came from different parts of Asia. There were things that they did not understand about my culture, or there were concepts that I had to explain in detail because they had a different perspective about it. Learning from that experience has helped me come up with communication materials that cut through barriers and get the message across.'* (G24, the Philippines)

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*'The program has actually given me the confidence to speak up during meetings and to share my opinions with international colleagues. It also gave me a bit of knowledge in terms of handling differences with them.'* (G26, Malaysia)

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For Education professionals like G17, G25 and G30, participating in the programme also allowed them to establish a connection with their students and inspire them with their experiences during the mobility. Additionally, some graduates also cited being able to **problem-solve independently** as one of the main contributions of their mobility experience to their current job (G4, G6, G34). As G6 shares:

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*'Problem-solving and being quick-witted is also very relevant to my job now. There are times when we need to complete a task quickly with minimal guidelines. This is something that my mobility experience helped me with.'* (G6, the Philippines)

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The data also show that the **professional knowledge and know-how** acquired in the host university or country, which would otherwise be unavailable to the participants, played an important role in their ability to perform their jobs. This is particularly evident for G11 and G23, whose exposure to professional practices in the host countries allowed them to innovate in their jobs. In addition to being exposed to a different academic culture, it appears that the relevance of knowledge acquired also depended on the learning opportunities embedded in the study programme's curriculum, which points to the role of educational quality in boosting graduates' career outcomes:

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*'My food processing class in Bogor helped me out in the processes in our own company like making new products and trying to maximise efficiency.'* (G1, the Philippines)

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*'I can transfer a lot from what I learned to my current work... The teachers showed me a different way to look at language teaching. They told me during a Literature session that grammar did not matter most in a language. I knew that before, but I could only understand this thoroughly during my time in Malaysia. Now when I teach, I also tell my students the same thing.'* (G11, Viet Nam)

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*'In my current line of work, it is really important to know how to work with a production team and be familiar with the jargon. This is something that I was exposed to in my classes in Cambodia and my experience there being surrounded by people who did production.'* (G23, the Philippines)

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In line with this, some LMRs alluded to the importance of **providing quality and relevant educational experiences** to graduates to target specific skills, including 'curating' experiences that expose them to situations they can encounter in the workplace (L26). LMRs like L20 and L38 also alluded to the importance of graduates' study habits, self-initiative, the skills of the teaching staff, and the quality of the educational experience overall. As L38 observes:

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*In terms of soft skills, graduates who have studied abroad might have a slight advantage as they are exposed to the 'real world' earlier... However, when it comes to hard or technical skills, the person who has been on a study abroad exchange might not necessarily be better than a student who has only studied locally. It really depends on each individual's focus and personality. This includes the individual's willingness to study course curriculum diligently, explore materials outside of university, work on personal projects, just to name a few. The educators' skills and experience also play a huge factor in shaping graduates' skills and qualities.'* (L38, Malaysia)

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This finding alludes to an important point for higher education institutions to foster positive and appropriate curricular experiences for graduates to reap the career and skills development benefits of student mobility. As evidenced by Ismail, Saikim, Yahaya, Pau, & Ibrahim's (2020) mixed-methods study exploring the most prominent themes captured by student reports on their AIMS mobility experience, they concluded that positive staff-student relationships contributed to participants' development of personal qualities (such as resilience and adaptability) and social competencies such as building new relationships with others.

### Employers generally hold a positive view of mobility, either within or beyond the ASEAN region

The labour market representatives interviewed generally have a **positive view of mobility regardless of whether it takes place within ASEAN or elsewhere**, which runs parallel with findings from prior studies in non-ASEAN contexts (CIMO & Demos Helsinki, 2014; Geldres-Weiss, Flander, & Almeida, 2017). This potentially offers wider possibilities for young people in the region to access and reap the benefits of mobility through intra-regional student exchange programmes. Graduates' responses alluded to this point, whereby short-term student mobility in a neighbouring ASEAN country was seen as an opportunity to enrich their educational experiences without leaving the region. Overall, these trends point to the huge potential in South-South mobility and cooperation in ASEAN.

### Intra-ASEAN mobility appears to give candidates an edge in the labour market, with some caveats

Around half of the LMRs interviewed (n=20) report that **study abroad gives a candidate some advantage** in the hiring process, especially during the screening or interview stage. According to HR professionals L22 and L25, a mobility experience raised their interest in a candidate, especially when dealing with a large volume of applicants. Likewise, L38 alluded to the desirability of previous study

abroad experience given the current globalised job market. This finding somewhat deviates from other studies in non-ASEAN contexts that found mobility to have modest effects on hiring decisions (Van Mol, 2017; Wiers-Jenssen & Storen, 2021). A likely explanation is that countries with more mobile students and higher positions in global hierarchies (as is the case in several European countries) tend to dampen mobility's differentiating effect (Van Mol, Caarls, and Souto-Otero, 2020). In contrast, the relatively recent mobility impetus in ASEAN region and its (mainly) peripheral position in global higher education are likely to generate a competitive advantage.

Findings from the study also suggest that employers perceive **formerly mobile graduates to possess a number of desirable skills and characteristics** valued in the job market. For instance, employers expect them to have better English skills than non-mobile peers (E4, E8). They also associate a host of soft skills with mobility, especially communication skills (L4, L5, L6, L7, L8, L10, L12, L17, L38), open-mindedness (L3, L9, L10, L17, L18, L19, L20, L26, L35, L37), adaptability (L2, L17, L19, L20), autonomy and independence (L17, L20, L38), interpersonal skills and teamwork (L8, L19), resilience (L5, L20, L26), and creativity and innovation (L14, L17, L26). They are also viewed as proactive in seeking opportunities and life experiences, eager to learn, and motivated to 'prove themselves'. These qualities align with those identified in existing literature, whereby recruiters consider formerly mobile candidates as possessing desirable qualities and dispositions such as strong interpersonal skills, independence, maturity, ambition, problem solving, self-management, curiosity, adaptability, cross-cultural communication, and teamwork competency (Pham & Phan, 2022; Sutherland, Thompson & Edirisingha, 2021; Nilson & Ripmeester, 2016; CIMO & Demos Helsinki, 2014).

These findings suggest mobility's signalling effect (see Spence, 1973), which refers to the assumptions employers make about the potential productivity of an employee based on certain signals that act as proxies for traits that cannot be observed or ascertained. Some of the graduates

such as G2, G30, and G39 alluded to the positive impact of their mobility on potential employers:

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*'I applied for one of the international schools and the person who interviewed me was very amazed by my experience in Cambodia, just based on my resumé... they said, in that case, we believe you're so flexible, you can adapt... so in that interview, they immediately said OK, you're offered the position.'* (G2, Malaysia)

*'Interviewers seemed to be interested and had confidence that I had valuable experiences, skills and abilities. They expected that if they hired me in their schools, I would be able to teach my students communication skills.'* (G30, Thailand)

*'When my interviewer knew that I had spent a semester abroad, he/she became more interested and asked me more specifically about what things I have done and learned there. Actually, this happened all the time in my job interviews. They always asked me about my international experiences and most of our conversation centred around this topic.'* (G39, Thailand)

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Another value ascribed to mobility is **having access to an expanded menu of subjects**. A graduate from the Philippines, G23, believes that a combination of having access to relevant courses in the host country and having the appropriate profile for the job led to her current role as a graphic designer. She shares:

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*'For this particular job I'm in now, I think that my mobility experience was the reason why I got in. The person who hired me for my current job kept on asking me about my exchange. He got interested in the journalism courses that I took in Cambodia because it really mattered for the kind of content that their company produced. For sure there were many good graphic designers who applied but I feel*

*that the exchange was my edge.'* (G23, the Philippines)

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In terms of mobility playing a role in hiring decisions, some employers in the Business (L28, L29, L30) and Education sectors (L4, L6) acknowledge the advantage of previous mobility experience **when specific languages are required in the role**. For employers hiring for language teaching positions, teachers with prior study abroad experience signal language competence to their clients, which in turn enhances their reputation and position in the market (E4, E6). This finding resonates with Van Mol's (2017) findings regarding mobility's strong contributions when specific skills like language are sought out.

Having a culturally diverse clientele also makes ASEAN-mobile graduates valuable for employers, especially **those who are interested in expanding their presence to other countries in Southeast Asia**. The findings remind us of other recent studies (Tran, Phan, & Bellgrove, 2021a; Singh & Fan, 2021; Tran et al., 2021b) in which organisations in booming economies that plan to scale their operations globally or in specific regions like the Indo-Pacific area and Asian countries prefer to hire mobile graduates who had existing connections with these targeted areas. According to L10, an Academic Officer of an education company based in Viet Nam:

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*'We are an educational institute, but many of our clients are corporates. So we want the applicants to be adaptable to different corporate cultures so that they make the clients comfortable. If the applicants have experience in these countries, I don't mean they need to have any in-depth knowledge about cultures there... but if they have some knowledge about the country, its people and culture, it will be better. We have clients who are Laotian and Cambodian teachers and they are very eager to learn... So applicants with ASEAN experience will be ideal for us, especially when we want to expand in the ASEAN region.'* (L10, Viet Nam)

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In the case of G33, a Malaysian graduate from the Creative Industry field, her ability to develop conversational Bahasa Indonesia during her five-month long mobility in the country was highly valued by her then-employer looking into expanding their operations to Indonesia. As she shares:

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*'I know Indonesian and I speak Indonesian conversationally. It could be a very useful tool for them, considering if they have Indonesian clients or if they want to go to the Indonesian market, it's like I'm a starter, I'm a bridge [...] So I think I've had interviews where two employers were really glad that I could roughly have conversational Indonesian. I could speak their language.'* (G33, Malaysia)

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This tendency among internationally oriented organisations to value international experiences has been documented in literature (Green et al., 2019), with evidence that employers with positive previous experience hiring mobile graduates are more likely to value international experience when hiring new employees (Van Mol, 2017).

Additionally, international study abroad experiences also tend to be valued in situations where **the skill set or domain knowledge required for the job is not inherently available in the local context**. This is where the graduate's mobility destination becomes a consideration – as the excerpts below reveal – especially when it indicates the candidate's potential suitability for the role:

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*'If the graduate's program was in agriculture, I would look more into where he or she took the program. If it's Taiwan, I know Taiwan to be a big Agritech nation, so that's a plus for me. Another example is if we're looking to hire someone with experience in finance then I prefer someone who was exposed to large banks in Europe.'* (L13, Chief Financial Officer of an Agritech start-up with ASEAN-wide operations)

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*'I look out for specific countries like Malaysia whose government seriously invests in their game development industry (they have grants for indie companies and students) or Singapore which has established schools that excel in computer science and have students looking to make it in the tech world. There are also very good schools that offer game development courses in partnership with western and/or Japanese game developers. Despite possible cultural differences, I feel that potential employees who have these backgrounds can definitely strengthen our team with their skills and unique perspectives. If the opportunity arises, I would like to recruit graduates who have relevant study experience/time in the above-mentioned ASEAN countries.'* (L36, the Philippines)

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In some cases, graduates also believed that being a recipient of mobility scholarships helps in setting them apart from other candidates (G9, G10, G25, G42). As G42 states:

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*'Receiving a scholarship shows that I possess different skill sets: knowing how to write a proposal, reports, going through interviews. It shows to my employers that I am the kind of person that seeks opportunities and puts a great effort into the pursuit.'* (G42, Thailand)

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In contrast to previous research Tran et al. (2021b) or Singh and Fan (2021) in which employers hold a concern that graduates lack the ability to adapt to the local workplace, the employers in this study do not seem to think that mobile graduates had insufficient knowledge of the local employment market. The reasons could be explained partly by the short duration of the mobility, meaning that the students were not away from the domestic labour market for a long time. Furthermore, according to the employers, new employees – especially for entry-level jobs – are provided with the necessary training and onboarding once they are recruited.



Despite the benefits outlined above, evidence from the study suggests that most employers tend to evaluate mobility alongside a host of other criteria when deciding whether or not to hire a candidate, which makes it **a desirable yet insufficient factor in recruitment**. This aligns with findings from several studies (Green et al., 2019; Geldres-Weiss et al., 2017; Van Mol, 2017; CIMO & Demos Helsinki, 2014), which points to the trend that while there are overlaps in what employers seek and what are often associated with international experiences, international credentials are not used as a recruitment criterion on its own.

Employers allude to the importance of assessing the totality of the **candidate's skills, mindset, and attitudes against the demands** of the role. This pattern is especially notable among employers from Engineering and ICT (L11, L12, L16, L18, L32, L36, L37) and Business and Finance (L7, L13, L17, L21, L27, L28, L30), where technical and job-specific skills are crucial in the types of job roles they hire for. This gap aligns with the findings of Wiers-Jenssen & Storen (2021) in Norway, who found that mobility's signalling effect is somewhat stronger for business and administration graduates compared to their counterparts in occupationally specific fields.

Employers also pay attention to the relevance of the applicant's **qualifications** to the job role (L4, L6, L7, L11, L12, L14, L16, L18). A study by Tokarcikova, et. al. (2020) reveals that ICT employers in Europe find it essential for ICT graduates to acquire and develop technical skills along with business skills to become desired professionals who can play a significant role in the future workplaces and the economy as a whole.

Meanwhile, **having prior work experience appears to be an important factor across sectors** (L6, L7, L8, L14, L18, L35, L37), and some employers are more likely to see the value of **academic mobility when it is coupled with practical experience** in the host country. Alternatively speaking, the mobility experience itself might not be the crucial factor in the hiring decision among LMRs. They take differentiating factors with regard to that experience into account in their recruitment agenda (van Mol, Caarls, & Souto-Otero, 2020). For instance, according to L18, the ASEAN Head of Customer Solution Management in the ICT sector:

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*'If you study for six months abroad and when I read your resume and it says well, in the first month he worked as an engineer in a start-up and in the second month he did a weekly training in the local university on encoding, let's say. Wow. He went there to a new country. So that's raising the bar. This shows there is something more than just being there.'*  
(L18, ASEAN employer)

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These findings on the value of integrating work-based learning into international study arrangements run parallel with existing literature. While Petzold's (2017) findings show that study abroad experience can somewhat substitute work experience for employers and that both types of activities are rewarded in the labour market, there is evidence supporting the value of integrating work-based learning arrangements with international study programmes. In the Dutch setting, Van Mol (2017) found that slightly more employers value an international internship experience compared to a purely academic mobility stay. In the ASEAN setting, a recent study by AHDO & the ASEAN Foundation (2021) also revealed that the contributions of cross-border internships within ASEAN are comparable to those of Westward student mobility. Overall, the study's findings and extant literature allude to the importance of combining both approaches to boost the employability efforts in the region.

Additionally, some employers adhere to a set of hiring principles that reflect their organisation's values and mission, in which case mobility becomes a minor consideration (L16, L18, L22). Therefore, it is necessary to **demonstrate a good fit between the candidate and the organisation** (L9, L13). L13, an ICT employer hiring across ASEAN, alludes to this balance between the candidate's traits and organisational fit:

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*'It all boils down to the person ... how he or she passes through the stages of hiring... whether the candidate is a good fit with the organisational culture.'* (L13, ASEAN employer)

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Evidence from the study also suggests how certain job roles and resource limitations would prompt a preference for non-mobile graduates. in the hiring process. As L28 from Thailand relates:

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*'It depends on each job position that we are looking for. If that job position requires a very specific field and a candidate studied this field directly from abroad (from known universities that offer this specific field) and his/her knowledge and skills can be applied in our company, it would be great for us. But for other general positions, we tend to look for candidates that graduated from local universities. This has to do with the budget for hiring. Because in general, employers have to pay a higher salary to graduates that graduated from abroad. Also, these international graduates can be overqualified for our general positions, because we don't necessarily need their English skills that much in frontline operation.'* (L28, Thailand)

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Lastly, while employers generally focus on the match between the candidate's skills and the demands of the job role, one's host country and university evoke certain assumptions as to the potential value of the candidate in some cases. In this regard, **reputation around field specialisations** (for instance, Malaysia for game development and Singapore for animation and computer science, and university reputation in a specific field) are found to influence some employers' hiring decisions. This observation is supported by the experience of G1 from the Philippines, who shared that the reputation of her host university contributed to her eventually doing a post-graduation work placement at a prestigious research institute in her sector. She relates:

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*'Having gone to IPB University gave me an edge talking with people in my internship since it was a well-known agricultural university. The experience gave me a lot to relate to with them. It made it very comfortable for me to fit into that career path.'* (G1, the Philippines)

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Meanwhile, other employers (L9, L27, L28, and L32) allude to the notion of **educational quality based on institutional rankings** (top-ranking universities in English speaking countries) as a consideration when recruiting employees. A recent study by Van Mol (2020) among Dutch graduates shows contrasting findings, in that there are no significant differences between graduates who studied locally and those who pursued education in countries with higher-ranked university systems and labour markets. However, another study by Humburg, van der Velden, & Verhagen (2013) in the European context shows that university reputation still factors in as a determinant of recruitment for some employers.

According to a study by Souto-Otero & Bialowolski (2021) on graduate employability in Europe, 'reputational recruiters' place strong emphasis in the attendance to high-ranking institutions and have the highest requirements for non-cognitive skills. Reputational recruiters are typically large in internationalised organisations (Suoto-Otero & Bialowolski, 2021). In the ASEAN job space, the observable effect of international 'prestige hierarchies' (Van Mol, 2020) could be linked to the gaps in perceived educational quality between and within ASEAN countries.

Taking the Malaysian context as an example, L17 alludes to quality gaps especially in public universities as a result of broader issues on governance and funding structures. As he observes:

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*'As promotions, increments, and funding come with improved rankings, a dangerous environment is created which ironically has had an adverse effect on education quality. A practical example is an overemphasis on the volume of journal publications (one of the KPIs for rankings) where academic staff are required to have a certain number of publications annually, if not risk their promotions and increments being denied, which in turn has wider implications for the department or the university as a whole in terms of public funding. Unfortunately, having a higher quantity of journal publications does not necessarily mean these journals are of high quality.'* (L17, Malaysia)

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Additionally, the ASEAN region faces an important **linguistic challenge**, whereby the difficulty in pooling graduates with adequate English language skills seems to reinforce the preference for Western English-speaking destinations. As L22, an employer in the Education sector, shares:

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*'I've heard some HR directors and hiring managers talk about the quality of English as well. When they see that you're a foreign graduate on a CV or that you had mobility in those Western countries, that your quality of English and communication are higher. I think that's the perception. And communication these days, that skill set is so important because it's something that people here feel that's really lacking in the talent pool.'* (L22, Malaysia)

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The employers' views cited above allude to the importance of raising the reputational value of ASEAN universities as well as considering intra-regional employability against ASEAN's linguistic diversity. At least for employers with a more international clientele, finding employees proficient in English could be a greater challenge for countries that do not use it as one of the primary languages, such as Thailand and Viet Nam.

Equally importantly, there seems to be a **lack of awareness** among employers on the existence of intra-ASEAN mobility schemes. Only around one in four (n=11) of the 40 LMRs interviewed reported being familiar with intra-ASEAN student mobility schemes. This finding points to the need to build these programmes' brand and visibility and enhance ASEAN mobile graduates' attractiveness to employers.

Overall, and as several studies suggest, there appears a need to bridge the gap by enhancing employers' knowledge and awareness of the benefits of international study experiences as well as the graduates' capacities to articulate their ability to use the skills and knowledge they gained overseas to potential employers in the recruitment process (Pham & Saito, 2020; Green et al., 2019; CIMO & Demos Helsinki, 2014). As employers' hiring decisions are also based on a broad range of criteria, it is crucial that graduates are able to think about how best to maximise their mobility (by developing technical and soft skills, expanding their professional networks, and gaining work-related experience) to achieve their short- and long-term career goals.



## 4.4. Stakeholders' Recommendations to Enhance Employability

There is a consensus between graduates and labour market representatives on the need to enhance industry involvement in student mobility and higher education programmes

The main suggestion that emerged from the interviews was the need for more industry involvement as part of the mobility programme to provide **opportunities to gain work experience and knowledge about labour market trends** (n=39). Both graduates and employers expressed that work-oriented learning arrangements - including **internships** (n=19) or **community engagement** activities (n=4) would have boosted their employability. Five labour market representatives also suggested offering employment opportunities for mobility graduates once they finish their studies through some kind of a job contract or a **mutual agreement** between both parties prior to their programme participation. This can be considered as part of a recruitment process in which companies can look for talented graduates that will have specific skills that companies want. The need for internships and practical experience for graduate employability has also been documented in existing literature (The Gallup Organisation, 2010; AHDO & ASEAN Foundation, 2021).

To enhance the employability of graduates, gaining work experience alone is not sufficient. The stakeholders should have good knowledge of current labour market trends. This calls for companies and employers to provide **information on market and job forecasts** to universities and students (L21, L38). At the same time, universities should understand the market demand and **align their curriculum** accordingly (n=6). For graduates to be more well-informed in choosing which courses or programmes are beneficial for them in the future, both graduates and labour market representatives also suggested the need to provide **career orientation** or knowledge of job opportunities in both the host and home countries of students (n=10).

Other recommendations relate to programme visibility, network building, and additional student support

The stakeholders also mentioned the importance of **promoting mobility programmes** (n=9). This includes sending out information to more students, creating positive images of mobility programmes through university rankings and presenting alumni's successful case stories or graduates' engagement in the community. Meanwhile, mobility programmes should offer **more recipient quotas** (L36) and universities themselves should be more active in looking for mobility scholarships for their students (L23). Those with limited English skills students should be taken into account, and **offering free English courses** can be another way to help them (L21).

Another issue that surfaced in the data is the difficulty of some graduates in having their international coursework recognized and validated by their home universities upon their return (n=3). To mitigate this, they suggested giving clear information about a **credit transfer process** early on and **additional guidance** to students as to the more suitable courses that would be credited later on and for greater harmonisation between the programmes of study in the host and home country.

Another suggestion raised by graduates (n=8) is to improve their **integration into local culture** and to **build networks** with locals and other international students. Half of them suggested that host universities assign a student consultant as a 'buddy' or **student partner** for an international student. While others suggested more **organised intercultural activities** by host universities, **housing arrangements** with locals, or simply more activities for international students to build networks.

Other areas for improvement include **specific skills training**, more **active engagement among alumni**, increased **support for free movement** of labour, students receiving more **support and guidance** from universities, introducing student **monitoring and evaluation systems**, enhancing the **skills of teaching staff**, **lengthening the duration** of the programme, providing opportunities for **multi-site mobility**, and **ensuring the continuity** of the programmes. Overall, a **holistic approach** where all stakeholders have a role to play would be beneficial to boosting the employability of intra-ASEAN mobile graduates. As L38 suggests:

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*‘Companies, education institutes and policymakers must be on the same page when it comes to developing mobility schemes to improve students’ employability. Each of these mentioned entities has its specific agenda and roles to play. Companies should highlight what skills are forecasted to be most required by industries and/or provide training to new joiners... Education institutes must develop curriculum that are true to existing theories yet relevant to industry demands; Policymakers must oversee the whole ecosystem and implement robust policies which will incentivise the collaboration between all parties to ensure graduates will be equipped with the necessary skill sets and be employable when joining the workforce. These roles highlighted are required within each country. To have a truly fluid ASEAN mobility scheme, the Governments across the region must work hand in hand to lower the entry barriers including visa requirements, freedom of movement, etc., to welcome talents from ASEAN Member States. (L38, Malaysia)*

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The coding table of stakeholders’ suggestions on how to improve intra-ASEAN mobility programmes’ contributions to employability can be found in Appendix 8.

# 5 | Conclusions and Recommendations





# 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study aimed to map the trends in student and labour mobility in the ASEAN region as well as provide an exploratory account of the contributions of intra-ASEAN student mobility on graduate employability from the perspectives of graduates (supply side) and labour market representatives (demand side). For this, a combination of desk research and stakeholder interviews was implemented. The study found that ASEAN student mobility has grown three-fold in the last decades from 7,643 intra-ASEAN mobile students in 1999 to 28,333 in 2018, yet it still represents only a tenth of the overall outbound mobility in the region at 301,792 students in 2018. Statistics also suggest that despite the upward trend in intra-ASEAN labour mobility, it largely involves low-skilled occupations and occurs along specific mobility corridors: Malaysia to Singapore, Indonesia to Malaysia, and the CLMV countries to Thailand. These findings highlight the need to further enhance the mobility of the ASEAN people and further deepen the regional labour market.

Meanwhile, qualitative data from the interviews show that intra-ASEAN student mobility is positively regarded by the labour market representatives interviewed. Overlaps also exist between the skills demanded by employers and those developed by graduates through their study abroad experience in another ASEAN country. Equally as important, there is evidence around the contributions of student mobility beyond skills development, alluding to its potential in expanding the career aspirations of young graduates and developing well-rounded professionals in the region. Despite its desirability, student mobility alone is not a sufficient factor for recruitment, and employers' hiring decisions are based on a broader set of criteria that involves job-specific skills, previous work experience, possession of relevant qualifications, goodness of fit with the company's

organisational values, perceptions around the host university or country's reputation and quality, and the candidate's capacity to articulate his or her value in relation to the demands of the job.

Overall, the findings gleaned from the interviews are in line with the literature on the benefits of student mobility, offering valuable considerations that allow ASEAN to analyse, design, and adopt measures to support and strengthen the mobility of students, researchers, and teaching staff as well as increase their employability and job prospects. Based on the findings of this exploratory study, a number of policy recommendations and further research directions are offered.

## 5.1. Policy Recommendations

### Embed the employability dimension into existing intra-ASEAN student mobility schemes through placements, internships, and career support for mobile students.

While evidence from the study points to the range of career benefits (in the form of KSAOs, social networks, and overall personal and professional development), existing intra-ASEAN schemes could more holistically integrate employability in the design and implementation of student mobility programmes alongside the fulfilment of their social and cultural purposes. In line with extant literature, labour market representatives highlight the importance of practical experience in the hiring process (through internships and project-based learning), and providing opportunities for graduates to apply their knowledge in real-world and work settings while on mobility was found to<sup>15</sup>, which provides a self-assessment tool to raise students' awareness of and capacity to articulate the added value of their mobility participation, could be pursued.

Lastly, there is a strong case for providing and strengthening ASEAN universities' career support. This remit is often associated with institutions in students' home countries, although there appears to be a need among graduates for such activities to be offered in the host country with a view of exploring labour market opportunities abroad. As such, it is advisable that host universities provide career-support workshops for international students to explore the opportunities available in

significantly enhance the attractiveness of mobile graduates to employers. Students also appear to value the chance to participate in project-based and experiential activities. As such, there is a need to explore an integration of academic and work-based mobility that also takes educational quality and credit transfer into account. While the onus on pushing for internship arrangements has traditionally been ascribed to educational institutions by providing internship opportunities as part of the curriculum, the success of such efforts will equally depend on actions from Member States (by reducing visa barriers and providing incentives), the private sector (by investing time and financial resources to train upcoming and new graduates), and ASEAN intergovernmental bodies (by liaising, consolidating, and incentivising the efforts of public and private sectors, such as establishing an intra-ASEAN internship framework in cooperation with relevant stakeholders).

Additionally, it appears that hiring decisions are largely affected by the candidates' capacity to articulate their strengths and fit with the job during the interview. As such, there is a need to bridge the gap between the actual skills gained and employers' perceptions of mobile graduates. This can be attained by providing a framework through which they can adequately communicate what they learned to prospective employers. For instance, an initiative similar to the project Erasmus Skills

the host labour market, as well as qualities expected from and preferences of employers. Pre-departure orientations and post-arrival debriefings are other practical approaches through which higher education institutions may support graduates' employability, specifically with regard to tailoring their student mobility experience to suit their professional goals, managing their expectations on the advantages and challenges of studying abroad, and identifying the types of jobs and companies that will most value their study abroad experience.

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<sup>15</sup> Erasmus Skills is a European Commission co-funded project that aims to provide digital tools to enhance graduates' awareness of the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and other benefits that they developed through student mobility. See <https://www.erasmuskills.eu/eskills/about>

Pursue structured university-industry collaborations and dialogues to enhance the intra-ASEAN student mobility brand and raise employers' awareness of their value in the modern labour market.

The current study has shown that while employers do not consider mobility as a fundamental factor in recruitment, many of the skills that students are able to develop during an intra-ASEAN mobility stay align with those they look for in potential employees. Alongside improving graduates' capacities to articulate these learnings, there is an equally important need to enhance the employers' awareness of the breadth of benefits that a mobility stay could bring to a potential employee. For instance, attributes and soft skills such as curiosity and problem-solving skills — which have been greatly enhanced among the graduate interviewees in the study — are particularly important in boosting company innovation and growth.

Universities should also make an effort in order to highlight the relevance and quality of the curriculum and programmes they provide. For this, structured dialogues should be pursued not only among industry players who are keen on supporting international careers but also among organisations with more localised operations, especially given the highly cross-border and interdependent nature of trade and business operations. There should also be a closer engagement with industry players in curricular design and development. Additionally, enhancing the credibility and visibility of student exchange programmes in ASEAN could encourage employers to hire intra-regionally mobile graduates and contribute to deepening the ASEAN regional market. In that sense, it is recommended that the

mobility programmes be continued and scaled up to involve more participating institutions, programmes choices for students, and students engaged with the mobility.

Enhance intra-ASEAN students' networking opportunities with ASEAN companies and alumni to boost their long-term employability.

International student mobility is often viewed as an avenue to expand students' professional networks. This has been supported by the findings in this study, whereby several graduates alluded to developing important social ties with international peers. However, there appears to be limitations in terms of nurturing and expanding such ties especially once they return to their home countries. Providing networking support and access to intra-ASEAN alumni and student groups during and after the mobility stay could further improve their long-term employability. It is also important that students have networking opportunities with companies and organizations through events organised by, for instance, host institutions to increase the students' visibility to the potential employers and to help exchange students garner knowledge about current labour market requirements in the host society.

Additionally, home and host countries can offer graduates with informational and social resources as they look for, move between, and generate jobs. Regional bodies are also recommended to generate ASEAN-wide student and alumni groups to provide opportunities for corporate partnerships, advocacy, and increased visibility for intra-ASEAN student mobility programmes.



## Develop mechanisms to monitor and ensure the attractiveness of intra-ASEAN student mobility programmes.

Administrative elements such as adequate information and guidance when choosing courses, providing linguistic and academic support, and organising cultural activities in the host country all appear to contribute to the academic value of the mobility perceived by students. As such, there is a need to pay attention to these operational aspects of the student experience, incorporating them into a monitoring instrument that universities and funding bodies can use to continuously improve the student mobility schemes in the region.

More broadly, intra-ASEAN student mobility's contributions to employability and regional development could be further facilitated by ensuring the educational standards and reputational value of ASEAN universities by training, attracting, and retaining competent teaching staff; adopting agile curricula that are responsive to evolving business and societal demands; and generating specialised centres of excellence in host countries.

## Generate more robust data collection and registration on intra-ASEAN mobile students and the outcomes of exchange programmes in the region.

While the issue of graduate employability is gaining traction in the region, data on mobile students and their post-graduation trajectories in the ASEAN region remain scarce. In order to facilitate evidence-informed policies and decision making,

there is a need to establish guidelines for data collection (in accordance with ethical standards) and to mainstream the data collected by universities and organisers of student mobility schemes. Additionally, it will also enable the conduct of more robust studies employing sophisticated quantitative methodological approaches such as longitudinal studies and regression analysis. This could mean successful cases in employment of graduates should be studied in depth and shared this knowledge among stakeholders.

## Continue to enhance structural support towards the free movement of students, workers, and their skills in ASEAN.

The findings of this exploratory study point to the enhanced interest among formerly mobile graduates to pursue further studies or work abroad and in another ASEAN country, thereby contributing to subsequent labour mobility. This would support the existing initiatives in the region for greater skills mobility and market integration. While a number of initiatives have made progress in recent years such as the establishment of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRf), the mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) for workers, and credit transfer systems, challenges remain as to their full integration and implementation. For this, sustained efforts must be pursued in order to mainstream the credit transfer system and support the greater harmonisation of higher education in the region.

In addition, students should receive support from institutions and governmental bodies for their visa application procedures to ease their mobility and transition to a foreign country at the beginning of their exchange programmes. In the long-term, a common ASEAN study visa scheme may be explored in order to streamline the process and facilitate accurate data collection on intra-regional student mobility (Atherton et al., 2020). Post-study visas can also support graduates' lengthier stay in



another ASEAN country to gain work experience. For this, continued dialogues in the region among Member States and national bodies handling immigration issues must be supported in order to align visa legislation for study purposes and mitigate the challenges associated with country-specific immigration policies.

## Explore avenues to ensure the accessibility and sustainability of intra-ASEAN student mobility programmes.

Evidence from the study suggests an overall positive view of student mobility, with graduates alluding to both its professional and personal benefits. It is also viewed to support wider regional objectives such as human capital formation, people-to-people mobility, and social cohesion, thus raising issues around the need to ensure their sustainability. To achieve this goal, a concerted effort among relevant stakeholders — including Member States, universities, and private bodies — must be realised in order to guarantee the continuity of such programmes. Investments from governments and corporate partners must be explored and sustained, as well as the provision of alternative and hybrid models for mobility provision (such as joint programmes and online learning) to reduce costs, widen access, and improve the environmental sustainability of student mobility. Lastly, it is equally important to ensure that intra-ASEAN student mobility programmes can be made as accessible as possible to underserved groups, including less economically advantaged students, persons with disabilities, and students from ethnic minorities.

## 5.2. Future Lines of Research

### Conduct more studies exploring a wider geographical, theoretical, and methodological breadth, possibly exploring the role of mobility characteristics and the differences in outcomes between countries and sectors.

The desk research revealed that there was a notable paucity of studies that specifically focus on intra-ASEAN short-term mobility's effects on employability, despite the initiatives to promote student exchange within the region over the past decades. This points to the need to conduct more studies on the link between mobility and employability in the ASEAN region in order to contribute to the scholarship in ASEAN higher education as well as provide the basis for evidence-informed policy decision-making in the region.

The findings gleaned from this exploratory study could be used to conduct comparative research involving other stakeholders (e.g., university leaders, mobility coordinators, international offices, and career services) and a bigger sample covering all ten ASEAN Member States. Future studies are recommended to investigate the perspectives and recruitment practices from a wider range of employers and sectors, including multinational corporations and SMEs with more localised operations. By expanding the number of participants and the study's scope, between-country and between-sector differences could also be investigated in more detail.

Aside from qualitative data, quantitative approaches employing a wider range of methods (e.g., surveys, labour market field experiments, and the use of register data) could be implemented to overcome self-selection bias, as well as longitudinal and tracer studies that monitor mobile graduates' labour market outcomes over time. Economic (quantitative) analyses of intra-regional mobility's added value to the region are also highly encouraged as potential support for further investment in intra-regional mobility schemes. Additionally, a closer examination of the role of mobility characteristics (e.g., length, level of studies during which mobility is undertaken, etc.) would be beneficial in unpacking the mechanisms through which mobility contributes to employability.

From a conceptual standpoint, the issue of graduate employability in ASEAN could be examined from other perspectives beyond the skills-oriented human capital approach, including well-being and social justice-informed theories such as the capability approach.

Conduct focused research on specific outcomes such as the development of job-specific skills, the mechanisms through which graduates develop soft skills, and the durability of intra-ASEAN mobility's signalling effect.

Considering job-specific skills' importance in the recruitment process, it would be worthwhile to conduct studies around how intra-ASEAN mobility not only develops soft skills but also students' job-specific and technical competences. Specific dimensions that can be examined include the relevance of the courses they take in the host country with respect to their study discipline and

the ways in which the technical knowledge they gained abroad is applicable or useful in their local contexts. In terms of soft skills, the study highlights the contribution of intra-ASEAN mobility on graduates' communication, intercultural, interpersonal, and adaptability skills. Future studies are encouraged to delve deeper into the mechanisms through which intra-regional mobility sparks these changes and how they specifically manifest in graduates' professional behaviour (e.g. thinking outside the box, managing resilience and frustration around potential misunderstandings or cultural differences at work), which provides a more nuanced account that can help employers better appreciate the relevance and importance of mobility in job performance, business growth, and innovation. Lastly, it would be beneficial to investigate the durability of intra-ASEAN mobility's signalling effect by specifically involving employers who have directly hired intra-ASEAN mobile graduates, comparing their expectations of the graduates during recruitment and their actual performance on the job.

Explore other forms of intra-regional mobility, including virtual and hybrid forms of mobility among teaching staff and researchers.

With intra-regional mobility's seemingly positive contributions to graduates' personal and professional growth, it would be beneficial to investigate how mobility among teaching staff could lead to similar outcomes, especially that they also contribute to educational quality. Investigating the benefits of other forms of mobility, such as international internships and virtual mobility, are also recommended especially in the shift and increasing take-up of online and hybrid forms of learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, it is recommended to examine international student mobility in the broader context of internationalisation in the ASEAN higher

education space. For instance, other forms of international education collaboration, such as mobility for researchers and teaching staff, have been largely underexplored. Future studies are therefore encouraged to pursue these lines of investigation not only to enhance the employability of ASEAN graduates but also to build a stronger education and research infrastructure to advance the region's knowledge-based economy and address pressing societal issues through higher education.

## Investigate the entrenched issues of privilege, inequality, and social justice around international student mobility and employability.

Intra-regional student mobility and higher education cooperation among institutions in the global periphery challenge the dominant North-South or Westward patterns of student flows. However, there are prevailing issues of inequality and privilege that determine students' participation in international student mobility and their real opportunities to reap its benefits (for instance, see Rakhmani et al., forthcoming). As such, it is recommended that future studies focus on the role of sociodemographic factors (e.g., the urban-rural divide, income levels, and gender, among others), in the access to and participation in intra-ASEAN student mobility and employability outcomes.



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# Appendices







# Appendices

**Appendix 1.** An Overview of Intra-ASEAN Mobility Programmes (Source: Organisations' Websites)

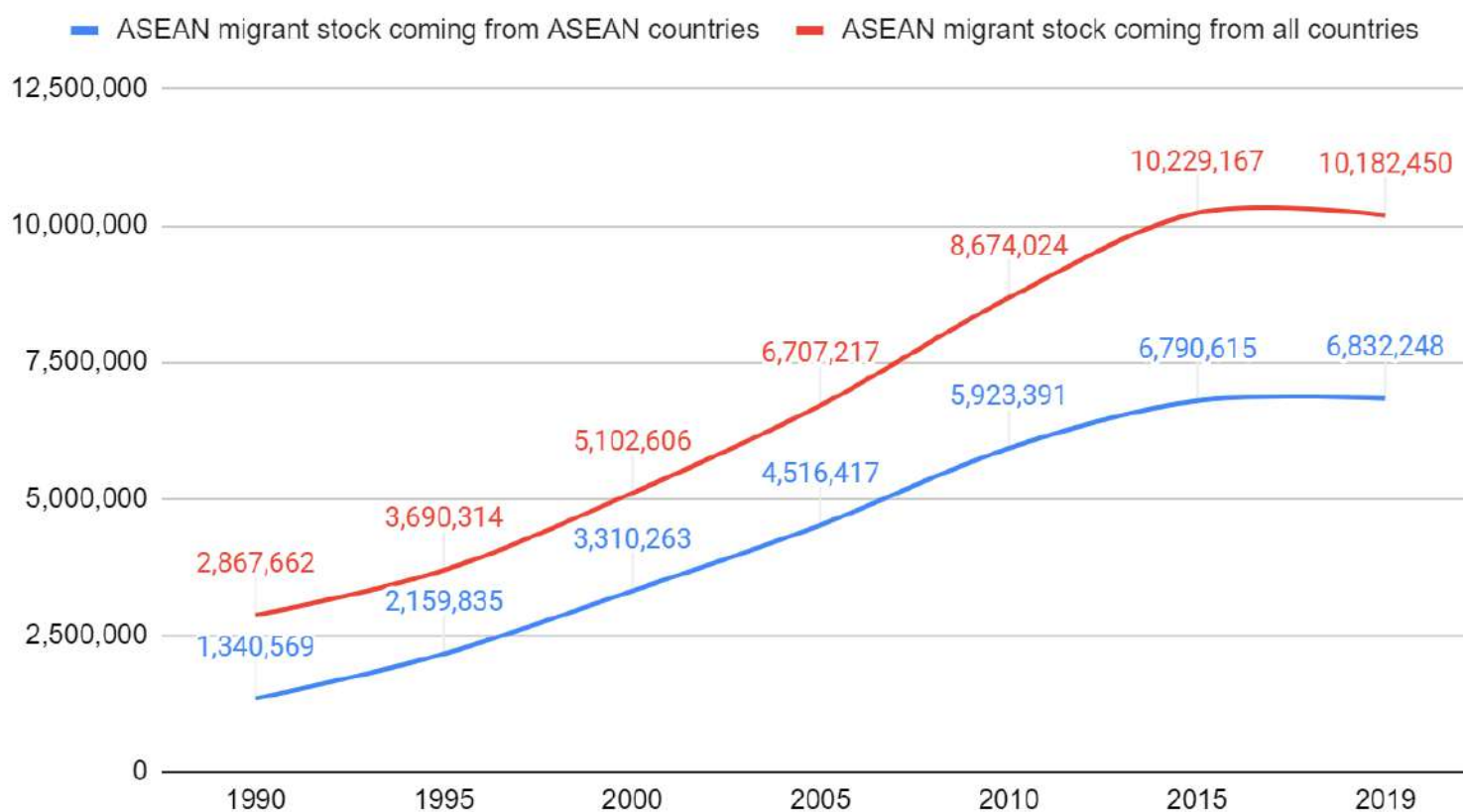
	UMAP	AUN	AIMS	EU-SHARE
Establishment	1991	1995	2009 by SEAMEO RIHED (The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation's centre specializing in regional higher education development) Initiated from MIT (Malaysia-Indonesia-Thailand) Student Mobility Pilot Project	May 2015 (for an initial period of 4 years) and will continue until 2022
Aims	Better understanding of the cultural, economic and social systems of other countries and territories in the Asia Pacific region Enhancing cooperation among higher education institutions and increased mobility of university students and staff	Hastening the solidarity and development of a regional identity through the promotion of human resource development Strengthening the existing network of leading universities and institutions of higher learning in the region	Providing a multilateral platform for academic exchange and collaboration to strengthen regional integration and community building Providing students with opportunities to study abroad within selected disciplines and advance their learning and intercultural skills as confident global citizens	Strengthening regional cooperation Enhancing the quality, competitiveness and internationalisation of ASEAN higher education institutions and students, contributing to an ASEAN Community Enhancing cooperation between the EU and ASEAN to create an ASEAN Higher Education Space
Forms of cooperation	Provision of multilateral (programme A), bilateral (programme B), usually for one or two semesters and (usually non-credit bearing) short term (one to eight weeks) student exchange programs	Establishment of scholarships and bilateral mobility initiatives	Student exchange among participating institutions within one semester	Incorporating a scholarship component targeting short-term (one semester) intra-ASEAN and ASEAN-EU student mobility

Participation/ Achievement	570 member universities (35 countries/territories)	Establishment of networks: quality assurance (AUN–Quality Assurance Network); Engineering Education (AUN/Southeast Asia Engineering Education Development Network (AUN/SEED-Net)	Offering 10 study fields among a total of 69 higher education institutions nominated by their respective governments Participation of over 3,400 students (2018), Japan and Korea have been included since 2018	From 2016 onwards, provided 500 one-semester intra-ASEAN scholarships for ASEAN university students, with an additional 300 more by the end of 2022
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## Appendix 2. Summary of Responses Received from Potential Respondents

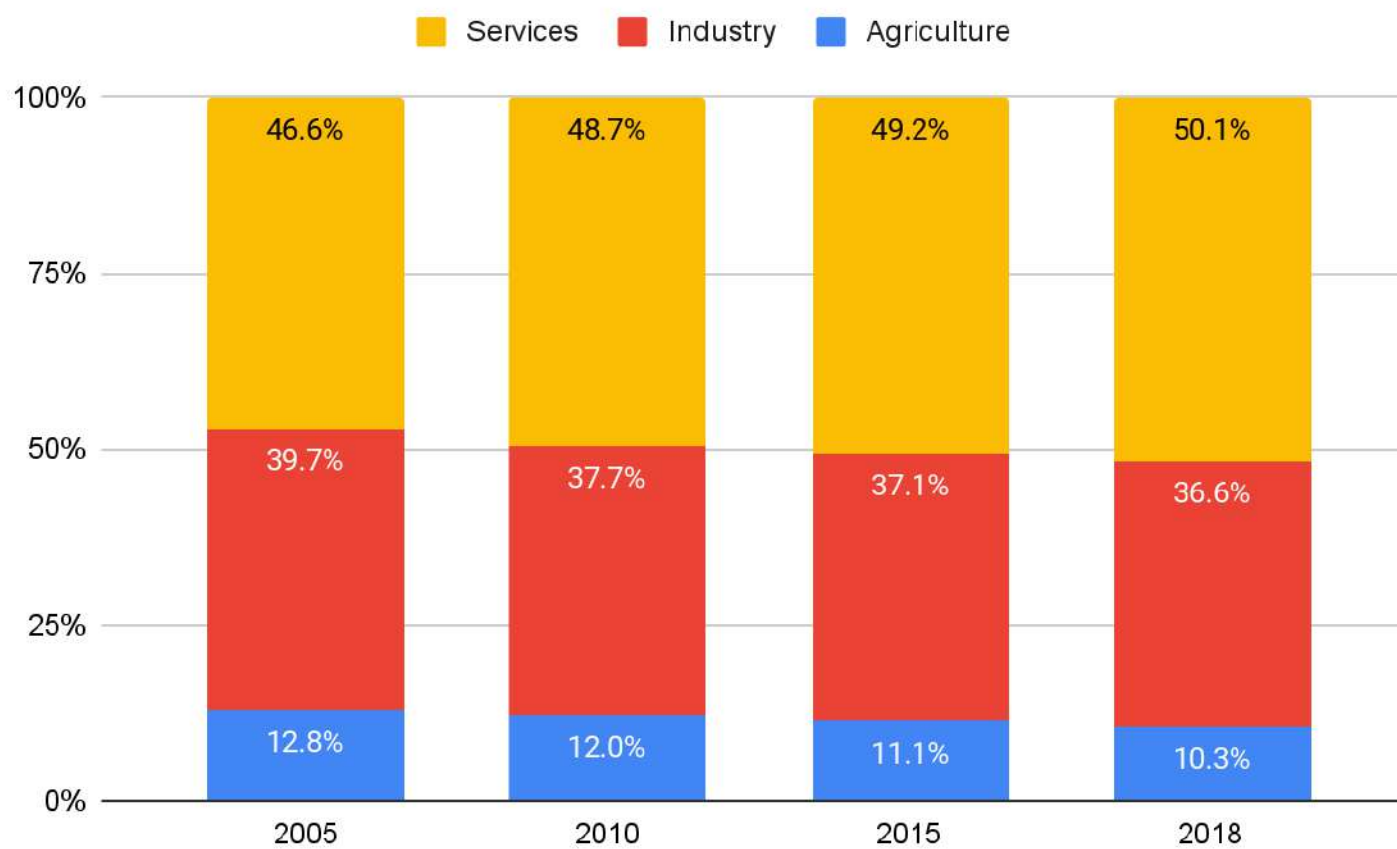
	Direct methods			Indirect methods				Total Completed
	Invited	Expressed Interest	Completed Interview (A)	Referrals from Other Interviewees	Responses to Public Announcement	Ineligible	Completed Interview (B)	(A + B)
Graduates								
Malaysia	56	9	9	1	1	1	1	10
The Philippines	3	3	3	3	7	5	5	8
Thailand	10	4	4	6	0	0	6	10
Viet Nam	39	17	9	6	0	0	6	15
Labour Market Representatives								
Malaysia	60	10	8	Not applicable				8
The Philippines	16	14	12					12
Thailand	20	10	10					10
Viet Nam	19	13	10					10
Total								83

**Appendix 3. Total Migrant Stock in the ASEAN Region by Origin, 1990-2019 (UN<sup>16</sup>)**



<sup>16</sup> United Nations. (2019). Retrieved September 21, 2021 from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock>

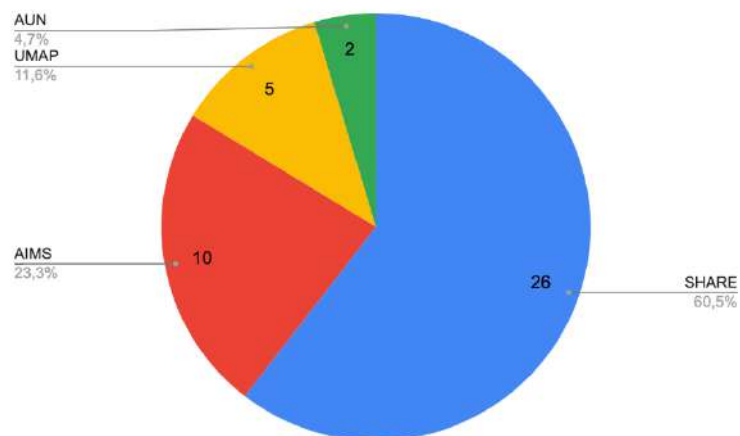
**Appendix 4.** Shares of Main Economic Sectors to Total ASEAN GDP (%), 2005-2018 (ASEAN Secretariat<sup>17</sup>)



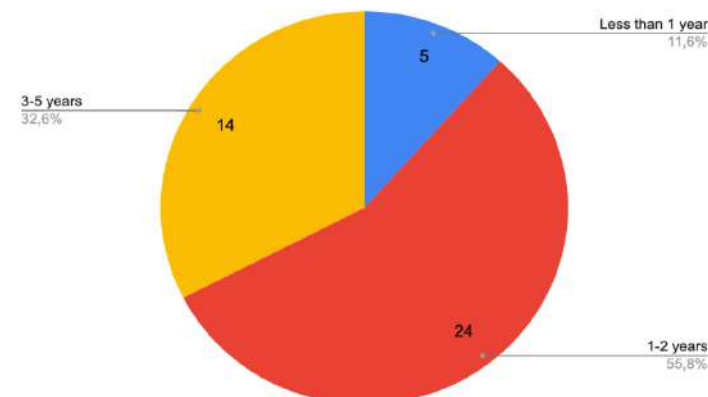
<sup>17</sup> The ASEAN Secretariat. (2019). *ASEAN key figures 2019*. Retrieved October 4, 2021 from [https://www.aseanstats.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/ASEAN\\_Key\\_Figures\\_2019.pdf](https://www.aseanstats.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/ASEAN_Key_Figures_2019.pdf)

## Appendix 5. Graduate Participants' Demographic Information

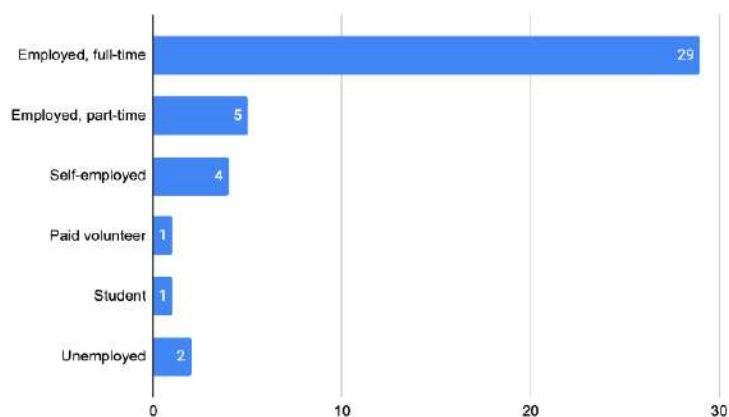
Graduate respondents by mobility programme



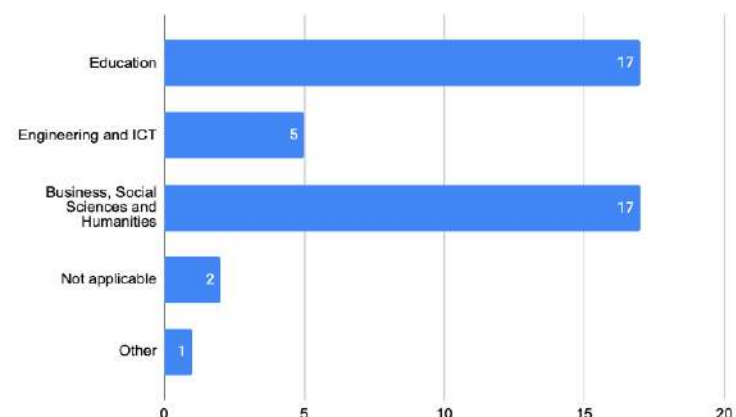
Graduate respondents according to time elapsed after completion of bachelor's degree



Graduate respondents by current employment status



Graduate respondents by current job sectoral category



## Appendix 6. A Display Matrix of Graduate Respondents' Developed Resources

Main theme	Total	Engineering and ICT	Education	Business and SSH	Sample Excerpts
Enhanced transversal or soft skills					
Written and oral communication skills, including language proficiency	27	G5, G8, G9, G14, G15, G17, G19, G22, G26, G27	G11, G12, G16, G20, G21, G25, G28, G29, G30	G10, G32, G33, G34, G35, G36, G37, G43	In terms of soft skills, I would say I got used to speaking English since during the mobility I had to speak English the whole time. (G5)
Intercultural competence	18	G1, G26, G19, G8	G12, G18, G30, G20, G21	G4, G6, G7, G10, G23, G24, G27, G32, G35	There were some courses that mostly Indonesians attended, so I could learn how they studied, how they thought, and what made them think that way. I learned to listen. I wouldn't argue right away but I learned to understand why they had their opinion, what their opinion was. I believe that skill made me better at work. (G18)
Interpersonal skills and working with a team	9	G3, G9	G2, G25, G29, G30, G18	G33, G36	I become more creative and more sociable. Many employers when they look at my CV, they can see that I'm an extrovert, I am sociable. This is the personality for many jobs, not only in English teaching but also in jobs that require interacting with others. (G9)
Independence and autonomy	9	G9, G17, G19, G22	G16, G18	G4, G34, G36	It gave a positive impact on my career as I am able to learn faster... Working in a fast-paced environment, you need to learn independently and quickly finish the task precisely. (G36)
Problem-solving and decision-making skills	6	G8, G15, G19	G18	G6, G32	When you mix around with many people, sometimes our differences are a lot, or we practice it differently or in a unique type of way. So we could share with each other. And those actually provide me with insights or the way I think or the way I solve problems, to be creative maybe, and also to look at things from different perspectives rather than just limiting yourself in one or two ways. (G32)

Interview skills	4	G26, G8		G6, G37	Whenever I join an interview, it's all conducted in English. That is how the communication skills that I learned and developed during the mobility program help me... I became more confident speaking in English compared to before. (G37)
Research skills	3	G9, G19	G13		I did a literature review, analysing and synthesising, writing a report, and a book review. In Viet Nam we only take exams. But in the host country, we are required to write a critique. (G13)
Leadership skills	2	G8	G29		It is an opportunity to open my worldview and develop my leadership skills, self-confidence, and decision-making skills... for example, they chose me to be the Head of Career Guidance and Employment Division even though I was young. There were other people who were older and had more qualifications. One of the reasons they chose me was because of the experiences abroad I had. (G29)
Project management skills	1		G16		I improved my project management skills. (G13)
Attention to detail and accuracy	1	G9			I learned to be more meticulous and careful. (G9)
Enhanced characteristics					
Adaptability and open-mindedness	15	G8, G14, G17, G26	G2, G12, G16, G18, G21	G6, G23, G34, G35, G37, G43	I'm not really familiar with the environment and I'm all alone there and it taught me how to adapt to that kind of situation. It made me like, when I'm in the workplace, a different environment, I can adapt to it. You can put me anywhere and I can adapt to the situation. (G35)



Curiosity and eagerness to learn	3	G17	G18	G32	The second thing is that my host university welcomed so many international exchange students. The way they shared about their passion for exploring a new land, having new knowledge, and taking a gap year enlightened me, inspiring me to learn more. (G18)
Desire to make a change	2	G14	G25		They took us to see different places/villages outside the city. I got to see different parts of the country. I also got to see kids living in poverty... I saw how difficult their lives were and I felt sorry for them. Then I looked back to my own country and somehow we are similar. I felt that I could do something to change, I want to help my students to have a better future. I want them to have more opportunities. For example, I could help them improve their English skills. (G25)
Enhanced ambition to achieve	1	G8			As I had experience with the exchange and the conferences, I know how important it is to become a global leader. I have the ambition to become one, it's not just "getting things done" but an ambition to achieve, a global leader in my field. (G8)
Empathy	1	G17			With my experience going to SHARE... I can share it with my students. I also can understand more about them - like what they want and how they feel. (G17)
Enhanced job-specific skills and knowledge					
Enhanced professional knowledge (topics not otherwise available in home university/country)	7	G1, G9, G15, G19, G22, G26	G11		What I studied about Psychology at my home university was very superficial. But in Malaysia, I was taught in-depth about psychology, which showed me how important it was to understand students' psychology, and what I should do to improve the lesson quality. (G11)

Enhanced professional know-how (e.g., innovative teaching methodologies and approaches)	7		G11, G12, G13, G16, G20	G7, G43	If I hadn't been abroad, I wouldn't be able to understand that language could be easy and flexible, not rigid or grammar-centred. This allowed me to explore new methodologies and integrate them into my teaching. I only knew about this when I was in Malaysia. (G11)
Knowledge of sector in host country	1			G36	We participated in activities with other exchange students from other countries and visited one of the Yakult factories in Bandung, Indonesia. Hence, we were able to recognize and differentiate the strategy in penetrating a huge market between our countries. This knowledge will be eye-opening to us as it can help us to learn and understand how to start up a business in a different market. (G36)
Increased experience of/interest in subsequent mobility					
Inspired to have more mobility and further education overseas	7	G14, G15, G19	G20, G21	G7, G10	I hope to have a competitive advantage when applying for an MA scholarship or to apply for jobs. (G21)
Confidence to move abroad	3	G17		G27, G43	Just the fact that I am now working in another foreign land is already a product of my mobility experience, because I learned that I can do it and that I want to do it. (G27)
Sponsorships and opportunities to go abroad (e.g. international conferences, other student mobility programmes)	5	G1, G8, G15	G12, G21		I keep in contact with SHARE international friends, attend workshops and conferences together and discuss higher education issues. (G12)
Expanded social networks					
Weak ties	13	G1, G17	G2, G12, G20, G21	G10, G32, G33, G34, G35, G37, G43	But I met an amazing friend there, as they always encourage me to get out from my comfort zone. Besides that, they also share if there's an opportunity that I can try. (G34)

Point of connection and rapport with employers/colleagues	2			G33, G35	I would say it's more of a connection bit... I could meet virtually with anyone from Indonesia and they could meet me. And then I would say that the mobility is sort of a form of connection that I can use. Like, hey, I've been there. This is what my experiences and it relates to experiences. (G33)
Expanded professional interests and horizons					
New career pathways	5	G1, G14	G2, G9	G27	I think the mobility opened up my world. It's not that I must limit myself to only one pathway. Although I was trained to be in that pathway, I still can do a lot of other things (G2)
New conceptualization of/passion for the field	4	G14, G15, G19	G11		A big impact of SHARE was on professional development trajectory and finding interest in doing research (G19)
Enhanced interest in ASEAN and the international dimension	3	G14	G21	G7	So one of the benefits I got from the mobility program is it made me feel more curious and also willing to learn more about ASEAN and internationalization. (G7)
New ways of thinking	2	G14		G27	I used to think that I have to find a stable job after graduation. But after finishing the program, I think I have changed a lot. I felt that I want to interact more, to explore more (G14)
Professional clarity and affirmation of one's career choice					
Enhanced interest/passion in the field of study and commitment to the job trained to do	5	G1, G19, G22	G11, G12		I found my motivation and passion for the food and beverage industry. So it has a big impact on what I can do later in the future. (G22)
Clearer picture of discipline or professional trajectory	3	G15	G22	G43	UMAP helped me to be clear about my professional trajectory (G15)

## Appendix 7. A Display Matrix of KSAOs Needed in the Labour Market

	Total	Cross-sectoral (Gov't and Think Tank)	Education	Business, Social Sciences and Humanities	Engineering and ICT
oral and written communication including language proficiency	22	L15, L19, L31, L32, L33, L34, L38	L1, L4, L5, L6, L23	L9, L14, L16, L17, L20, L22, L25, L30, L35, L39	
intercultural competence	5	L19, L33	L10	L35	L16
ability to work in groups/ interpersonal skills	8	L31, L32	L1, L2, L6, L10	L9, L21	
leadership skills	2	L26		L22	
problem-solving/decision-making skills	7	L32, L33		L14, L22	L11, L16, L36
critical thinking	3	L32, L33			L11
use of digital tools/digital literacy	8	L26, L32, L33	L23, L24	L20, L30, L39	
numeracy	1	L31			
financial literacy	1	L33			
time management	1				L16
project management	2				L11, L37
technical/job-specific skills	24	L15, L19, L32, L33	L4, L6, L23	L7, L13, L17, L20, L21, L27, L28, L30, L39	L11, L12, L16, L18, L32, L36, L37, L40
artificial intelligence and machine learning	2	L38			L12
cloud computing	1				L16
computer programing and software development	7			L13, L17, L27	L11, L36, L37, L40
user experience/interface design	1				L37

2D and 3D animation	1				L12
e-commerce	1			L30	
business/data analytics	5	L32		L17, L27, L30, L39	
statistical visualisation	1				L32
knowledge of economics and financial markets	2	L38		L7	
smart construction	1	L38			
smart farming	1	L38			
teaching	2		L4, L6		
adaptability and open-mindedness	12	L3, L15, L19, L34	L1, L2, L4 L5, L10	L9, L30	L16
curiosity and eagerness to learn	4		L2, L4, L5	L30	
proactive/initiative	2	L3	L2		
diligence/passion for work/commitment	5		L1, L4, L5, L24	L21	
good fit/aligned with organisation's values	6			L8, L9, L13, L22	L16, L18
creativity and innovation	4	L33		L14, L25	L36
strong academic background	2		L6	L35	
previous work-experience	3			L8, L35	L37
conscientiousness	2			L22	L18
tolerance for ambiguity	1				L16
having growth mindset	2			L21, L22	

## Appendix 8. Stakeholders' Suggestions on How to Improve Intra-ASEAN Mobility Programmes' Contributions to Employability

Suggestions for Improvement	Total	Examples
Industry involvement (Stakeholders collaboration)	29 G=10 L= 19	<p><b>Providing opportunities for work experiences:</b> Internships, training, or practicum in the host or home country (G3,G7, G9, G10, G12, G13, G17, G19, G21, L1, L4,L6, L8, L15,L16, L20, L22,L24, L38)</p> <p>Employment opportunities (through a contract or MOU) for mobility graduates among partner businesses and organisations (L21, L24, L25, L27, L28)</p> <p>Community engagement through social projects and campaigns (L18,L16, L21, L26)</p> <p><b>Providing knowledge about the market demand:</b> University to understand industry demands and align their curriculum (L1, L13, L15,L34, L38, L39)</p> <p>Market and job forecasts collected by industries made available for graduates (L21, L38)</p> <p>Forums or events for university-industry dialogues to take place (L13)</p> <p>Company visits to explore a wide range of jobs related to the field (G15)</p> <p>Exposure to industry (G27)</p> <p><b>Financial support:</b> Business companies or organisations help fund mobility programmes (L21)</p>
Mobility programme promotion and more recipients	9 G=5 L=4	<p><b>Popularise information about scholarship and mobility programmes:</b> Information about mobility programmes reach out to more students (G1,G11,G18, G36, G38,L21,L23, L25 ) Creating positive image to mobility programmes through social services: eg. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (L21) Use successful case stories to promote mobility programmes/ scholarships Use university rankings to promote mobility programmes (L21)</p>

		<b>More recipients:</b> More quotas for programme participants (L36) Universities are more active in looking for scholarships for their students (L23) Free English course to support students with limited English skills but want to participate in the mobility programmes (L21)
Career and labour market orientation	10 G= 5 L= 5	Professional orientations for students, including managing career expectations (G11, G19,G32, G33,L6,L28,L30, L38, L39) More knowledge about employment opportunities in the host country (G16)
Cultural learning and Network building in host university	8 G=8	Host universities offering local 'Buddy' or student partner/ consultant for international students (G31, G38, G39, G40) More organised intercultural activities among students (G10,G39) Living environment with locals: host family (G26), local students dormitories (G41) Network building among exchange students (G22)
Credit transfer	6 G=6	Enable students to choose from more suitable courses that could be credited later on (G5,G9, G23,) Clear information about credit transfer process to graduates from the beginning(G36) Liability of host universities to provide existing courses as advertised (G37) Curriculum alignment (G27)
Specific skills training	5 G= 4 L= 1	Language skills (E23) Problem solving skills (G13) Work skills in intercultural environment (L31) Focus on presentation and public speaking skills (G10) More soft skills training that are crucial in the professional job (G14)
More active engagement among alumni after graduation	5 G=3 L=2	More workshops and meetings between alumni across universities to expand students' network (G2, G11) Alumni working together on projects (G18, L21)

Support & guidance from university	5 G=4 L=1	International Relations Office to offer encouragement to students and guidance on choice of courses and administrative processes (G1) Improving communication system between home and host university to facilitate the application and visa process (G42) Programme alumni as mentors to mobility students (G31,G42, L20)
Supporting free movement of labour	5 G=1 L=4	Stakeholders reinforcing government to support free labour market policies (L29, L38) Omitting visa-related barriers (L17) Business and companies reducing barriers to support foreign workers (L29) Course Certification that is widely accepted (G2,L27)
Enhancing the educational experience in mobility	5 L=5	Improving the teaching staff's skills (L20, L38) Universities embedding 21st century skills in their curriculum (L33) International dialogues about mobility programmes be included in both Basic and Higher education (L34) Talent mobility in ASEAN through internships and community engagement(L26)
Duration of the mobility	4 G=4	Longer duration of mobility programme (G8, G28,G29) Longer stay for the purpose of internship (G33)
Monitoring & Evaluation support	3 L=3	Monitoring and evaluating students during mobility programmes (e.g., by senior alumni) (L20) Awarding scholarships for students who have clear objectives to join mobility programmes and being demanding for their outcomes (L30) Curriculum, programme activities align with programme objectives (L23)
Multi-site mobility	1	A scholarship offering more mobilities (G25)
Continuity	1	Offer this kind of mobility program to students every year because there are a lot of benefits (G30)





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