Safe and Fair:

Realizing women migrant workers' rights and opportunities in the ASEAN region

Spotlight Initiative

Programme Narrative

Photo: UN Women/Pornvit Visitoran

Safe and Fair: Realizing women migrant workers' rights and opportunities in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region is part of the Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls, a global, multi-year initiative between the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN). Safe and Fair is implemented through a partnership between the ILO and UN Women (in collaboration with UNODC) with the overriding objective of ensuring that labour migration is safe and fair for all women in the ASEAN region. Migration can be beneficial for all actors involved. Migrant women are able to access higher paid jobs, whilst increasing their agency and improving their position in the family and community. It is estimated that 63.9 Billion US Dollar were received in remittances in Southeast Asia in 2016. It is estimated that women's remittances can make up half of this. The programme aims to strengthen labour migration governance and address risks inherent in migration systems that can result in violence and trafficking, strengthen rights-based and gender-responsive approaches to violence against women and labour migration governance and support access to essential services. This will be done by:

- ✓ Improving the frameworks that govern labour migration and ending violence against women;
- ✓ Improving access to information and services for women migrant workers and opportunities for them to network and organise;
- ✓ Producing data and evidence on the experiences of women migrant workers; and
- ✓ Campaigning to generate a better understanding of the contribution of women migrants.

Programme Objectives

1. Women migrant workers are better protected by gender-sensitive labour migration governance frameworks;
2. Women migrant workers are less vulnerable to violence and trafficking and benefit from coordinated responsive quality services;
3. Data, knowledge and attitudes on the rights and contributions of women migrant workers are improved.

Implementation Countries

- Brunei Darussalam
- Cambodia
- Indonesia
- Lao PDR
- Malaysia
- Myanmar
- Philippines
- Singapore
- Thailand
- Viet Nam

At a Glance

Duration: 2018 – 2022

Implementing organizations: ILO and UN Women

Stakeholders: women migrant workers, ASEAN Member States' government authorities, ASEAN institutions, and worker, employer, civil society and community-based organizations.

Budget: EUR: 25.5 Million

Target beneficiaries: current, potential and returnee women migrant workers and their families.

Cross-cutting themes: women's voice and agency; rights-based approaches; broad engagement of stakeholders.

Background

International labour migration in the ASEAN region has consistently increased over the past decades, with almost half of the 10 million migrants there being women. Women migrant workers make vital social and economic contributions to their communities and countries of origin and destination. Therefore, women's labour migration can be a crucial source of empowerment for women. However, through the migration cycle, women migrant workers face a risk of violence, trafficking, and discrimination that limits their access to fair recruitment and decent work. They also have scarce access to protection and support services.

Photo: ILO/J. Aliling

The positive experiences and contributions of women migrant workers can only be fully ensured if their safety, labour and human rights are fully protected. Irregular migrants and migrant domestic workers, among others, are at particular risk due to their status and isolation. Whether migrating through regular or irregular channels, women migrants can face violence and abuse from intermediaries and employers, as well as from partners and others.

Violence against women migrant workers and trafficking are part of the broader spectrum of violence against women, and are driven by cultural and gendered norms. Such cultural and gendered norms – including the use of gender specific bans that prohibit the migration of women – also impact the migration opportunities available to women, restricting their ability to access regular migration into skilled, safe and well-paid employment. For migrant women, including survivors of violence, services are not well equipped to meet their needs - they are frequently challenging to reach, and are often not well coordinated among institutions, including policing, criminal justice, health and social welfare services.

While the ASEAN region has seen advances in addressing violence against women, much more needs to be done. Changing cultural norms around violence against women throughout migration and improving labour migration governance with a gender lens is necessary in order to achieve labour migration that is safe and fair for all women in the ASEAN region.

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