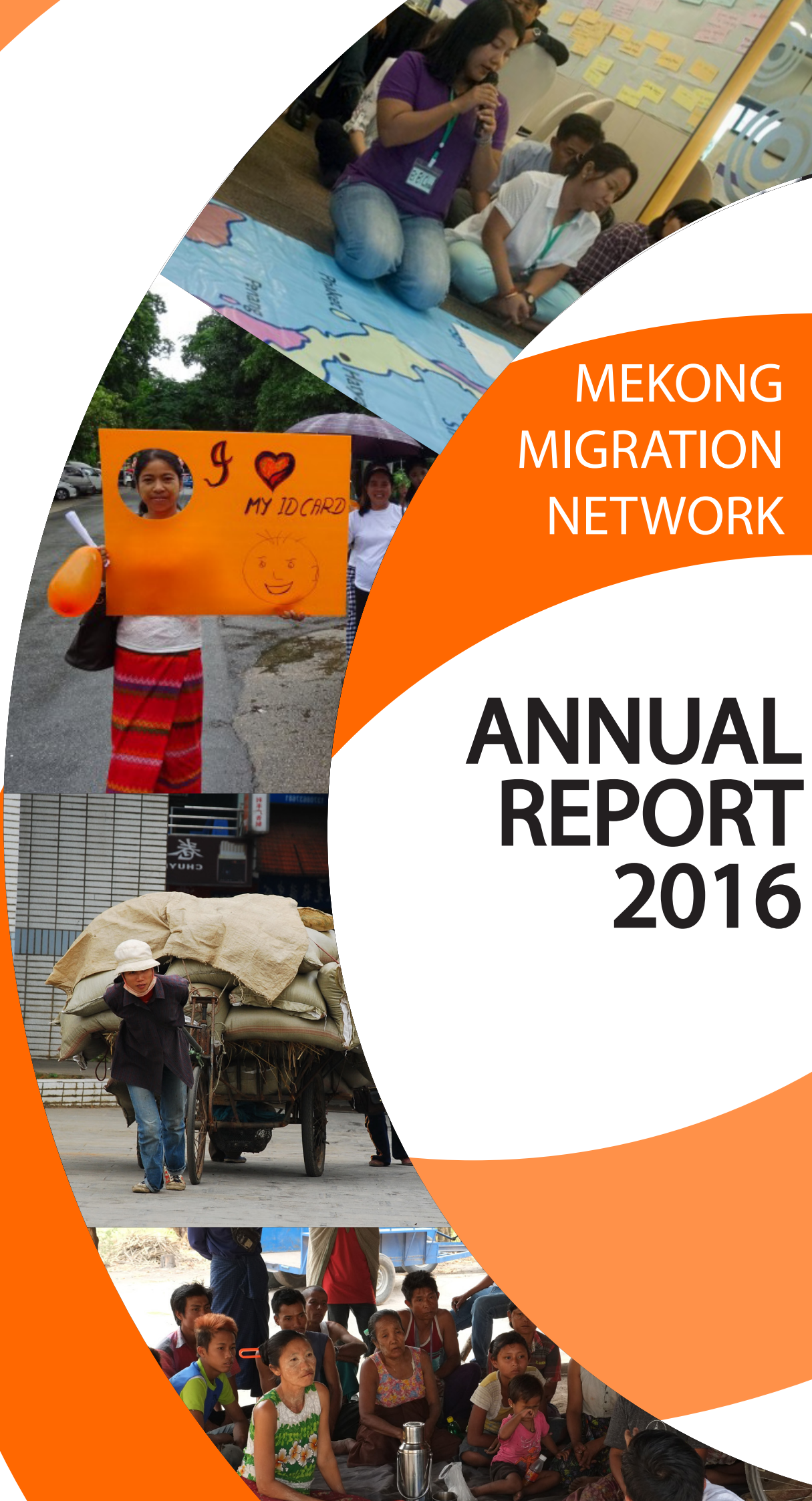


MEKONG
MIGRATION
NETWORK

ANNUAL
REPORT
2016



Annual report prepared by Mekong Migration Network
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Acronyms

ACTIP	ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children
AEC	ASEAN Economic Community
AFML	ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour
AIT	Asian Institute of Technology
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CI	Certificate of Identity
COMMIT	Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking
CSO	Civil society organization
CWCC	Cambodian Women's Crisis Center
EU	European Union
FDG	Focus group discussion
FED	Foundation for Education and Development
GFMD	Global Forum on Migration and Development
GMS	Greater Mekong Subregion
IDP	Internally displaced person
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IUU	Illegal, unreported and unregulated
LSCW	Legal Support for Children and Women
MMN	Mekong Migration Network
MOEAF	Myanmar Overseas Employment Agencies Federation
MOLVT	Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MWRN	Migrant Workers Rights Network
NCPO	National Council for Peace and Order
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NV	Nationality Verification
OSS	One-Stop Service
SC	Steering Committee
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
UN	United Nations
YCOWA	Yaung Chi Oo Workers' Association

The Mekong Migration Network (MMN) is a subregional network of civil society organisations, research institutes and mass organisations that are committed to working together to promote and protect the rights of migrant workers and their families in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). As a network, MMN conducts joint advocacy, information monitoring and research, capacity building and networking.

MMN emerged from a collaborative action research project that the Asian Migrant Centre (AMC) along with over 20 collaborating organisations carried out from 2001 to 2003 to assess the issues, needs and responses on migration in the GMS. As a result, the first edition of a resource book on migration in the GMS, titled “Migration Needs, Issues and Responses in the Greater Mekong Sub-region: A Resource Book,” was published in 2003, highlighting gaps in responses and laying out comprehensive recommendations for policy reforms.

In October 2003, over 30 civil society organisations in the GMS along with interested advocates met in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and agreed to formally establish a network to collectively monitor the information on migration in the region and conduct research, advocacy, capacity building and networking. MMN was conceived as a way to fill the gaps identified by organisations in the region, including a lack of cross-border collaboration among civil society organisations in the GMS concerned with promoting and protecting migrants’ rights. These participants became the founding members of MMN and developed the MMN Terms of Partnership, which explains the nature and mechanisms of MMN. The founding members also nominated members to the MMN Steering Committee, which has become instrumental in decision-making and coordinating members. As a result, MMN has become a crucial organisation linking migration advocacy efforts spanning across the GMS.

MMN’s work is deeply rooted in the belief that “migrants’ rights are human rights,” meaning that the fundamental human rights enshrined in the UN international human rights instruments, standards and treaties apply to all migrant workers. Under this vision, members are committed to advocating for the rights of all migrants in the GMS without discrimination and work towards MMN’s central goal of promoting the welfare, well-being, dignity and human rights, with a special emphasis on labour rights, women’s rights and family rights, of all migrants in the GMS. Member organisations also strive to strengthen the advocacy of migrants’ rights by building mutual support and solidarity among migrants and their advocates within the GMS.

MMN Members

Regional Asian Migrant Centre (AMC)

Burma/ Myanmar 88 Generation Peace and Open Society (Labour Department)
Labour Rights Defenders and Promoters (LRDP)

Cambodia Legal Support for Children & Women (LSCW)
Cambodia Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
Cambodian Women's Crisis Center (CWCC)
Cambodian Women for Peace and Development (CWPD)
Coordination of Action Research on AIDS and Mobility (CARAM)-Cambodia
Banteay Srei

China Migrant Workers' Education and Action Research Centre (MWEAC)
Ruili Women and Children Development Centre
Association for Women's Capacity Building and Community Development in Yunnan
Women Migrant Education Research Professional Association
Yunnan Health and Development Research Association

Lao PDR Faculty of Social Sciences, National University of Laos
Lao Women Union

Thailand MAP Foundation
Thai Action Committee for Democracy in Burma (TACDB)
National Catholic Commission on Migration (NCCM)
EMPOWER Foundation
Federation of Trade Unions-Burma (FTUB)
Foundation for AIDS Rights (FAR)
Foundation for Women (FFW)
Friends of Women Foundation (FOW)
Foundation for Education and Development (formerly Grassroots HRE)
The Human Rights and Development Foundation (HRDF)
Institute for Population and Social Research (IPSR), Mahidol University
Maryknoll Thailand - Office for Migrants at Immigration Detention Center in Bangkok
The Mekong Ecumenical Partnership Program-Christian Conference of Asia (MEPP-CCA)
Pattanak Foundation
Peace Way Foundation
Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN)
Yaung Chii Oo Workers Association (YCOWA)
Studio Xang

Vietnam Center of Research and Consultancy for Development (CRCDD), Southern Institute of Sustainable Development (SISD)
Education & Psychology Association - Ho Chi Minh City
The Applied Social Work Center
Research Center for Management and Sustainable Development (MSD)

MMN Steering Committee

Mr. Brahm Press

MAP Foundation, Thailand

During MMN's 6th General Conference held in March 2015, Mr. Brahm Press became a member of the SC representing MMN members in Thailand and continued to sit in the SC throughout 2016.

Ms. Thet Thet Aung

88 Generation Peace and Open Society, Myanmar

During MMN's 6th General Conference held in March 2015, Ms. Thet Thet Aung became a member of the SC representing MMN members in Myanmar and continued to sit in the SC throughout 2016.

Ms. Chhan Sokunthea

Cambodia Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC), Cambodia

During MMN's 6th General Conference held in March 2015, Ms. Chhan Sokunthea became a member of the SC representing MMN members in Cambodia and continued to sit in the SC throughout 2016.

Ms. Trang Thu Hoang

Research Center for Management and Sustainable Development (MSD), Vietnam

During MMN's 6th General Conference held in March 2015, Ms. Trang Thu Hoang became a member of the SC representing MMN members in Vietnam and continued to sit in the SC throughout 2016.

Ms. Han Jialing

Migrant Workers' Education and Action Research Centre (MWEAC), China

During MMN's 6th General Conference held in March 2015, it was decided that Ms. Han Jialing will continue to serve the SC representing MMN members in China and continued to sit in the SC throughout 2016.

Ms. Kabmanivanh Phouxay

National University of Laos, Lao PDR

During MMN's 6th General Conference held in March 2015, it was decided that Ms. Phouxay will continue to serve as a member of the SC representing MMN members in Lao PDR and continued to sit in the SC throughout 2016.

Ms. Reiko Harima

Regional Coordinator (on behalf of the Secretariat, non-voting member)

Ms. Reiko Harima continued to serve as MMN Regional Coordinator and sat in the SC.

MMN Secretariat

MMN Secretariat offices are located in Hong Kong and Chiang Mai, Thailand. The Secretariat in Hong Kong was established at the time of the launch of MMN and has been hosted by AMC since that time. The Secretariat office in Chiang Mai was established in 2008 and was hosted by MAP Foundation until 2011. In November 2011, following the earlier decision by the MMN Steering Committee, MMN registered its Secretariat in Thailand as the Foundation for Migrants from the Mekong Neighbourhood (Foundation for MMN). The newly established foundation's board then became in charge of overseeing the administration of MMN's function in Thailand, while MAP Foundation continues to assist the Secretariat as an advisor.

MMN Secretariat Team 2016

Ms. Reiko Harima, *MMN Regional Coordinator, 2003 to date*

Ms. Omsin Boonler, *MMN Research and Advocacy Officer, April 2011 to date*

Ms. Khin Cho Myint, *MMN Information and Advocacy Officer, March to May 2016*

Ms. Hay Mann Zaw, *MMN Advocacy Building Capacity Officer, November 2016 to date*

Ms. Carli Melo, *MMN Research Officer, June 2016 to date*

Ms. Sirada Dankham, *Administration Officer, March 2015 to date*

Consultants

Ms. Gabrielle Curtis, *May 2015 to December 2016*

Mr. Ché Singh Kochhar-George, *January 2014 to date*

Interns and Volunteers

Ms. Yujing Liu, *intern at AMC Hong Kong, Yale University Yale-China Program, June-July 2016*

Ms. Xiao Lan Zhang (Christine), *intern at AMC Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Social Justice Summer Internship Program, June-July 2016*

Ms. Suzannah Driscoll, *intern, Hong Kong University Social Justice Summer Internship Program, July-September 2016*

Ms. Elisa Sandri, *intern, October-December 2016*

Ms. Ashley Saxby-Pinkerton, *intern, October 2015 to May 2016*

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the MMN Secretariat, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to MMN members who have worked tirelessly over the past year to fight for the cause of improving the rights of migrants, the MMN steering Committee for contributing their time and effort in realising MMN's goals and strengthening the network, and all the staff members, interns and volunteers who have been a part of the Secretariat family.

We would also like to acknowledge the continued warm support and contributions of the Foundation for Migrants from the Mekong Neighbourhood, which was registered in November 2011, in managing MMN's operations in Thailand. We are also very appreciative of the Asian Migrant Centre, the initiator of the network in 2001, for continuing to host the network's Secretariat in Hong Kong and contributing its expertise in carrying out regional work.

In 2016, MMN organised a number of country visits for MMN delegates and members of the Secretariat, including trips to Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand and Japan. These visits would not have been possible without the full support of MMN members in the respective countries as well as many other friends and partners who saw the importance of forging cross-border solidarity to protect migrants' rights. We very much value these newly forged partnerships and look forward to further working with them in the years to come.

Last but not least, MMN would like to thank all the supporters who have made it possible for us to continuously strengthen our advocacy work. Supporters of MMN in 2016 included the following: Oxfam, Toyota Foundation, International Development Research Centre, and the Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development (CCFD).

And to all others not named here but who have contributed their time, expertise, and efforts, MMN would like to extend our gratitude.

Reiko Harima
Regional Coordinator, Mekong Migration Network



Ms. Reiko Harima speaking at the MMN Consultation Meeting with CSOs on the roles of countries of origin, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Message from the Steering Committee

Initially aimed at filling a gap in knowledge about migration in the Mekong Sub-region, the Mekong Migration Network (MMN) has become a leader and an essential resource on the issue, promoting the rights of migrant workers and their families in the Greater Mekong Sub-region for fourteen years now.

MMN aims to increase understanding of migration and influence attitudes by doing direct research with migrant communities accompanied by critical analysis and advocacy on essential or emerging issues which affect migrants' rights. This past year, MMN once again approached both macro and micro aspects of migration in the Mekong. First, there was a culmination of activities around the topic of "social exclusion." Through a series of travels around the Mekong and then to Japan, the question, "what are the effects of social exclusion on migrants?" was raised to migrants and relevant stakeholders in both origin and destination countries. Similarly, MMN started research looking at Special Economic Zones and mono-cropped cash crops to identify more specific conditions which contribute to migrants' isolated status and accompanying rights violations. With increasing use of regularized migration channels, MMN decided to investigate what Countries of Origin need to do to take more responsibility for their migrants, prior, during and upon return.

It is contributions like this that makes the Mekong Migration Network and its members a vital aspect of the narrative which is influencing and directing migration management at the national, regional and international levels. We do this with the confidence and support of our donors and the migrant communities we serve, and intend to continue to contribute as the situation and narrative continually shifts.

Brahm Press
 MAP Foundation
 Member of the MMN Steering Committee



Mr. Brahm Press (front row; sixth from left) visits a Migrant Resource Centre in Myanmar with other MMN Members and staff from the Secretariat team

Overview of Migration

in the Greater Mekong Subregion in 2016



Workers carrying a basket of fish at a fish market in Myanmar

The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) is comprised of Burma/Myanmar, Thailand, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Yunnan and Guangxi provinces of China. Migration in the subregion takes place mainly through informal channels making it difficult to estimate accurate numbers of migrants. Gaps in political and economic development throughout the GMS are key drivers of interregional migration. Thailand's period of relatively high economic growth makes it the main destination country for migrants from less developed countries, including Cambodia, Myanmar, and Lao PDR, with an estimated 3 to 4 million migrants in the country. Similarly, China's recent economic prosperity has led to an increase of two-way movement across the border between Yunnan Province and Myanmar, Lao PDR, and Vietnam respectively.

Migrant workers are employed in various sectors, including agriculture, fishing, construction, manufacturing, domestic work, entertainment, and mining to name a few. Although migrant workers are the backbone of economic and social development in the region, they continue to be denied many essential rights, benefits, and labour protections. The absence of policies and mechanisms to assist migrants with integrating into local communities, in conjunction with poor living and working conditions, and the widespread criminalisation and discrimination of migrants, leads to migrant populations living in social isolation.

The largely informal nature of migration flows in the region has led many of the governments in the region to become focused on issues of national security, the prevention of undocumented migration, the elimination of trafficking, and the regularisation of migrants' immigration statuses. In 2015, the bilateral Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) on Employment Cooperation, which Thailand separately signed with Burma/Myanmar, Lao PDR, and Cambodia in 2002 and 2003, were reviewed and discussed. In 2016, Myanmar and Thailand signed a new MOU to expedite the process for workers to apply for Certificates of Identity (CIs), a document that allows Burmese migrant workers to work regularly in Thailand. As part of the MOU, Myanmar also proposed to establish six new centres in Thailand to oversee nationality verification and speed up the process of migration.¹ The issuance of CIs, however, has been an issue of contention for such migrant worker rights organisations, such as the Migrant Workers Rights Network (MWRN), which has argued that the application process of the CIS is costly

¹The Government Public Relations Department, "Signing of MOU to Allow Migrant Workers from Myanmar to Work Legally in Thailand", 16 Feb. 2016, thailand.prd.go.th/ewt_news.php?nid=2730&filename=index.

and can readily lead to corruption. The governments of Myanmar and Thailand signed an additional agreement in June wherein the work-break period was reduced from three years to one month.²

While Thailand's Nationality Verification (NV) process—a system that allows migrants already residing in Thailand to receive official identification documentation to apply for work permits—has increased the number of regular migrants, the concrete effects of the policy are still uncertain, especially in regards to labour conditions, access to justice, and the quality of life of migrants. A large number of migrants have also fallen out of regularisation processes and remain undocumented.

Since 2014, the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) has established a new process for registering migrants that saw the creation of One-Stop Service (OSS) centres across the country for migrants to obtain temporary residential permits and work permits (also known as 'pink cards') as interim documents. While Thailand had previously halted the use of temporary pink cards, it began to reissue the documents to undocumented migrants following meetings between officials from Myanmar and Thailand in February 2016. The new version of the pink card has an extended validity of two years and a possible two-year renewal.³ The reinstatement of this policy, however, drew criticisms from some who saw the move as a step backwards in the advancement of migrants' rights. The MWRN, for instance, contended that the pink card fails to grant the holder regularised working status because it is not a legal form of identification. Moreover, holders of the pink card can be deported at any time and are not eligible for domestic benefits such as social security or workers' compensation, unlike those with temporary passports and work permits.⁴

Meanwhile, GMS governments continued their cooperative efforts to prevent human trafficking, investigate and prosecute perpetrators, protect victims, and build capacity to stop trafficking by signing numerous agreements as well as implementing the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking (COMMIT). In November 2015, the 10 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) leaders signed the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ACTIP), which established a legal framework for the region to effectively address the issue of trafficking in persons.

In November 2016, the Regional COMMIT Task Force and Senior Official Meeting was held in Vientiane, Lao PDR. During the meeting, the COMMIT governments adopted the ASEAN-COMMIT indicators of human trafficking and other forms of exploitation as well as the COMMIT Guidelines on Victim Identification and Referral Mechanisms. Additionally, the respective governments unanimously agreed to set the strengthening of labour migration systems in the GMS as a priority for 2017. In order to improve COMMIT's long-term sustainability, the governments also decided to introduce an annually-rotating COMMIT Chair.⁵

At the same time, Special Economic Zones (SEZs) have emerged as an important part of many countries' strategies for economic growth. GMS countries have been developing industrial zones and SEZs in border regions and in other strategic positions, such as in close proximity to ports and capital cities, to encourage foreign investment and generate employment opportunities. SEZs are generally areas where national laws either do not apply or are relaxed, thereby facilitating greater investment in a given zone.⁶ In order to attract and maintain investment, states often suppress labour rights while deregulating trade practices in a 'race to the bottom'.⁷ The limited access to trade unions and other services for workers in SEZs mean that workers employed in these zones, including migrant workers, are vulnerable to exploitative practices.

² RFA Staff, "Aung San Suu Kyi to Sign Pact to Allow Myanmar Workers Smoother Access to Jobs in Thailand", *Radio Free Asia*, 22 June 2016, www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/aung-san-suu-kyi-to-sign-pact-to-allow-myanmar-workers-smoother-access-to-jobs-in-thailand-06222016164414.html.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Aung, Nyan Lynn, "Workers in Thailand Told to Re-Register for Pink Cards", *The Myanmar Times*, 1 Mar. 2016, www.mmmtimes.com/national-news/19233-workers-in-thailand-told-to-re-register-for-pink-cards.html.

⁵ UN ACT, "COMMIT SOM 11 in Vientiane, Lao PDR Concluded", 28 Nov. 2016, un-act.org/commit-som-11-in-vientiane-lao-pdr-concluded/.

⁶ Farole, Thomas, "Special Economic Zones in Africa: Comparing Performance and Learning from Global Experiences", World Bank, 2011.

⁷ Mekong Migration Network, "In-depth Study: Border Economic Zones and Migration", 2013.



A Special Economic Zone in Phom Penh, Cambodia

All GMS countries except China belong to ASEAN, which aims to promote economic growth, stability, and peace in the region. By the end of 2015, ASEAN member countries founded the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) to promote greater regional economic integration. Soon after in 2016, the AEC put forward a blueprint for 2025⁸ that included plans to eliminate tariffs for Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam by 2018, eliminate tariffs for petroleum products of Vietnam and Cambodia by 2025, and develop procedures and guidelines to effectively address the effects of non-tariff measures by 2019.⁹ In spite of these economic plans, only transnational workers employed in select professions will be able to enjoy the benefits of AEC, including freer movement in the region, which are a distant reality for the majority of migrant workers who work at the bottom of economic structures.

2016 Overview

Burma/ Myanmar

2016 saw Myanmar's first elected civilian leader in over 50 years, Htin Kyaw, sworn in as the country's president and pro-democracy figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi appointed to the position of state counsellor. In November 2015, the National League for Democracy (NLD) won an outright majority in both the upper and lower house of parliament.¹⁰ Such a change in the political landscape has led to new internal developments in regards to Burmese migrant workers' rights, and has renewed Myanmar's engagement with foreign governments to respond to migration issues. Myanmar is set to formally join the AEC in 2018—an indication of its commitment to economic cooperation with its neighboring countries.¹¹ However, many deeply rooted problems within the government and the country mean that the improvement of migrant workers' rights continue to face significant barriers that will require more time and sustained effort to overcome.¹²

During a three-day visit to Thailand, the Labour Ministers of Myanmar and Thailand signed two agreements and one MOU covering employment, labour cooperation and border crossing. The agreement concerning employment intended to improve the process of migration, with special emphasis placed on the roles of intermediate brokers and employment agencies on both sides of the border. This agreement came in response to long-standing criticisms from workers' rights groups who have argued that the system has allowed for the exploitation of workers and that loopholes in the system leave workers vulnerable to abuse.¹³

⁸ ASEAN, "ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025", Nov. 2015. www.asean.org/storage/2016/03/AECB-P_2025r_FINAL.pdf.

⁹ ASEAN, AEM and AEC Council, "ASEAN Economic Community 2025 Consolidated Strategic Action Plan", Feb. 6 2017, asean.org/storage/2012/05/Consolidated-Strategic-Action-Plan-endorsed-060217rev.pdf.

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch, "Burma", Sept. 12, 2017, www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/burma.

¹¹ Ma, Alex, "Labor Migration from Myanmar: Remittances, Reforms, and Challenges." Migration Policy Institute, 18 Jan. 2017, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/labor-migration-myanmar-remittances-reforms-and-challenges>.

¹² Human Rights Watch, "Burma".

¹³ Mang, Lun Min, "After State Counsellor's Visit, Overhaul of Thai Migrant Worker Scheme Expected", *The Myanmar Times*, 1 July 2016, www.mmmtimes.com/national-news/21149-after-state-counsellor-s-visit-overhaul-of-thai-migrant-worker-scheme-expected.html.

In further efforts to protect migrant workers' rights, the two governments made plans to establish OSS centres for workers in 10 Thai provinces, as well as pre-arrival and pre-departure orientation centres in Myanmar. These facilities will offer information on legal protection to workers and provide work-related education and training.¹⁴ Both countries recognise the importance of worker rights, although the improvement of these rights remains slow.

A fourth border gate along the border of Myanmar and Thailand, Htee Kee-Phunaron, is scheduled to be in service soon along with the existing border gates in Tachileik-Mae Sai, Myawaddy-Mae Sot, and Kawthaung-Ranong. Workers with proper documents will be allowed to work across the border for 30 days at a time—an increase from the previous one-week allowance for border crossing, which had formerly been the catalyst for irregular border crossings.¹⁵

Since December, Myanmar has stopped workers from entering Malaysia after Najib Razak, Malaysia's Prime Minister, criticised Myanmar for its treatment of Rohingya Muslims. To date, there has been no set time frame for how long this policy change will last. According to the latest data, there are 147,000 Myanmar migrant workers in Malaysia and a "sizeable number" of undocumented workers.¹⁶

In 2015 the Myanmar government signed a ceasefire agreement with eight different armed groups but has yet to reach long-lasting peace agreements with the seven other major groups, including those in Kachin and Shan State. As a result, fighting between the Burmese military and ethnic armed groups in Kachin and Shan State often flared up. There has been ongoing violence and conflict in Maungdaw, Rakhine State, which Human Rights Watch describes as a "crisis represent[ing] the most serious and widespread violence against the Rohingya since the ethnic cleansing campaign in 2012." Four years later, in 2016, an estimated 120,000 Rohingya have been displaced in camps in Rakhine State. As well, access to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Kachin and Shan State have been increasingly limited.¹⁷



Workers commuting to their factories in Myanmar

¹⁴ Mang, Lun Min, "After State Counsellor's Visit, Overhaul of Thai Migrant Worker Scheme Expected", *The Myanmar Times*, 1 July 2016, www.mmmtimes.com/national-news/21149-after-state-counsellor-s-visit-overhaul-of-thai-migrant-worker-scheme-expected.html.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Lee, Yimou, "Myanmar Stops Migrant Workers Going to Malaysia after Rohingya Row", *Reuters*, 7 Dec. 2016, www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-rohingya-malaysia/myanmar-stops-migrant-workers-going-to-malaysia-after-rohingya-row-idUSKBN13W19X.

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, "Burma".

In Cambodia, labour migration is still predominantly governed by sub-decree 190 and the eight prakas (ministerial orders). Cambodia has continued to regularise labour migration as per an MOU with Thailand through the NV and MOU processes. Towards the end of 2016, there were 487,000 documented Cambodian migrant workers in Thailand, approximately two-thirds of whom were fully regularised migrants with passports, and one-third were pink card holders.¹⁸ Unlike migration into Thailand, workers have to go through registered private recruitment agencies in order to migrate regularly to Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Gulf countries. An official estimate suggested that there were over one million Cambodian men and women working overseas, the majority of whom work in Thailand.



A recruitment agency in Cambodia

Korea and Japan have also increasingly become popular destinations among Cambodian migrant workers, although the two countries have higher qualification requirements for accepting migrant workers, which include language proficiency.¹⁹ The Cambodian Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MOLVT) has also been looking for new destination countries for Cambodian workers. In February 2016, for instance, Cambodia signed an agreement with Saudi Arabia regarding the recruitment of domestic and general workers, although no plans have been made to date for the implementation of this policy.²⁰

There has been an increased effort by MOLVT to promote and protect migrant workers abroad. In May, Cambodia signed a bilateral agreement with the Philippines to promote and protect migrant workers' rights. Both countries recognised the need to ensure better support for migrant workers, such as by providing in-country consulate assistance, and acknowledged that migrant workers play an important role in the economic development of the two countries.²¹ In the same month, the Association of Cambodian Recruitment Agencies (ACRA) signed an MOU with the Malaysia National Association of Employment Agencies (PIKAP) in an attempt to protect the interest and safety of Cambodian domestic workers travelling to Malaysia.²²

From April to August, the Thai government temporarily blocked migrant workers from Cambodia from entering Thailand, claiming that the ban was necessary to conduct a census on migrants in the country. Labour rights groups have since argued that "the suspension would not stem the flow of Cambodians to Thailand. Many migrants have already chosen to cross the border illegally in order to avoid red tape and administrative costs."²³ Despite changes in the Thai immigration policy, Thailand and Cambodia signed an MOU during this year's Joint Commission for Bilateral Cooperation on the Establishment of Transit and Reception Centre for Victims of Trafficking and Other Vulnerable Groups. The two countries also agreed to increase trade threefold by 2020, as well as to invest in infrastructure and transport connectivity, which included discussion on a proposal to build a railway network connecting Bangkok and Phnom Penh.²⁴ An increase in trade activities and the development of a railway network between the two countries will likely increase migrant workers' movement in the near future.

¹⁸ IOM, "Thailand migration profile", 2016, <https://thailand.iom.int/sites/default/files/Infosheets/IOM%20Infosheet%20-%20Labour%20Migration%20Trends%20in%20Thailand.pdf>.

¹⁹ Lim, Siv Hong, "Cross-Border Labor Migration Surges in Cambodia, Raising Risk of Human Trafficking", The Asia Foundation, 14 Dec. 2016, asiafoundation.org/2016/12/14/cross-border-labor-migration-surges-cambodia-raising-risk-human-trafficking/.

²⁰ ILO, "Cambodia (July - September 2016)", 2016, www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_531471.pdf.

²¹ Kunthear, Mom, "Philippines and Cambodia to Protect Migrant Rights", *Khmer Times*, 5 May 2016, <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/news/24678/philippines-and-cambodia-to-protect-migrant-rights/>.

²² Chor, Sokhuntea, "Agreement signed to protect workers", *Khmer Times*, 29 June 2018, <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/news/25568/agreement-signed-to-protect-migrant-workers/>.

²³ "Government Halts Migration to Thailand for Four Months", *The Cambodia Daily*, 22 Apr. 2016, <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/governments-halt-migration-to-thailand-for-four-months-111634/>.

²⁴ The Government Public Relations Department, Thailand, "Thailand and Cambodia Sign MOU on Transit and Reception Center for Victims of Trafficking", 27 Aug. 2016, thailand.prd.go.th/ewt_news.php?nid=3730&file-name=index.

This year, Cambodia was upgraded from ‘Tier 2 Watch List’ status to ‘Tier 2’ status in the U.S. State Department’s annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report.²⁵ The step up from Tier 2 Watch List to Tier 2 was a reflection of the Cambodian government’s effort to meet the Trafficking Victims Protection Act’s (TVPA) minimum standards.²⁶ However, the report also claimed that “Cambodia remains a source, transit, destination country of men, women, and children subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking”.²⁷

At the national level, MOLVT announced a possible change in the minimum wage law to expand the law’s coverage to all workers beyond those in the garment industry. The *Phnom Penh Post* reported that the proposed legislation was met with “cautious praise from union leaders and advocates, along with skepticism.” The full details of the proposal, including information on when and how it would be implemented, has yet to be released. The minimum wage currently stands at USD 140 per month for garment and footwear workers, and is expected to increase to USD 153 by January 2017.²⁸ In December 2016, female Cambodian workers led by the Women Union Network (WUN), an association of female trade unionists, protested on the streets and urged MOLVT and the Ministry of Women’s Affairs to ratify International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions 183 (on maternity protection) and 189 (on promoting decent work for domestic workers). As it stands now, domestic workers are not covered under Cambodia’s Labour Law.²⁹

China

In 2016, China became a member of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). In 2016, China also set up its first immigration office, with the aim of attracting so-called “overseas talent” from abroad.³⁰ The Chinese government also planned to launch a pilot programme for issuing foreigner work permits in Beijing and Shanghai with the intention of streamlining the process of migration and separating migrant workers into the categories of “High Level Talent”, “Professional Personnel” and “Non-technical or service workers” based on criteria such as salary, educational background, or Chinese language fluency. By so doing, China hopes to attract overseas talent from the first category while at the same time restricting the number of non-technical or service workers entering China.³¹ The programme will officially begin in 2017.

Despite tensions along the border of China and Myanmar, around 5,000 to 10,000 people from Myanmar and China reportedly move to and from the two countries every day.³² In Ruili, a city in Yunnan Province located on the China-Myanmar border, around 50,000 people from Myanmar set up businesses or worked in factories as of March 2016.³³

²⁵ Lim, Siv Hong, “Cross-Border Labor Migration Surges in Cambodia, Raising Risk of Human Trafficking”, The Asia Foundation, 14 Dec. 2016, asiafoundation.org/2016/12/14/cross-border-labor-migration-surges-cambodia-raising-risk-human-trafficking/.

²⁶ U.S Department of State, “Tier placements”, <https://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2017/271117.htm>.

²⁷ U.S Department of State, “Cambodia”, <https://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/countries/2015/243409.htm>.

²⁸ Sengkong, Bun, and Ananth Baliga, “Ministry Drafting New Minimum Wage Law to Cover All Workers”, *Phnom Penh Post*, 31 Oct. 2016, www.phnompenhpost.com/national/ministry-drafting-new-minimum-wage-law-cover-all-workers.

²⁹ David, Sen, and Ananth Baliga, “New Push for ILO Conventions”, *Phnom Penh Post*, 1 Dec. 2016, www.phnompenhpost.com/national/new-push-ilo-conventions.

³⁰ Sara Staedicke, Jeanne Batalova, and Jie Zong, “Top 10 of 2016 – Issue #9: On the Brink of Demographic Crisis, Governments in East Asia Turn Slowly to Immigration”, Dec. 6 2016, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/top-10-2016---issue-9-brink-demographic-crisis-governments-east-asia-turn-slowly-immigration>.

³¹ Yang, Grace, “China’s New Foreigner Work Permit System Goes National On April 1: Have You Checked Your Employment Contract?” China Law Blog, 31 Mar. 2017, www.chinalawblog.com/2017/03/chinas-new-foreigner-work-permit-system-goes-national-on-april-1-have-you-checked-your-employment-contract.html.

³² RFA Staff, “Chinese Authorities Demand Money From Detained Myanmar Migrants in Border Town”, *Radio Free Asia*, 7 Nov. 2016, www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/chinese-authorities-demand-money-from-detained-myanmar-migrants-in-border-town-11072016153455.html.

³³ Wang, Ann, “The Myanmar Muslims in China.” *Frontier Myanmar*, 23 Mar. 2016, frontiermyanmar.net/en/the-myanmar-muslims-china.

Dongxing, in China's Guangxi region, implemented a pilot scheme in 2015 that allowed eight local factories to hire around 1,000 Vietnamese employees for a single stay for up to six months. A year later in 2016, around 4,000 Vietnamese workers live and work in Dongxing, Guangxi, and approximately 10,000 work in Guangxi's Shangsi County.³⁴

Lao PDR

In April 2016, the Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2016-2020 was officially approved at the 7th National Assembly's Inaugural Session. "Developing a protection and management mechanism for Lao workers overseas" and strengthening "the management of recruitment services and safe labour migration" were mentioned as the two priorities to achieve the goal of "Improved Public/Private Labour Force Capacity".³⁵

For many Laotian workers, SEZs have been a primary source of employment opportunities, which has led some people to return home from abroad. In the Pakxe-Japan Specific Economic Zone in Champassak Province alone, 100 of the 700 workers were returnees from Thailand.³⁶

Remittances from Laotian migrant workers made up a significant portion of Lao PDR's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). According to World Bank estimates, remittances to Lao PDR totaled USD 116 million in 2016.³⁷

Thailand has been one of the top five destination countries for Laotian migrant workers.³⁸ According to some reports, the population of Laotian migrants in Thailand was 300,000 in 2016.³⁹ Thailand's Ministry of Labour, however, reported that there were only 128,388 registered Laotian workers in Thailand as of July 2016.⁴⁰

In July 2016, a new MOU on labour cooperation between Lao PDR and Thailand was signed. The MOU pledged to enhance the protection of migrant workers' rights in both countries. The cooperation framework covered academic cooperation, as well as collaboration on skill development, employment, labour protection, and social security.⁴¹ As of October 2016, 40,467 Laotian migrant workers with valid work permits entered Thailand through the MOU process.⁴²

This year, Lao PDR hosted the National Preparatory Meeting for the ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour (AFML), which focused primarily on the social protection of migrant workers. Provisions on social protection were also included in the aforementioned MOU between Lao PDR and Thailand.⁴³

³⁴ "China Focus: Vietnamese workers power factories across border", *Xinhua*, 30 Aug 2016, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-08/30/c_135645845.htm.

³⁵ Ministry of Planning and Investment, Lao PDR., "8th Five-Year National Social Economic Development Plan", June, 2016, http://www.la.one.un.org/images/publications/8th_NSEDP_2016-2020.pdf.

³⁶ Pongkhao, Somsack, "Lao Workers Returning Home to Work in SEZs", *Vientiane Times*, 16 July 2016, <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/aec/Lao-workers-returning-home-to-work-in-SEZs-30290688.html>.

³⁷ ILO, "Triangle in ASEAN- Lao People's Democratic Republic", http://www.ilo.org/asia/projects/WCMS_622431/lang-en/index.htm.

³⁸ Mana Southichack, "Lao Labor Migration and Remittance Trends and economic and livelihood implications," Feb. 15, 2014, http://rightslinklao.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2016/04/Lao_Migrant_Workers_Remittance_Mana_2014_final_.pdf.

³⁹ IOM, "Assessing Potential Changes in the Migration Patterns of Laotian Migrants and their Impacts on Thailand and Lao People's Democratic Republic", 2016, <https://thailand.iom.int/sites/default/files/document/publications/EN%20-%20Assessing%20Potential%20Changes%20in%20the%20Migration%20Patterns%20of%20Laotian%20Migrants%20and%20Their%20Impacts%20on%20Thailand%20and%20Lao%20People%27s%20Democratic%20Republic.pdf>

⁴⁰ Prangthong Jitcharoenkul, "Thailand, Laos agree on workers' pact", *Bangkok Post*, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/news/general/1029497/thailand-laos-agree-on-workers-pact>.

⁴¹ "MOU between Thailand and Laos Focuses on Labour Cooperation to Resolve Issues to International Standards" July 7, 2016, <http://www.mol.go.th/en/content/51590/1468134010>.

⁴² IOM, "Migrant Information Note" December 2016, https://thailand.iom.int/sites/default/files/document/publications/MIN%20No.30_ENG_FINAL.pdf.

⁴³ ILO, "Lao PDR (July – September 2016)."

The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare reported that 24,000 registered foreign workers, the majority of whom are from Vietnam, China, and Thailand, worked in Lao PDR.⁴⁴

Thailand

In 2016, Thailand made continued efforts to regularise migrant workers. The Cabinet approved plans to systematically register migrant workers, solve “illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU)” fishing activities, which the European Union (EU) has yellow-carded Thailand for, and overcome labour shortages all while continuing to address national security issues.⁴⁵ On the other hand, the Thai government has established MOUs to facilitate the employment of migrant workers and encouraged employers to recruit and employ regular migrant workers. Thai authorities also established post-arrival and reintegration centres for migrant workers from Cambodia, Myanmar, and Lao PDR in three provinces in Thailand. The centres provide services and assistance to employers and migrant workers recruited through the MOU process.

Although OSS centres have been registering migrant workers, the coverage of the regularisation process has been restricted. Migrant workers eligible to register were limited to those who held non-Thai identification cards (‘pink cards’) and those who obtained documents issued by their countries of origin. To qualify, applicants must be under the age of 55 (as of 1 April 2016), and their children must be below the age of 18. Undocumented workers and their employers could be penalised, as stipulated by the Working of Alien Act B.E. 2551, and many undocumented migrant workers face the



A deported Cambodian migrant worker at the Migrant Reception Center in Poipet, Cambodia

threat of deportation if they are discovered by authorities.⁴⁶ The OSS registration scheme has also failed to include migrant workers in the fishing industry, including migrant fisherman and seafood processing workers. According to the Ministry of Labour, 1,178,678 migrant workers and 23,669 migrant dependents from Cambodia, Myanmar, and Lao PDR have registered through the OSS scheme as of December 2016.⁴⁷ At the same time, 392,746 migrant workers entered into Thailand through the MOU process, while 897,828 entered into the country without going through formal processes but later completed the NV process.⁴⁸

In August 2016, the Thai government issued the Royal Ordinance on Bringing Migrant Workers to Work with Employers in Thailand B.E. 2559 (2016) to further regulate the recruitment of migrant workers. A few months later in October 2016, the Cabinet approved the National Strategy Migrant Worker Management B.E. 2560-2564 (2017-2021). This five-year plan aims to reduce Thailand’s dependence on foreign workers; systematically control the recruitment of migrant workers by regulating the movement of migrants coming into the country to work and moving back to their countries of origin; keep employment conditions of migrant workers on par with international standards; ensure effective management of migrant workers; and monitor and evaluate the implementation of migration policies.⁴⁹

Although the Thai government has revised and relaxed some of its regulations regarding migrant workers, such as allowing them to change their employers or workplace and permitting them to return home during annual New Year’s celebrations (known as ‘Songkran’ in Thailand), the government also increased efforts to crackdown on undocumented workers throughout 2016. In February, the Ministry

⁴⁴ “Laos toughens up on foreign workers”, *The Nation*, March 15, 2017, <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/detail/business/30309088>.

⁴⁵ Thailand Ministry of Labour, “Guideline on the management of migrant workers from Myanmar, Lao PDR and Cambodia after March 31, 2016”, Mar. 4, 2016 http://www.bora.dopa.go.th/images/snbt/book/59/mt03091_v1320.pdf.

⁴⁶ Thailand Ministry of Labour, “Last Corner for Foreign Worker Registrations Ending on 29th July 2016 where Violators Will Face Heavy Fines”, July 31, 2016, <http://www.mol.go.th/en/anonymouse/news/51966>.

⁴⁷ Thailand Department of Employment, https://www.doe.go.th/prd/assets/upload/files/alien_th/d9f0bb05fe-79c6aae74ded438a25e3ba.pdf.

⁴⁸ Office of Foreign Worker Administration, Thailand, “Statistics of migrant workers nationwide” (in Thai), December 2016, https://www.doe.go.th/prd/assets/upload/files/alien_th/b579b43c5c135321afec8d83c4ed4aa4.pdf

⁴⁹ “Guideline for Management of migrant workers at the end of the registration period”, RYT9 October 25, 2016, <https://www.ryt9.com/s/cabt/2536443>.

of Labour started making plans to strictly enforce labour laws requiring the documentation of all irregular migrant workers. The Head of the Department of Employment, Arak Phrommanee, stated that the ultimate goal of the Thai government is to improve the country's image regarding the treatment of migrant workers, thereby improving its ranking in the U.S. State Department's TIP Report.⁵⁰ The Committee on Foreign Workers and Human Trafficking Resolution Policies met in June and agreed to establish guidelines for "alien" workers, increase penalties for employers who hire workers without the necessary papers, and take aggressive actions against workers without work permits.⁵¹



A migrant community in Rayong, Thailand

After the Thai government amended its MOU with Cambodia and signed a new MOU with Vietnam in 2015, the government also reviewed and amended its MOUs with Myanmar and Lao PDR in 2016. In the amended MOUs between Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Lao PDR, migrant workers who have worked for four years in Thailand will only have to return to their countries of origin for 30 days opposed to 3 years as stipulated in previous MOUs. In addition, the Department of Employment has improved its recruitment system and expanded the number of professions available to migrant workers from Cambodia, Myanmar, and Lao PDR, which now includes employment in 24 industries as well as domestic work. At the same time, Vietnamese workers were now allowed to work in labour-intensive professions, including in the construction and fishing industry.⁵² Aside from amending the MOU on Labour Cooperation and Agreement on Employment of Workers with Myanmar, the Thai government is facilitating the employment of cross-border migrant workers, outlined in Section 14 of the Working of Alien Act B.E. 2551, by signing the Agreement on Border Crossing with Myanmar in June 2016, as well as a similar agreement with Cambodia in July 2015. The MOU on border crossing allows migrant workers who obtain a border pass to apply for a work permit under Section 14.⁵³

In other news relating to Thailand's anti-trafficking efforts, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Interior Grisada Boonrach declared in April that victims and witnesses of human trafficking are allowed to stay in Thailand for up to one year during the investigation of trafficking cases. Depending on the status of the case, witnesses and victims may also be permitted to stay for an additional year after the first year is over. This marks an important step towards protecting the rights of victims of trafficking and is a desirable alternative to detention.⁵⁴

Domestically, 2016 also saw increases in Thailand's minimum wage of five to ten baht in 69 provinces, although the current 300-baht minimum wage will remain in eight provinces. This is the first increase to the country's minimum wage in three years.⁵⁵ Despite the increase, ILO reports that 90 percent of migrant workers in Thailand from Cambodia, Myanmar, and Lao PDR are still earning less than the minimum wage.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ "New Drive to Register Illegal Labour", *Bangkok Post*, 4 Feb. 2016, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/news/general/850984/new-drive-to-register-illegal-labour>.

⁵¹ Lucksanawong, Juthathip, "Illegal Workers Face Major Crackdown", *The Nation*, 14 June 2016, <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/national/Illegal-workers-face-major-crackdown-30288083.html>.

⁵² Thailand Ministry of Labour, "DOE Reveals Legal Methods of Importing Foreign Workers through MOUS with 4 Nations (Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam)", June 23, 2016, <http://www.mol.go.th/en/anomouse/news/51135>.

⁵³ Public Relations Office, Kalasin, "Recruitment of cross-border migrant workers (in Thai)", Sept 22, http://pr.prd.go.th/kalasin/ewt_news.php?nid=7130

⁵⁴ "Decision on Victims of Trafficking Welcomed", *The Nation*, 12 Apr. 2016, see www.mekongmigration.org/?p=4940.

⁵⁵ "Small Minimum Wage Increases", *Bangkok Post*, 19 Oct. 2016, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/news/general/1114224/small-minimum-wage-increases>.

⁵⁶ "Migrant Workers need Full Protection", *Bangkok Post*, December 17, 2016, <https://www.pressreader.com/thailand/bangkok-post/20161217/281809988540384>.

2016 saw a continuous rise in the number of Vietnamese overseas workers over the period of the last three years. The Department of Overseas Labour (DOLAB) reported in 2016 that there were 126,296 Vietnamese working overseas—37 percent of whom were female—with Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea being the primary destination countries. In 2016, Vietnam and South Korea renewed their MOU on the Employment Permit System, which had been suspended for four years.⁵⁷

In April 2016, the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam promulgated Resolution Number 142/2016/QH13 on the country's Five-Year Socio-Economic Development Plan 2016–2020. In the plan, “[s]ending labourers to work overseas” was reported as one of the key means for sustainably developing “culture, society, and healthcare by combining and harmonising economic development, cultural development, social progress and improvement of social equality and living standards.” Promoting “the protection of overseas Vietnamese nationals” was also mentioned as a way to improve “the efficiency of foreign affairs, promote proactive international integration, and create peaceful environment and favorable conditions conducive to national development”.⁵⁸ Moreover, in June 2016, a Joint Circular between the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Finance was issued and included a detailed guideline for supporting potential migrant workers.⁵⁹

In the same month, a Formosa Plastics Group steel plant in Vietnam caused one of the worst environmental disasters in four of the country's central provinces—Ha Tinh, Quang Binh, Quang Tri, and Thua Thien Hue. One report claimed that the steel plant “spilled toxic waste that polluted more than 200 km (125 miles) of coastline, devastating sea life and local economies dependent on fishing and tourism.”⁶⁰ Estimates indicated that a total of 263,000 labourers were directly and indirectly affected. In response, the Government of Vietnam supported sending people who had lost their jobs as a result of the spill to work overseas.⁶¹

2016 also saw an increasing number of Vietnamese from the central provinces of Vietnam—Nghe An and Ha Tinh in particular—travelling to Thailand and Lao PDR to seek employment, mostly by means of tourist visas. Close proximity to migrants' origin communities, employment opportunities, and the existence of Vietnamese communities in Thailand were some of the major pull factors for migration. Most undocumented Vietnamese workers in Thailand work in the service sector, fishing industry, and as domestic workers.⁶²

Relations between Cambodia and Vietnam continued to be strained owing to border disputes. In October, the two countries decided to invite international experts to settle the matter.⁶³ The Vietnamese President's first trip to Cambodia in 2016 marked a small step toward a future of bilateral cooperation between the two countries.⁶⁴ The vast majority of foreigners living in Cambodia were Vietnamese according to the latest estimates by Cambodia's Ministry of Interior.⁶⁵

⁵⁷ DOLAB, “Trên 126,000 lao động Việt Nam đi làm việc ở nước ngoài trong năm 2016 (More than 126,000 Vietnamese go to work overseas in 2016)”, 10 Jan 2017, <http://www.dolab.gov.vn/New/View2.aspx?Key=2881>.

⁵⁸ “Resolution No. 142/2016/QH13 on Five-Year Socio-Economic development plan 2016 – 2020 (SEDP)”, <http://www.chinhphu.vn/portal/page/portal/English/strategies/strategiesdetails?categoryId=30&articleId=10057712>.

⁵⁹ Joint Circular no. 09/2016/TTLT-BLĐTBXH-BTC on guiding the implementation of some provisions on supporting to send labourers to work overseas under the contract regulated in decree number 61/2015/ND-CP on 9 July 2015 of the Government on policies on employment and national employment fund <http://vbpl.vn/TW/Pages/vbpbq-toanvan.aspx?ItemID=117778&Keyword=61/2015/ND-CP>

⁶⁰ Mai, Nguyen, “Formosa steel plant in Vietnam restarts after toxic spill”, *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-vietnam-environment-formosa-plastics/formosa-steel-plant-in-vietnam-restarts-after-toxic-spill-idUSKBN18P186>.

⁶¹ MOLISA, “Ngư dân tại 4 tỉnh miền Trung bị thiệt hại sẽ có cơ hội đi XKLD tại Hàn Quốc” (Fishers in 4 affected central provinces will have opportunity to go to work in S.Korea), 6 September 2016, http://phanhoichinh sach.molisa.gov.vn/tin-tuc-su-kien/-/asset_publisher/0Vb3Tb9V6WVx/content/ngu-dan-tai-4-tinh-mien-trung-bi-thiet-hai-se-co-co-hoi-i-xkl-tai-han-quoc.

⁶² “Vietnamese Workers Flock to Thailand, Laos for Jobs”, *Asia News Network*, 3 Mar. 2016, <http://www.nation-multimedia.com/business/Vietnamese-flock-to-Thailand-Laos-for-higher-payin-30280804.html>.

⁶³ Pheap, Aun, “Cambodia, Vietnam Seek Help From Abroad in Border Dispute”, *The Cambodia Daily*, 25 Oct. 2016, www.cambodiadaily.com/news/cambodia-vietnam-seek-help-abroad-border-dispute-119698/.

⁶⁴ “Cambodia-Vietnam Ties.” *Khmer Times*, 17 June 2016, www.khmertimeskh.com/news/26226/cambodia-vietnam-ties/.

⁶⁵ Chanveasna, Ros, “More than 3,500 Foreigners Deported in 2016”, *Khmer Times*, 6 Jan. 2017, www.khmertimeskh.com/news/33975/more-than-3-500-foreigners-deported-in-2016/.

Achievements in 2016

In 2016, MMN continued its work promoting and protecting the rights of migrants in the region through collaborative research, joint advocacy, capacity building, and networking. MMN continued to strengthen its organisational capacity by developing network members' knowledge and skills in regards to advocating for migrants' rights, facilitating mutual exchanges, reaching out to new members, and expanding its operational base.

All of MMN's projects and activities work towards the goal of protecting and promoting the rights of migrants, decriminalising migration, promoting tolerance, advancing mutual respect and harmony, and creating solidarity. While all the projects are coordinated by the MMN Secretariat with guidance from the MMN Steering Committee (SC), and in some cases external advisors, MMN emphasises teamwork and close collaboration between its members and Secretariat staff. Ultimately, projects are implemented to strengthen mutual understanding and partnership among migrant advocates in the region, as well as to increase the capacity of MMN members, for example by strengthening their research skills.

MMN's work in 2016 gave special emphasis to selected themes, which are described below. Firstly, MMN carried out a research and advocacy project examining the impact of social exclusion on migrants and promoting social inclusion. Entitled "Beyond 'Tolerance': Working hand-in-hand to promote the social inclusion of migrants and their families," the project gave MMN a lens through which to examine a wide range of issues affecting migrants' lives, including discrimination, denial of access to social services, and poor working and living conditions. Secondly, MMN embarked on a new project focusing on the roles of countries of origin in protecting migrants' rights. Prior to this project, MMN had long been advocating for policy changes and improvements to migrants' countries of origin, including Cambodia, Myanmar, and Lao PDR. The launch of the project in 2016, however, gave renewed energy and focus to the theme. Thirdly, MMN implemented a series of activities aimed at building capacity of migrants' rights advocates in the Mekong. These activities included a week-long regional training on Advocacy with ASEAN, which many migrants' rights advocates deemed crucial in helping them better understand ASEAN mechanisms and develop an effective advocacy strategy at a time when ASEAN is preparing to implement the ASEAN Declaration on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers. Aside from this training, MMN also organised a national training for civil society organisations (CSOs) in Myanmar and invited participants of the national training to visit Cambodia and Thailand. The capacity building of CSOs in Myanmar was timely, as an increasing number of CSOs in Myanmar are starting to work on migration issues following changes in the country's political climate, and thus desire to strengthen their understanding of labour migration policies, as well as to learn from the experiences of other migrants' countries of origin, such as Cambodia where programmes for prospective migrants, migrant returnees, and migrants' families have been in existence for many years. Lastly, MMN embarked on a collaborative research project with the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) that focuses on the impact of SEZs on migration in Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia, with a particular focus on women garment factory workers.

MMN Members at the Regional Training on Advocacy with ASEAN



Please refer to the following sections for more information on MMN's achievements in 2016.

1. Beyond "Tolerance": Promoting the Social Inclusion of Migrants in the Mekong

Over the last few decades, millions of people have migrated between Mekong countries and beyond in search of security and a better life. Millions of migrants live "side-by-side" with local communities but not "together." This creates a sense of isolation, and prevents them from playing a more visible role as members of a community. Migrants continue to be treated by governments as if they are purely "temporary." How long is "temporary"? How long can one stay somewhere without hoping for a sense of belonging and acceptance? How long before one is allowed to play a full role in society? Little attention has been given to the social inclusion of migrants in society and what needs to be done to go beyond "tolerance" to embrace the friendship and contributions migrants bring to society.

MMN has been working on this theme for a number of years. From 26-28 February 2013, MMN organised the "Mekong Symposium on Migration: Migrants from the Mekong Neighbourhood Living Together Seeking Effective Responses to Enable Integration and Social Cohesion," Bangkok, Thailand. Attended by more than 70 participants, including representatives of Mekong governments, United Nations (UN) agencies, EU, and civil society, the symposium resulted in a joint statement promoting the social inclusion of migrants.

For the press release of the symposium, please see: <http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=1339>

In 2014, MMN developed a lesson plan for primary school children to learn the history of migration and published a picture book, entitled *Dragon Lake*, with the intention of encouraging more open attitudes towards diversity in society. These publications were presented at a conference entitled "Embracing Diversity," where representatives of the Thai Ministry of Education expressed their willingness to integrate the publications into school activities. These projects were made possible with the support of the Toyota Foundation.

In 2016, MMN conducted field visits to Cambodia, Myanmar, Japan, and Thailand in collaboration with CSOs and migrant right advocates to gather information and initiate forward-looking conversations on the necessary changes to respond to the social exclusion of migrants and their families. The visits resulted in an advocacy paper entitled *Permanently Temporary: Examining the Impact of Social Exclusion on Mekong Migrants*, which elaborated on the concept of social exclusion of migrants, and highlighted the implications of social exclusion on migrants in the four project countries. The paper was submitted to relevant government ministries at public events held in Bangkok, Yangon, and Phnom Penh. At these events, MMN also showcased a photography exhibition and multimedia presentation on migrants' social inclusion. Government representatives, CSOs, migrants, and other stakeholders gave presentations on the issue followed by public discussion. The project successfully reached out to the media and public by increasing understanding on migration in countries of origin where migration has historically been a sensitive issue, to such an extent that CSOs were at one point not allowed to work on migration issues. The project also facilitated mutual exchanges among CSOs in the four project countries and strengthened partnerships.

The following is a summary of each event.

Country visit to Thailand, March 2016

During the country visit to Thailand, project partners travelled to Rayong, where a significant number of Cambodian migrants work. MMN partners visited the drop-in center of Foundation for AIDS Rights (FAR), an organisation that works to promote migrants' rights and access to health care services. They proceeded to visit a number of worksites where Cambodian migrants work and live, including the Ban Phe Pier in Ban Phe sub-district, before heading to the Labour Rights Promotion Network (LPN) school for migrant children where around 100 Cambodian children study.



MMN Members visit the Foundation for AIDS Rights in Rayong, Thailand

The Thailand country visit ended in Mae Sot, a border town that relies almost entirely on Burmese migrants working in manufacturing and other sectors. MMN partners were introduced to the work of local organisations, including MAP Foundation, Foundation for Education and Development (FED), and Young Chi Oo Workers' Association (YCOWA), and learned how they promote the social inclusion of migrants. Project partners also visited a migrants' worksite and residence, and interviewed workers and their families about their concept of "home" and "belonging."



MMN members learning about Special Economic Zones in Cambodia

Country visit to Cambodia, May 2016

During the country visit to Cambodia, MMN partners visited the Phnom Penh Special Economic Zone (PPSEZ) and the Sanco Special Economic Zone (Sanco SEZ) to understand the livelihood opportunities available to workers in Cambodia. MMN also visited Poi Pet, a town bordering Thailand, and participated in a discussion hosted by the Cambodian Women's Crisis Center (CWCC) with migrant returnees and their families.

Country visit to Myanmar, June 2016

During the visit to Myanmar, MMN partners visited Thilawa Special Economic Zone—one of three SEZs being developed in Myanmar—to better understand the livelihood opportunities available to workers in Myanmar. Participants also visited two rural communities, Naung Khar Shae and Thayetyone, and interviewed local people about their perceptions of outbound migration as well as reintegration into communities after returning from abroad. During their visit, MMN partners also engaged in a public discussion organised by ILO and shared their ideas concerning whether or not regular migration contributes to the actual betterment of migrant workers' livelihoods. MMN partners then had a meeting with the Myanmar Overseas Employment Agencies Federation (MOEAF) and visited a Migrant Resource Centre to understand the roles various stakeholders play in facilitating outbound migration.



MMN members visit the pre-departure training centre for migrants heading to Malaysia and Thailand

Country visit to Japan, July 2016

During the visit to Japan, MMN met with migrants and discussed their views on the concept of "home." MMN and Meiji Gakuin University in Yokohama, Japan, also organised a symposium that was attended by around 100 people. At the symposium, MMN partners gave presentations on issues relating to labour migration between the Mekong countries and Japan, and on issues relating to supply chains and the role of Japanese consumers and investors. Various speakers from Japan presented on the issue of social exclusion experienced by migrants in Japan. MMN partners proceeded to visit several non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including the Kalabaw-no-Kai organisation in Kanagawa and Young Women's Christian Association in Kyoto, and learned about how these organisations assist migrants in Japan with integrating into host communities. MMN partners also visited a factory in Komatsu City, which employs workers from Myanmar through the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP).



MMN Members meet with a volunteer doctor in Japan

At the end of each country visit, MMN partners participated in an internal reflection meeting, where partners discussed their newfound understanding of issues surrounding the social inclusion and exclusion of migrants. All of the country visits were accompanied by Mr. John Hulme, a documentary photographer. MMN member organisations in respective countries arranged community visits for Mr. Hulme, where he took photos and videos with the help of project partners.

The findings from these visits were reflected in the final advocacy paper, and photos and videos taken by Mr. Hulme were used for the photo exhibitions and multimedia presentation, as reported below.

Photo exhibitions

MMN held photo exhibitions in three locations—Bangkok, Thailand, Yangon, Myanmar, and Phnom Penh, Cambodia. These exhibitions showcased photos depicting the experiences, aspirations, and struggles of migrants in the destination and origin countries of Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Japan.

MMN and SEA Junction co-organised the first exhibition in Bangkok from 8-16 October 2016. At the opening event, MMN launched the English version of a multimedia presentation and advocacy paper. The opening event was attended by over 40 people, including migrant workers, migrants' rights advocates, CSOs, international NGOs (INGOs), and research and academic institutions.

For a detailed report about the opening event, please visit:
<http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=5126>.

The second exhibition was held in Phnom Penh from 21-23 October 2016. At the opening event on 21 October 2016, MMN launched the Khmer-language multimedia presentation and advocacy paper. The opening event was attended by the public and representatives of the Cambodian government, NGOs, and INGOs. Mr. Sokchar Mom, Program Manager of Legal Support for Children and Women (LSCW), and the Cambodia Country Coordinator for this project, welcomed audience members and presented an overview of the project. This was followed by a screening of the Khmer version of MMN's multimedia documentary.

For a detailed report about the opening event, please visit:
<http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=5204>.

The final exhibition was held in Yangon from 28-30 October 2016. The launch of the photo exhibition in Yangon was accompanied by a public discussion on the issue of enhancing social inclusion among migrant returnees in Myanmar. Representatives of the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population (MOLIP) attended the opening ceremony, and representatives of MMN submitted the Burmese version of the advocacy paper to them. Representatives from ILO Myanmar, 88 Generation Peace and Open Society, the Cambodian Women's Crisis Center, and Myanmar migrant returnees discussed the issue of social exclusion experienced by Myanmar workers in both destination countries and upon return.

For a detailed report about the opening event, please visit:
<http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=5225>.



Opening of photo exhibition in Yangon, Myanmar



Photo exhibition in Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Multimedia presentation, "Beyond 'Tolerance': Living Together With Migrants"



A screenshot of the multimedia presentation

The multimedia presentation, entitled "Beyond 'tolerance'" is available in English, Thai, Khmer, Burmese, and Japanese.

For the English version, please visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xEaX-mc7jDE&t=3s>

For the Thai version, please visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S80HpaVL-gk&t=3s>

For the Khmer version, please visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pi3MuT4KLgA>

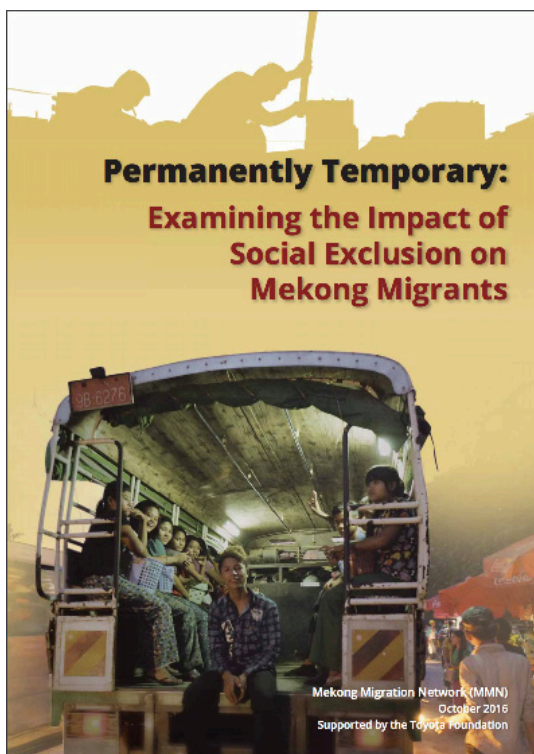
For the Burmese version, please visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPADk7LA0a0>

For the Japanese version, please visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fpMllydF08>

Advocacy paper, *Permanently Temporary: Examining the Impact of Social Exclusion on Mekong Migrants*



The paper containing the conceptual discussion on social exclusion of migrants and case studies from Thailand, Japan, Cambodia, and Myanmar is available in English, Khmer and Burmese.

For the English version, please visit:

<http://www.mekongmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Permanently-Temporary-Eng-mmn-printed-version.pdf>

For the Khmer version, please visit:

http://www.mekongmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Advocacy-Paper_KHMER-18Oct16.pdf

For the Burmese version, please visit:

<http://www.mekongmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Book-Permanently-burmese-mmn.pdf>

The Report, *Permanently Temporary: Examining the Impact of Social Exclusion on Mekong Migrants*

2. Roles of Countries of Origin Project

26 Migrant workers have long been a fundamental part of the economy of the GMS, filling labour shortages in destination countries while sending remittances home. Despite their importance, migrants in the GMS often work and live in precarious situations. The region is notorious for labour exploitation with migrant workers in some extreme cases being deceived and trafficked, and suffering from forced labour. While destination countries should rightly bear much of the responsibility for the protection of migrant workers inside their territory, countries of origin must also play a proactive role in ensuring that their nationals migrating abroad are protected. This holds true for both documented and undocumented migrants. The development of formal labour migration systems offers new opportunities to ensure the protection of workers who, until very recently, had little alternative but to migrate across borders through informal channels. It is often assumed that moves towards a formal migration process will automatically lead to better protection for migrants, including the prevention of trafficking. However, this is not necessarily so. If recruitment or government agencies are not properly regulated and monitored, and if the authorities do not introduce rights respecting measures, migration through formal channels may simply lead to higher costs and forced dependency on agencies with little or no benefit to migrants. It is therefore essential that the relevant agencies in countries of origin have a full understanding of the issues at play, including potential successes and pitfalls, when developing policy and legislation in this area. It was in this context that MMN launched the project to examine in depth the roles of countries of origin, and develop recommendations to Myanmar and Cambodia, key countries of origin in the Mekong.

The objectives of this research project were as follows:

1. To examine the roles that can be played by countries of origin in protecting migrant workers;
2. To identify strengths and gaps in migrant worker protection, including in the use of recruitment agencies, in the Philippines and Indonesia;
3. To examine current policy and practice in Myanmar and Cambodia and identify shortcomings and policy gaps; and
4. To develop recommendations for Myanmar and Cambodia based on the above research in order to strengthen the protection and promotion of workers' rights abroad.

In 2016, the following activities were carried out as part of the project.

CSO Consultation Meetings

In June 2016, MMN organised a CSO consultation meeting in collaboration with 88 Generation Peace and Open Society to discuss the role of origin countries in protecting migrant workers. Participants included CSOs and trade unions working for migrant workers. Participants discussed issues related to migration governance, recruitment practices, and reintegration (of migrants) and collectively developed recommendations addressed to the Myanmar government. A similar CSO consultation had been organised in Cambodia in 2015.



CSO Consultation Meeting in Bangkok, Thailand



CSO Consultation Meeting in Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Consultation Meetings with Migrants

To fully understand and to work towards addressing the need for countries of origin to establish support networks for their migrant workers, MMN also conducted consultation meetings with migrant



Migrant Consultation Meeting in Myanmar

workers themselves. In total, there were four meetings with migrants working in Thailand, one with migrant returnees in Myanmar, and one with migrant returnees in Cambodia. 162 migrants and returnees were interviewed through the consultation meetings, in which migrant workers shared their experiences, learnt about international standards and the measures other countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia take in protecting their nationals overseas. Migrant workers were given further information on what their own countries currently do with regards to migrant and migration support, and discussed their recommendations to their respective governments.

3. Capacity Building Initiatives

In 2014, MMN began an initial three-year collaboration with Oxfam (2014-2016). Under Oxfam’s overarching theme of “promoting social protection for all marginalized workers”, MMN’s role was to enhance the capacity of migrants’ rights advocates in the region to advocate for social protection for migrant workers with ASEAN. With the support of Oxfam and anonymous donors, MMN developed training modules on ASEAN advocacy for migrants’ rights advocates and carried out the following Regional Training on Advocacy with ASEAN in June 2016 in Bangkok, Thailand.

Regional Training on Advocacy with ASEAN

The five-day training course on “Advocacy with ASEAN” was held from 4-7 June in Bangkok with a total of 17 trainees from Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, and Vietnam. The trainees, a majority of whom work with NGOs advocating for migrant rights in their respective countries, were selected based on their prior knowledge on and experience with working with migrant workers issues, and were expected to remain engaged in MMN ASEAN advocacy activities following the training. The training course sought to strengthen trainees’ understanding on how to advocate to ASEAN and develop trainees’ advocacy and analysis skills. It also informed trainees of information on ASEAN and how ASEAN can be utilised for advocating for migrants’ rights.



Trainees presenting on the result of their discussions during the regional training.

On the last day of the training, the participants jointly evaluated the training and developed a work plan to translate the knowledge and skills they learnt during the training into actual advocacy work. As an immediate action plan, participants agreed to collectively develop a policy brief on recruitment practices, one of the key issues identified during the training that require immediate attention. The MMN Secretariat followed through with this work plan, and consulted with alumni of the training programme to publish a policy brief on recruitment practices. MMN representatives proceeded to circulate the policy brief at the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), which was held in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on 8-12 December 2016 as reported below.

For more information about the training and photos, please see: <http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=5030>



Trainers presenting on the MOUs of Myanmar

Myanmar National Training on Responses to Labour Migration

MMN conducted a national-level training on migration from 29 August to 2 September, titled “Myanmar National Training on Responses to Labour Migration.” The training was organised in collaboration with 88 Generation Peace and Open Society. Ms. Liz Hilton from EMPOWER Foundation and Ms. Ei Ei Chaw from Foundation for Education and Development (FED) were the main trainers and ensured active participation of participants. There were altogether 25 trainees, representing 18 CSOs in Myanmar.

Over the course of the week, the trainers facilitated participatory activities to expand participants’ understanding on different types of movement and migration trends in the region, as well as their ability to critically analyse national and regional migration policies and the role of embassies, labour attachés, and other stakeholders.

Highlights of the training included:

1. Engaging with representatives from MOEAF and ILO during a panel discussion and critically reflecting on their presentations;
2. Learning how to prepare press releases, reports to CSOs, and statements to the government and having these pieces critiqued by professional writers and journalists from 7 Days News; and
3. Planning for and carrying out advocacy on regular and irregular migration by preparing brochures and distributing them to students at the Yangon University of Education.

For more information about the training, please see: <http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=5352>

To facilitate the exchange of issues and strategies and to strengthen mutual understanding and cross-country collaboration between CSOs based in Myanmar, Thailand, and Cambodia, MMN organised country visits for participants of the Myanmar National Training to Thailand on 23-26 November 2016 and to Cambodia on 13-17 December 2016.

The objective of the Thailand Country Visit was for participants to gain a better understanding of cross-border labour migration processes and the support available to migrants in destination countries. During the visit, delegates had the opportunity to engage in insightful discussions with organisations working to support the rights of migrants in Thailand, such as Workers Solidarity Association (WSA), and with migrant communities themselves. MMN member organisations, namely MAP Foundation, Shan Women’s Action Network, and EMPOWER Foundation, hosted the participants and shared their perspectives on the situation of migrants living in Thailand as well as their experience with and strategies on working with migrant labour issues as members of civil society organisations.

for participants to gain a better understanding of



Group picture of members of Myanmar and Thai CSOs during the country visit to Thailand

The week’s activities equipped CSO representatives with knowledge on various types of programmes aimed at protecting and empowering migrants, including raising awareness through multimedia documentation and radio broadcasting, and facilitating space and knowledge on women’s empowerment and migrant labour rights. Participants were also able to network with CSOs in Thailand, with whom they can collaborate to protect rights of migrants from Myanmar in Thailand in the future.

For more information about the country visit to Thailand, please see:
<http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=5568> (Highlights and photos)
http://www.mekongmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Thailand-Country-Visit-Report_Final.pdf (Full report/proceedings)

The objective of the country visit to Cambodia was for CSOs in Myanmar to gain a better understanding on Cambodia’s policies and practices to facilitate safe migration and prevent trafficking, and strategies developed by CSOs to protect the rights of migrants and migrant returnees. During this visit, participants met with various NGOs including the CWCC, Civil Volunteer Group, the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC), the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights, Krousar Thmey, and Damnok Toek, and exchanged strategies for countries of origin. Participants also had the opportunity to meet with representatives from IOM as well as the Chairperson of Provincial Committee for Counter Trafficking (PCCT) to learn about the existing government structures to promote safe migration and fight human trafficking.

For more information about the country visit to Cambodia, please see:
<http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=5582>

In December, MMN invited participants of the Myanmar National Training and subsequent country visits to an assessment meeting in Yangon. Overall, participants felt the training helped improve knowledge on labour migration purposes, channels, and policies in the GMS and improved the development of their respective organisations’ programmes concerning labour migration. Country visits also helped participants gain first-hand knowledge of the reality of migration through direct engagement with migrants.



Group picture of members of Myanmar and Cambodian CSOs during the country visit to Cambodia

4. Research and Advocacy on Special Economic Zones

Special Economic Zones have emerged as a prominent strategy in the pursuit of regional economic integration in the GMS. SEZs can be located in border regions or in other strategic positions, such as in close proximity to ports and capital cities, and are generally areas where national laws either do not apply or are relaxed, thereby facilitating greater investment in a given zone.

SEZs often contain labour-intensive factory-based industries, including the garment industry, and rely on internal and cross-border migrant workers for production. While SEZs have been upheld as a model for market-based growth, they are often associated with labour rights violations and poor working standards. Such violations include: workers facing limitations on their freedom of association; trade unions being restricted from accessing zones; employees constantly working under the threat of arbitrary dismissal; wages being below a country’s minimum wage; working hours exceeding national labour laws; and degraded occupational health and safety. Violations of workers’ and human rights are more likely to be experienced by women who make up the majority of the workforce in many industrial zones.

Collaborative research project on Special Economic Zones and the garment industry

Financially supported by International Development Research Centre (IDRC) Canada, this three-year joint project between MMN and AIT explores the policies and practices of the garment industry operating in industrial zones and SEZs in Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia, and their impact on women migrant workers' working and living conditions and life choices. The project investigates how particular environments – industrial zones and SEZs located in border regions and in the vicinity of major cities in central regions – and internal and cross-border migration influence women's participation in collective action, their relationship with local communities, and social and cultural norms. The project commenced in 2016 and has since involved a stakeholder consultation meeting, research design public workshop, project partner consultation meeting, preliminary studies of three of the five study sites – Mae Sot, Thailand, Yangon, Myanmar, and Phnom Penh, Cambodia – and presentation at the 5th Conference of the Asian Borderlands Research Network.

Stakeholders' Consultation Meeting – Bangkok, March

On 2 March, MMN and AIT co-hosted a stakeholder consultation meeting in Bangkok with the objective of exchanging information on the status of research and practices related to SEZ development in the GMS amongst relevant stakeholders. The meeting also provided a space for MMN and AIT to introduce the project and seek feedback on the proposed research questions and methodology. The consultation meeting was attended by representatives of the ILO, Thailand's Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, Thailand Development Research Institute, Just Jobs Network, Worker Rights Consortium, academics, and CSOs.



Research Design Workshop for the SEZ project in Bangkok, Thailand

Research Design Public Workshop – Bangkok, 15 July 2016

On 15 July, MMN and AIT co-hosted a public workshop in Bangkok, which created the space for stakeholders and project partners to map out issues surrounding labour migration, the garment industry, industrial zones, and SEZs in the GMS from the perspective of government, businesses, and civil society. The workshop also aimed to facilitate discussion on how MMN and AIT's field-based research will be able to provide relevant evidence to inform regional dialogue on SEZs and migration.

1st Project Consultation Meeting – Bangkok, July

Following the research design public workshop, MMN and AIT held a two-day internal consultation meeting from 16-17 July with project partners to discuss the scope, methods, and potential benefits of this joint research and advocacy project. The project partners include: FED, MAP Foundation, and Yaung Chi Oo Workers' Association (YCOWA) from Thailand, LSCW from Cambodia, and Ms. Thet Thet Aung, a former member of 88 Generation Peace and Open Society, from Myanmar.

Preliminary Studies – Mae Sot, Yangon, Phnom Penh, November 2016

Throughout November, MMN, AIT, and project partners carried out preliminary field studies in Mae Sot, Yangon, and Phnom Penh and jointly discussed research questions and methods, identified potential study sites, and conducted preliminary interviews with key informants and garment factory workers to better understand the context of each area.

Mae Sot, Thailand, 15-17 November 2016

In Mae Sot, the research team, including members of MMN, AIT, FED, MAP Foundation, and YCOWA, participated in internal meetings to discuss the project's research design, and conducted informal interviews with garment factory workers and a focus group discussion (FGD) with a Burmese migrant community. The team also met with representatives of the Office of Employment under the Ministry of Labour, Immigration Department, Tak Special Economic Zone Office, Tak Province Chamber of Commerce, and Tak Chapter of the Federation of Thai Industries to gain a better understanding of labour migration dynamics at the border and the impending development of the Tak SEZ.

Yangon, Myanmar, 19-21 November 2016

From 19-21 November in Yangon, members of MMN, AIT, and the Myanmar research team coordinated by Ms. Thet Thet Aung, facilitated FGDs with garment factory workers and met with CSOs supporting the rights of factory workers in both Hlaing Thar Yar and Shwe Pyi Thar industrial zones. The team also participated in internal meetings and met with representatives from the Department of Labour Relations and Department of Labour under the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population in Shwe Pyi Thar, as well as the Shwe Pyi Thar Industrial Zone Management Committee.

Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 25-27 November 2016

In Phnom Penh, MMN, AIT, and project partner LSCW toured the Phnom Penh SEZ, interviewed garment factory workers and a village head representing a ward largely inhabited by internal migrant garment factory workers, met with representatives of United Sisterhood Alliance and the Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions, and participated in strategic planning meetings.

5th Conference of the Asian Borderlands Research Network – Kathmandu, 12-14 December 2016

From 12-14 December, representatives of the MMN Secretariat and AIT participated in and presented at the 5th Conference of the Asian Borderlands Research Network (ABRN), titled: “Dynamic Borderlands: Livelihoods, Communities and Flows,” in Kathmandu, Nepal. In a panel titled: “Promoting Gender Sensitive Policies for Border Special Economic Zones in the Mekong Region,” MMN Research Officer Carli Melo presented on Border Special Economic Zones and their implication for female migrant worker mobility, drawing on findings from the project’s preliminary studies and MMN’s 2013 publication, *In-depth Study: Border Economic Zones and Migration*, and highlighting the development of the Tak SEZ in Mae Sot, Thailand, as a case study.

5. Advocacy and Networking

Throughout 2016, MMN engaged in a number of solidarity and advocacy actions by participating in national, regional, and international forums and conferences, and continued its networking efforts.

9th ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour

The 9th ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour (AFML) was held in Vientiane, Lao PDR, from 9-10 November 2016. The AFML has been organised annually since the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers was signed in Cebu, Philippines, in 2007. Mr. Brahm Press attended the AFML on behalf of MMN. He also joined a preparatory meeting organised by the Task Force on ASEAN Migrant Workers (TFAMW), which was organised prior to the AFML. The Forum concluded with participants negotiating and agreeing on a list of recommendations to work on for the upcoming year.

The 9th AFML resulted in the development of a number of recommendations. Regarding extending social protection for migrant workers in ASEAN, participants agreed to “take measures as appropriate to adopt and implement in each ASEAN Member State a progressive plan, with a clear timeframe, towards ensuring equitable access to social protection for migrant workers.”⁶⁵ Participants also agreed to “include applicable and gender-responsive social protection provisions in written employment contracts or other appropriate written document in a language understandable to migrant workers.” Additionally, regarding working towards the portability of social security for migrant workers in ASEAN, participants agreed to “identify knowledge gaps on portability of social protection for migrant workers from existing studies to be addressed in future studies. Ensure that findings and recommendations of the studies are widely disseminated to all relevant stakeholders and sectors.”

Global Forum on Migration & Development, Dhaka, Bangladesh, December 2016

The Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) is an initiative of UN Member States that began in 2006 to address migration and development interconnections in practical and action-oriented ways. MMN has been engaging in the GFMD processes from the beginning. The GFMD in 2016 took place in Dhaka, Bangladesh, from 8-12 December.

⁶⁵ The 9th ASEAN FORUM ON MIGRANT LABOUR, “Recommendations” November 9-10, 2016, http://apmigration.ilo.org/resources/the-9th-asean-forum-on-migrant-labour/at_download/file1.

MMN nominated four delegates to attend the 9th GFMD Civil Society Days from 8-9 December, entitled "Time for Action: Doing rights-based governance of migration and development in our communities and across borders." The four delegates included: Mr. Brahm Press, Executive Director of MAP Foundation, Thailand; Mr. Sopheap Suong, Regional Manager of CWCC, Cambodia; Ms. Thet Thet Aung, Head of the Labour Department of 88 Generation Peace and Open Society, Myanmar; and Ms. Omsin Boonlert of the MMN Secretariat. During the events, MMN delegates engaged in discussions on the topics of global governance of migration, labour migration and recruitment reform, borders and detention, and social inclusion.

International Workers' Day, Chiang Mai, 1 May 2016

MMN joined 14 other organisations of the Northern Labour Network and 200 workers at the International Workers' Day (May Day) event at Banpak Tassanajorn, Chiang Mai, Thailand. During the event, participants shared their experiences and discussed issues surrounding worker unions, occupational health and safety, and increasing restrictions on migrant workers' mobility and freedom. At the end of the event, participants made a statement including their demands to the Royal Thai Government and recommendations to the Ministry of Interior.

International Migrants' Day (IMD), 18 December 2016

IMD, Yangon

With the slogan of "Respect Migrants' Power, Give Equality Now!", the IMD event was organised in Yangon and attended by more than 1,000 participants—most of whom were workers and migrant returnees. MMN as a co-organiser ran a photo booth at the event and distributed publications to the public. Around 300 people came to the photo booth and around 600 people visited the publication table.

IMD, Chiang Mai

In Chiang Mai, MMN took part in a workshop organised at UNISERVE for the occasion of IMD. Representatives of CSOs promoting migrant rights, academics, and migrant workers' representatives met to discuss and share their experiences. Participants were invited to identify challenges and concerns regarding migration and migrants' rights, and to suggest practical recommendations. The results of group discussions were then presented to lawyers, scholars, and other NGOs for feedback on how to translate suggestions into concrete policies and implementable recommendations. The next day, a statement including recommendations was finalised and presented to the Governor of Chiang Mai.



1000 participants were present at the IMD events in Yangon, Myanmar



Participants of the IMD in Chiang Mai march on the streets to advocate for migrants' rights

Academic conference on Migration in the GMS, organised by Mahidol University, Asian Institute of Technology, and University of Sussex, 29-30 June 2016, Bangkok

On 29-30 June, Ms. Reiko Harima, MMN Regional Coordinator, attended the Conference on Migration in the GMS organised by Mahidol University, Asian Institute of Technology, and University of Sussex in Bangkok, Thailand. As a presenter, Ms. Reiko Harima presented on policies regarding health care for migrants in the Mekong based on MMN's 2015 report, *Self-Care & Health Care: How Migrant Women in the Greater Mekong Subregion Take Care of their Health*.

Regional public forum on "Cross-border investments and forced Migration in ASEAN: The relation of Thailand's sugar industry to Cambodian Migrant labors in Thailand," Bangkok, Thailand, 14 July 2016

On 14 July 2016, Project SEVANA Southeast Asia organised the above titled public forum. Ms. Reiko Harima, MMN Regional Coordinator was invited as a resource person on labour migration. Ms. Harima stated that MMN has not carried out a systematic study to examine the link between land grabbing as a result of cross-border investment and forced migration, even though landlessness has been identified as one of the key push factors for outbound migration in Cambodia. She pointed out that the experiences of migration into Thailand due to the loss of land—stories shared by Cambodian worker speakers—were not isolated cases.

6. Information Monitoring and Sharing

MMN website

Throughout 2016, MMN regularly updated its homepage, www.mekongmigration.org.

Listservs

Information sharing has been one of the main objectives of MMN since it was launched in 2003. The shared understanding of issues and regular exchange of views among MMN members and partners form a foundation for the network's joint actions. Currently, MMN hosts the following main listservs:

MMN members' listserv

The MMN Secretariat manages a formal listserv that only MMN members can subscribe to and access. Internal discussions, including discussions on strategies, work plans, and positions on key issues, are conducted through this listserv.

Mekong news

This is an open listserv that everyone, including non-MMN members, interested in migration-related news in the GMS can subscribe to. News, as well as MMN statements, press releases, and reports, are circulated through this listserv.

Secretariat Calender 2016

January

- 16-17** Organised a working group meeting in preparation for the Regional Training on Advocacy with ASEAN, Bangkok, Thailand
- 19** Interviewed Her Excellency Chou Bun Eng, Secretary of State, Ministry of Interior, Chairperson of the National Committee to Combat Trafficking for Roles of Countries of Origin project, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
- 19** Interviewed representatives of the Association of Cambodian Recruitment Agencies (ACRA), Phnom Penh, Cambodia
- 20** Interviewed Mr Choup Narath, Director, Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training), and representatives of ILO and IOM for the Roles of Countries of Origin project, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
- 21** Organised a CSO consultation meeting concerning Roles of Countries of Origin, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
- 22** Organised a country level planning meeting with MMN members in Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
- 24** Assisted in organizing a consultation meeting with Burmese migrant workers in Phang Nga for the Roles of Countries of Origin project, Phang Nga province, Thailand

February

- 4** Attended the JUNIMA (Joint UN Initiatives on Migration and AIDs) Steering Committee meeting, Bangkok, Thailand
- 9** Assisted in organising a consultation meeting with Burmese migrant returnees in Pha-An, Karen State for the Roles of Countries of Origin project, Karen State, Myanmar
- 25-26** Attended the Oxfam partners' meeting

March

- 2** Collaborated with AIT to organise the initial brainstorming meeting on SEZ project, Bangkok, Thailand
- 20** Assisted in organising a consultation meeting with Cambodian migrant workers in Rayong province for the Roles of Countries of Origin project, Rayong, Thailand
- 19-26** Organized the Cambodia Country visit for the MMN project "Beyond 'Tolerance': Working Hand-in-Hand to Promote the Social Inclusion of Migrants and Their Families", Mae Sot and Rayong, Thailand

May

- 15** Organized a country level planning meeting with MMN member organizations in Cambodia, Phnom Penh
- 16-17** Conducted key informant interviews for the Roles of Countries of Origin project, Yangon and Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar
- 23-27** Organized the Cambodia Country visit for the MMN project "Beyond 'Tolerance': Working Hand-in-Hand to Promote the Social Inclusion of Migrants and Their Families", Phnom Penh & Poi Pet, Cambodia

June

- 4-8** Organised the MMN ASEAN Advocacy Training, Bangkok, Thailand
- 19-24** Organized the Myanmar Country Visit for the MMN project "Beyond 'Tolerance': Working Hand-in-Hand to Promote the Social Inclusion of Migrants and Their Families," Yangon, Burma/Myanmar
- 27** Joined the Clean Clothes Campaign strategy meeting, Hong Kong
- 29-30** Attended a conference on labour migration organized by the Mahidol University, AIT and Sussex University, Bangkok, Thailand

July

- 1** Organized a project consultation meeting and a multimedia production team meeting for the MMN project "Beyond 'Tolerance': Working Hand-in-Hand to Promote the Social Inclusion of Migrants and Their Families," Chiang Mai, Thailand
- 2-3** Organized a project consultation meeting for the MMN project "Roles of Countries of Origin," Chiang Mai, Thailand
- 14** Attended a regional public forum on "Cross-Border Investments and Forced Migration in ASEAN: The Relation of Thailand's Sugar Industry to Cambodian Migrant Labors in Thailand," organized by Project SEVANA South-East Asia, Center for Peace and Conflict Studies, Chulalongkorn University, Contract Farmer Network (Thailand), Equitable Cambodia, and Human Rights and Development Foundation, Bangkok, Thailand
- 15** Organized a public workshop for MMN and the Asian Institute of Technology's collaborative research project "Special Economic Zones and the Garment Industry," Bangkok, Thailand
- 16-17** Organized a project consultation meeting for the joint MMN-AIT project "Special Economic Zones and the Garment Industry," Bangkok, Thailand
- 22-26** Organized the Japan Country visit for the MMN project "Beyond 'Tolerance': Working Hand-in-Hand to Promote the Social Inclusion of Migrants and Their Families," Japan

August

- 29-Sept 2** Organized the MMN "Myanmar National Training on Responses to Labour Migration," Yangon, Burma/Myanmar

September

- 22** Attended a Joint United Nations Initiative on Migration, Health and HIV in Asia (JUNIMA) Steering Committee Meeting, Bangkok, Thailand

October

- 8** Organised the Opening Event and Photo Exhibition for the MMN project "Beyond 'Tolerance': Working Hand-in-Hand to Promote the Social Inclusion of Migrants and Their Families," Bangkok, Thailand
- 21-23** Organised the Opening Event and Photo Exhibition for the MMN project "Beyond 'Tolerance': Working Hand-in-Hand to Promote the Social Inclusion of Migrants and Their Families," Phnom Penh, Cambodia
- 28-30** Organised the Opening Event and Photo Exhibition for the MMN project "Beyond 'Tolerance': Working Hand-in-Hand to Promote the Social Inclusion of Migrants and Their Families," Yangon, Burma/Myanmar

November

- 36
- 3-5** Attended the meeting on “Rights and Justice in the context of Labour Migration: A Civil Society Consultation organized by Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW)”, Bangkok, Thailand
 - 14-15** Attended and presented key findings of MMN report on *Self-Care & Health Care: How Migrant Women in the Greater Mekong Subregion Take Care of their Health* at the International Workshop on unskilled workers in “ASEAN- Migration and Care Issues” organised by Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Southeast Asia (RLS SEA) in collaboration with Hue University of Science, Hue, Vietnam
 - 15-17** Assisted in organizing a preliminary study for the Mae Sot study site for the joint MMN-AIT project “Special Economic Zones and the Garment Industry,” Mae Sot, Thailand
 - 19-21** Assisted in organizing a preliminary study for the Yangon study site for the joint MMN-AIT project “Special Economic Zones and the Garment Industry,” Yangon, Burma/Myanmar
 - 24-25** Attended and presented at the “Regional Programme Reflection Workshop” organized by Oxfam, Siem Reap, Cambodia
 - 25-27** Assisted in organizing a preliminary study for the Phnom Penh study site for the joint MMN-AIT project “Special Economic Zones and the Garment Industry,” Phnom Penh, Cambodia

December

- 5** Attended the Asia Civil Society Day (ACSD), Dhaka, Bangladesh
- 6-7** Attended the People’s Global action on Migration, Development, and Human Rights (PGA), Dhaka, Bangladesh
- 8-10** Attended the Global Forum on Migration & Development (GFMD) Civil Society Day, Dhaka, Bangladesh
- 12-14** Presented at the 5th Conference of the Asian Borderlands Research Network (ABRN) for the joint MMN-AIT project “Special Economic Zones and the Garment Industry,” organised by Social Science Baha, International Institute for Asian Studies, and ABRN, Kathmandu, Nepal

