

ANNUAL REPORT 2017



MEKONG MIGRATION NETWORK

Annual report prepared by Mekong Migration Network
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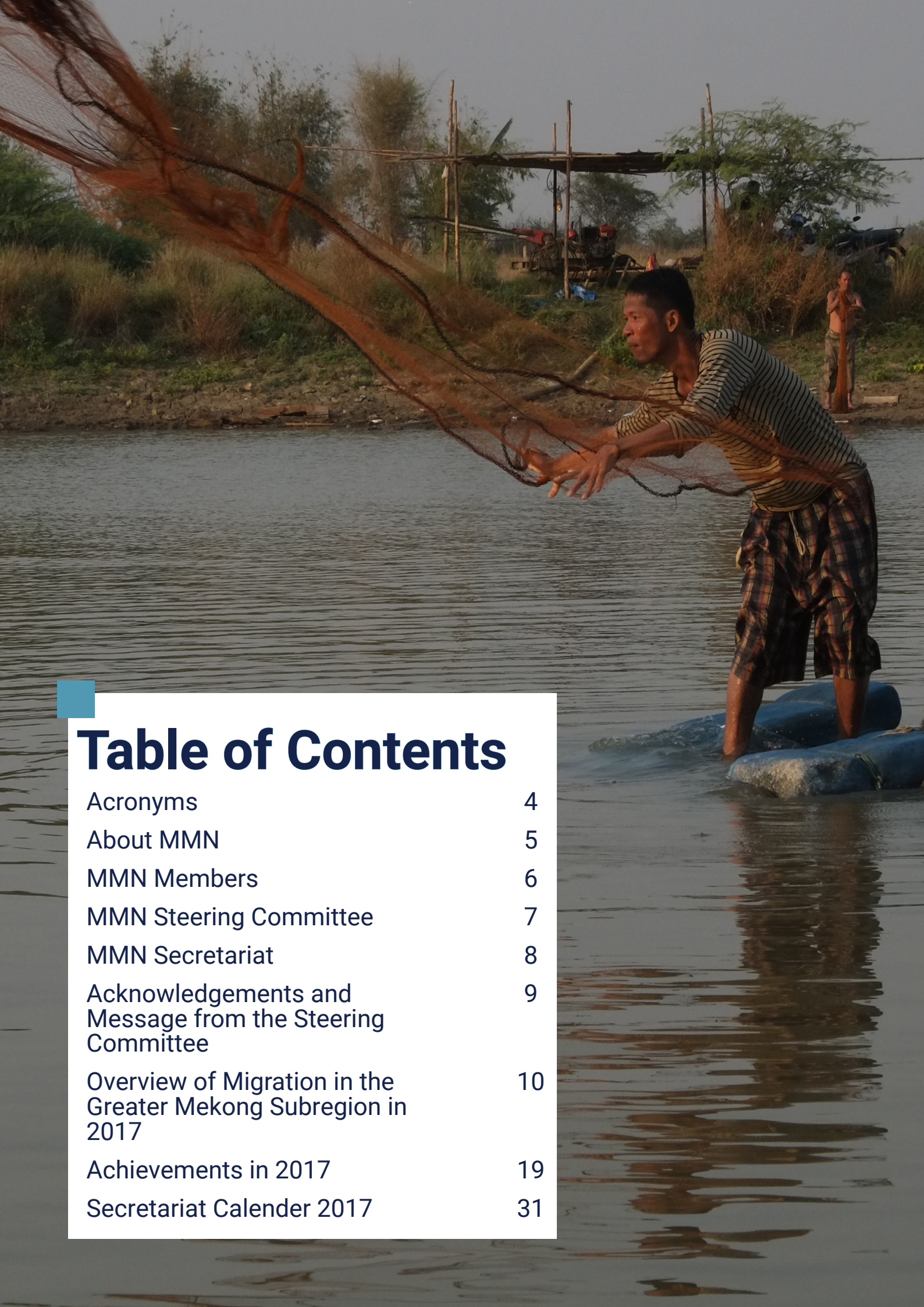


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Acronyms

AIT	Asian Institute of Technology
ACSC	ASEAN Civil Society Conference
AMC	Asian Migrant Centre
APF	ASEAN Peoples' Forum
CDC	Council for the Development of Cambodia
CSO	Civil society organisation
DOLAB	Department of Overseas Labour, Vietnam
FED	Foundation for Education and Development
FLC	Future Light Center
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMS	Greater Mekong Subregion
IFC	International Finance Corporation
ILO	International Labor Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LPN	Labour Rights Promotion Network
LSCW	Legal Support for Children and Women
MMN	Mekong Migration Network
MOC	Memorandum of Cooperation
MOLIP	Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NLD	National League of Democracy
OTIT	Organisation for Technical Intern Training
PAPA	Malaysian Association of Foreign Maid Agencies
PDT	Pre-departure training
SAFEA	State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs
SEA	Southeast Asia
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
TITP	Technical Intern Training Program
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 (FED) 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 Raks Thai Foundation Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) Yaung Chii Oo Workers Association (YCOWA) Studio Xang
Vietnam	Center of Research and Consultancy for Development (CRCD), 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 2017.

Ms. Thet Thet Aung

Future Light Centre, 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 2017.

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 2017.

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 2017.

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 2017.

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 2017.

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 HK was established at the time of the launch of MMN and has been hosted by the AMC since that time. The Secretariat office in Chiang Mai was established in 2008 and was hosted by the MAP Foundation until 2011. In November 2011, following the earlier decision by the MMN SC, 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 2017

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

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

Ms. Hay Mann Zaw, *MMN Advocacy Building Capacity Officer, November 2016 to October 2017*

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

Ms. Thaw Dar, *MMN Project Assistant, August 2017 to date*

Ms. Sirada Dankham, *Administration Officer, March 2015 to February 2017*

Ms. Suphit Chaihong, *Administration officer, April 2017 to date*

Consultants

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

Interns and Volunteers

Ms. Lisa Qian, *intern, June-August 2017*

Ms. Jenina L. Lim, *intern, June-July 2017*

Ms. Ashley Lushinsky, *intern, August-December 2017*

Ms. Victoria Pair, *intern, August-December 2017*

Mr. Stefan Luk, *intern at AMC, Hong Kong, June-July 2017*

Ms. Angela Yang, *intern at AMC, Hong Kong from June-August 2017*

Mr. Adrian Mok, *intern at the AMC, Hong Kong from July-September 2017*

Acknowledgement and Message from the Steering Committee

MMN's operation would not have been possible without the dedication of MMN members who have tirelessly defended the rights of migrants, the continued support of MMN Steering Committee members who have selflessly contributed their expertise in advancing MMN's goals and strengthening the network, and the commitment of staff members, interns and volunteers of the Secretariat in promoting a greater cause. For that, we are eternally thankful.

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, for managing MMN's operations in Thailand, and the Asian Migrant Centre, the initiator of the network in 2001, for hosting the network's Secretariat in Hong Kong and contributing its expertise in carrying out regional work.

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 2017 included the following: Oxfam, Solidar Suisse, Open Society Foundation, International Development Research Centre (IDRC), 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 heartfelt gratitude.

Reiko Harima

Regional Coordinator, Mekong Migration Network



Myanmar has a population of about 55 million and an estimated 3.9% migrate and work in foreign countries. Over the years, people have migrated against the context of globalisation and increased economic integration in search of better working opportunities. As a result, migrants' population have been increasing by the day. The increase in migration movements often involves huge economic and social repercussions, and at times even many exploitative practices against migrant workers and violations of their of labour rights—issues that need to be urgently addressed.

To protect the rights of workers, members of the Mekong Migration Network have worked together to protect the rights of migrant workers. In July 2017, MMN published a report entitled *Safe from the Start: The Roles of Countries of Origin in Protecting Migrants*. The same month, MMN organised the Policy Dialogue on the Roles of Countries of Origin in Yangon, Myanmar. Representatives of the Cambodian and Myanmar governments, International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), civil society organisations and recruitment agencies participated in this two-days meeting and shared their experiences. We are especially happy to see that both the Cambodian and Myanmar government recognise the importance of MMN's research findings. At the end of the two-days meeting, both governments even expressed their commitment to continue a multi-country and multi-stakeholder dialogue on the theme in the near future.

With a number of organisations working together in 2017, MMN has been successful in bringing together a wide range of stakeholders to discuss the important issues concerning the rights of migrants. Civil society organisations in Myanmar are excited to continue collaborating with MMN.

Thet Thet Aung

*Future Light Centre, Myanmar
Member of the MMN Steering Committee*



Overview of Migration in the Greater Mekong Subregion in 2017

2017 marked the 10th anniversary of the ASEAN adopting the Declaration on Promotion and Protection of Rights of Migrant Workers in ASEAN, which was signed in Cebu in 2007. After much anticipation, the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers was finally signed by the Heads of ASEAN States during the 31st ASEAN Summit. In spite of that, the Consensus is not legally binding, and most of its articles are subject to national laws and regulations, which has caused concern among advocates on the limited impact that the document is likely to bring about. The ASEAN plans to adopt an action plan to implement the Consensus in 2018.

At the national level, labour migration governance implemented by most of the governments in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) centered around regularizing migrants' immigration statuses, promoting regular migration channels, and preventing undocumented migration.

In Thailand, the announcement of the 2017 Royal Ordinance on Management of Foreign Workers has led to an intensified campaign to criminalize migrants and the subsequent mass exodus of migrants—mostly Cambodian migrants—owing to their fear of arrest and the extremely severe punishments that may follow.

Moreover, the movement of people in the GMS continued to be characterized by the mixed nature of migration—many are displaced due to conflicts, large-scale development projects, or human rights violations, while many others are trafficked. Adequate social protection and decent work continue to be beyond reach for many of the ordinary workers in the region.

Burma/ Myanmar

Managing labour migration effectively has become a national priority under State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), which took office in April 2016. Within the GMS, Myanmar has grown to become the country of origin for the greatest number of migrants, with an estimated 4.25 million Myanmar nationals living abroad—a figure representing almost ten percent of the country's population of 53.9 million people.¹ According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 70 percent of Myanmar's migrant population is based in Thailand, followed by Malaysia (15 percent), China (4.6 percent), Singapore (3.9 percent), and the USA (1.9 percent).² While formal mechanisms for cross-border and overseas labour migration exist, including Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) processes, a large proportion of Myanmar migrants remain 'irregular' (undocumented) due to the complexity, high costs, and time required to access regular channels, among other factors.

The Government of Myanmar is prioritising the management of labour migration, in part, given the potential for remittances to facilitate economic development, which, according to the World Bank, were an estimated USD 3.3 billion in 2016. This represents 4.9 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).³ The Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (currently referred to as the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population) speculated that remittances were likely closer to USD 8 billion, or 13 percent of the GDP, as of 2015, accounting for both official and unofficial remittance flows.⁴ Despite the nation's changing investment climate and efforts to create domestic employment opportunities—for example, through the development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs)—Myanmar nationals continue to be impelled to migrate given the existence of higher wages in neighbouring countries, internal armed conflict, and environmental changes.

¹ International Organization for Migration (IOM), "Myanmar", <https://www.iom.int/countries/myanmar>.

² Ibid.

³ The World Bank, "Migration and Remittances: Recent Developments and Outlook", *Migration and Development Brief 27*, April 2017, <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/992371492706371662/MigrationandDevelopment-Brief27.pdf>, 21.

⁴ Gupta, S., "Leveraging Migration for Development: A Review of Literature on Patterns and Movements in Myanmar", *Working Paper*, 2016, https://www.lift-fund.org/sites/ift-fund.org/files/publication/LeveragingMigrationforDevelopment_FinalDraftShagun.pdf, 8.

In an asserted effort to better protect and promote the rights of Myanmar nationals abroad, the Government of Myanmar, along with the other nine heads of ASEAN states, in 2017 signed a Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers at the 31st ASEAN Summit in the Philippines. Although the agreement is not legally binding and clauses are subject to national policies, it “recognises the contribution of migrants to both sending and receiving countries, and reaffirms the respect for and promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as the principles of democracy, the rule of law and good governance.”⁵ Within 2017, the Government of Myanmar also allowed workers to return to Malaysia after a six-month suspension that was imposed following Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak’s accusations that the Myanmar government was perpetrating human rights violations against the Rohingya in the Rakhine State.⁶ Moreover, a Myanmar government labour official publicly announced that the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population (MOLIP) is in the process of solidifying labour migration agreements with other Southeast and East Asian nations to send Myanmar migrants to work as domestic labourers, specifically targeting Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand.⁷ This announcement reveals intentions to remove a ban on the deployment of domestic workers to Hong Kong and Singapore, which was imposed in 2014 following cases of labour rights violations.⁸ Although the ban was constructed with the protection of migrant workers in mind, it ultimately forced workers to migrate irregularly, and thus with fewer protections and at greater risk of exploitation.⁹



A group of workers putting together a table in Myanmar

⁵ Mekong Migration Network (MMN), “Mekong Migration Network (MMN) cautiously welcomes the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers, signed by the Heads of ASEAN States during the 31st ASEAN Summit”, Mekong Migration Network Statement, 22 November 2017, <http://www.mekongmigration.org/?s=Consensus>.

⁶ Zaw Zaw Htwe, “MOEAF requests for lifting of worker ban to Malaysia”, *Myanmar Times*, 7 March 2017, <https://www.mmmtimes.com/national-news/25209-moeaf-requests-for-lifting-of-worker-ban-to-malaysia.html>; May Thet Hnin, “Myanmar workers can now go to Malaysia”, *The Global New Light of Myanmar*, 28 June 2017, <http://www.globalnewlightofmyanmar.com/myanmar-workers-can-now-go-to-malaysia/>.

⁷ Thiri Min Zin, “Myanmar Seeks Agreements With Southeast Asian Countries to Send Maids Abroad”, *Radio Free Asia*, 11 December 2017, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/myanmar-seeks-agreements-with-southeast-asian-countries-to-send-maids-abroad-12112017163326.html>.

⁸ Kyaw Phone Kyaw, “Domestic workers head to HK despite govt ban”, *Myanmar Times*, 17 December 2014, <https://www.mmmtimes.com/national-news/12581-domestic-workers-head-to-hk-despite-govt-ban.html>.

⁹ “Myanmar maid dilemma”, *Asia One*, 7 November 2015, <http://apmigration.ilo.org/news/myanmar-maid-dilemma>.

Across the border in Thailand, the main destination country for Myanmar migrant workers, the Thai government revealed the newly enacted Royal Decree on Managing the Work of Aliens B.E. 2560 (2017), which took effect on 23 June, citing an urgent need to address international concerns of human trafficking.¹⁰ The Royal Decree imposed hefty fines and prison terms on undocumented migrants and their employers, sparking a wave of mass arrests and police extortion of irregular migrants. On 6 July, Thein Swe, Union Minister of MOLIP, reported that more than 34,000 migrant workers had returned to Myanmar due to fear of the impact of Thailand's new labour regulations.¹¹ In response to the sudden wave of migration, the Government of Myanmar set up temporary facilities to offer food and shelter to returnees at border checkpoints and provided transportation to migrants' hometowns.¹² Citing problems of labour shortages, Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha postponed the enforcement of parts of the law until 1 January 2018.¹³ On 7 July, the Thai and Myanmar Labour Ministers met and agreed to set up a joint working committee to address issues arising from the new labour law during the remaining six months of 2017.¹⁴

Cambodia

In 2011, sub-decree 190 was established to manage the sending of Cambodian workers abroad, accompanied by eight ministerial orders that state the roles and responsibilities of private recruitment agencies in protecting and promoting the rights of Cambodian migrant workers. Since then, little further development has taken place. In 2014, the Cambodian government recognized labour migration as one of the country's development strategies, as reflected in one of the objectives of its labour migration policy for 2015-2018 that listed "Harnessing labour migration and mobility to enhance social and economic development in Cambodia; [and] recognizing that migrant workers are agents of innovation and development" (p.5) as part of the country's policy direction.¹⁵

The Cambodian government has time and again strongly encouraged workers to use regular migration channels. For example, Prime Minister Hun Sen signed a sub-decree that lowered the normal fee for a passport from US\$124 to just US\$4 for students and migrant workers. Despite this change of policy, some sources suggest that the official fee for a normal passport is still US\$100, and a same-day passport US\$200, so the process of migration through regular channels remains costly and lengthy.¹⁶ According to a recent survey conducted by ILO and IOM, less than a third of Cambodian migrants use regular channels to migrate, with the majority finding work through friend networks or unlicensed brokers.¹⁷

Toward the end of 2017, the Cambodian government signed a memorandum of agreement to appoint the Malaysian Association of Foreign Maid Agencies (PAPA) to monitor the safety and welfare of its citizens working as domestic workers in Malaysia.¹⁸ Cambodia and Thailand also signed an MOU on

¹⁰"Thailand: New Law on Foreign Employees and Migrant Workers", *Baker McKenzie*, 29 June 2017, <https://www.bakermckenzie.com/en/insight/publications/2017/06/new-law-on-foreign-employees>.

¹¹Htet Naing Zaw, "34,000 Migrant Workers Return from Thailand", *The Irrawaddy*, 6 July 2017, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/34000-migrant-workers-return-thailand.html>.

¹²Ibid; "Thousands of migrant workers head home", *The Nation*, 2 July 2017, <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/news/national/30319673>.

¹³Wongcha-um, P., Hariraksapitak, P., "Thai junta suspends new labour law, extends deadline after exodus", *Reuters*, 4 July 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-migrants/thai-junta-suspends-new-labor-law-extends-deadline-after-exodus-idUSKBN19P1DF>.

¹⁴"Thailand, Myanmar step up labour cooperation", *Bangkok Post*, 8 July 2017, <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/general/1283434/thailand-myanmar-discuss-labour>.

¹⁵MOLVT & ILO, "Policy on labour migration for Cambodia", *UN-ACT*, Dec. 2017, <http://un-act.org/publication/view/policy-on-labour-migration-for-cambodia/>.

¹⁶Chheng, Niem, "Passport fees to be investigated", *Phnom Penh Post*, 10 July 2017, <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/passport-fees-be-investigated>.

¹⁷ILO, "Triangle in ASEAN Quarterly Briefing Note", June 2018, http://www.ilo.int/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/genericdocument/wcms_614380.pdf.

¹⁸Naidu, Sumisha, "Cambodia to signs agreement to ensure welfare maids in Malaysia", *Channel NewsAsia*, 29 Nov 2017, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/cambodia-signs-agreement-to-ensure-welfare-of-maids-in-malaysia-9452032>.



People crossing the border from Cambodia to Thailand

cross-border trade in early November, which came into effect on 13 November 2017. Both countries agreed to increase efforts to boost cross-border trade, with the goal of reaching \$15 billion by 2020. This bilateral agreement can potentially increase the movement of workers between the two countries.¹⁹

In June 2017, the Thai government enacted a new law to impose criminal penalties on migrants who worked without a permit. Undocumented workers could face up to five years in prison, and fines of 2,000 to 100,000 baht (USD\$60 to US\$2,935). The introduction of the new law caused tens of thousands of registered and unregistered migrant workers from Cambodia, Myanmar, Lao PDR, and Vietnam to flee Thailand under the fear of arrest and harsh punishment.²⁰ By early August, 200,000 Cambodian migrant workers who were residing in Thailand successfully registered for legal documents through their employers or on their own.²¹ Despite the tightening of its immigration policies, Thailand remains a primary destination country for Cambodian migrant workers, a majority of whom were engaged in the fishing, agriculture, livestock, construction, manufacturing, and service sectors, including domestic work.²²

In 2017, migrant workers were encouraged to return home to vote in the commune council election. Among the roughly 1 million Cambodian migrant workers in Thailand registered to vote, about 20,000 will be unable to do so without assistance due to challenges in returning, owing to fears that their wages would be reduced or that they would be dismissed from their jobs if they left their posts.²³

¹⁹ May, Kunmakara, "New MoU with Thailand on trade across the borders", *Khmer Times*, 20 October 2017 <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/5087004/new-mou-thailand-trade-across-borders/>.

²⁰ Human Rights Watch, "Thailand: migration worker law triggers regional exodus", July 7 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/07/thailand-migrant-worker-law-triggers-regional-exodus>.

²¹ Sen David, "200,000 Cambodian migrant workers register in Thailand", *Khmer Times*, August 9 2017. <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/5077325/200000-migrant-workers-register-thailand/>.

²² ILO, "Triangle in ASEAN Quarterly Briefing Note", June 2018, http://www.ilo.int/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/genericdocument/wcms_614380.pdf.

²³ Men, Kimseng, "Labour activities seeks aid for migrant workers who may be unable to vote", *Voice of America*, 30 May 2017, <https://www.voacambodia.com/a/labor-activist-seeks-aid-for-migrant-workers-who-may-be-unable-to-vote/3875970.html>.

China

In an effort to attract more foreign workers in China, the visa application process has been made easier and simpler. The State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs (SAFEA) came into operation in April 2017, and became in charge of processing all foreign visa applications for work.²⁴ Foreigners' work permits were categorised into "A," "B," and "C" groups based on professional level and field of expertise.²⁵

Since the 1990s, China has allowed people in border areas to conduct small-scale cross-border businesses. For instance, in 2012, Vietnamese people were allowed to open stores in Dongxing city, a border city near Vietnam. Later in 2015, Vietnamese workers were allowed to work in Dongxing's local factories, a policy that drew more Vietnamese into China. As of November 2017, more than 10,000 Vietnamese cross-border workers hold jobs in Dongxing. In early 2017, the city Pingxiang also began its pilot scheme to allow Vietnamese to work in local factories.²⁶ In spite of these policies, many Vietnamese continue to migrate irregularly into China's border provinces to seek work.

At the same time, a number of Chinese workers also moved to central Vietnam to seek work through irregular channels, such as by applying for tourist visas as opposed to work permits.²⁷ Many of them were hired by Chinese companies in the construction industry to work as construction workers.

According to Beijing Normal University's study in 2017, the number of foreign workers and businesspeople crossing the border into China has increased every year due to the increased economic competitiveness of Yunnan province. At the same time, Ruili port, a town situated on the border between China and Myanmar, attracted the largest number of foreign workers among all frontier ports in Yunnan, with an estimated 50,000 people crossing the border through the port each day. Reports have shown that Myanmar workers from Muse to Ruili enjoyed higher education levels and earned a higher level of income compared to other workers in bordering towns.²⁸

Due to the higher proportion of men compared to women in China, the demand for Vietnamese²⁹ and Burmese³⁰ women remained high, making the bride trade between China and these countries prevalent. By 2020, there will be an estimated 30 million more Chinese men than women of marrying age.³¹



The border of China and Vietnam

²⁴ Yang Wanli, "China's big cities beckon as talent from overseas floods in", *The Telegraph*, February 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/world/china-watch/society/china-work-visa/>.

²⁵ Australian Government Department of Education and Training, "China easing work permit requirements for foreign graduates", <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/News/Latest-News/Pages/China-easing-work-permit-requirements-for-foreign-graduates.aspx>.

²⁶ "China Focus: Vietnamese cross-border workers ride Chinese boom", *Xinhuanet*, Nov 2017 http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-11/13/c_136749150.htm.

²⁷ Phuong, Nam, "8 người Trung Quốc làm 'chui' ở Nhiệt điện Vĩnh Tân" (8 undocumented Chinese migrant worker in thermal power Vinh Tan), August 2017, <http://plo.vn/thoi-su/8-nguoi-trung-quoc-lam-chui-o-nhiet-dien-vinh-tan-724430.html>.

²⁸ Deng Yanzi and Li Yingqing, "Opportunities abound in Ruili", January 2018, <https://www.chinadailyhk.com/articles/215/3/133/1516692623831.html>.

²⁹ Kate Hodal, "I hope you're ready to get married": in search of Vietnam's kidnapped brides", *The Guardian*, August 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/aug/26/ready-married-kidnapped-brides-vietnam-china>.

³⁰ Nick, Baker, "The child bride trade is booming in Myanmar as the gender gap bites in China", *Abc net*, October 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-08/inside-the-myanmar-china-bride-trade/9023906>.

³¹ Kate Hodal, "I hope you're ready to get married": in search of Vietnam's kidnapped brides", *The Guardian*, August 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/aug/26/ready-married-kidnapped-brides-vietnam-china>.

Lao PDR

For many years, skilled labour shortage seemed to be ‘a chronic problem’ in Lao PDR, which has led to the country’s failure to meet labour demands. Lao PDR has a lower standard of labour force in terms of education and skill level compared to other ASEAN member countries. Laotian workers who hope to work in overseas countries such as Thailand and Japan must first pass a labour skills test before they can be deployed abroad.³² At the end of June, 422 Laotian trainees migrated to Japan under the Japanese Technical Intern Training Program (TITP).³³ At the same time, Laos hosts around 1,300 foreign workers—mostly from China and Vietnam—every year.³⁴ However, many of these foreign workers did not obtain legal permits to work.³⁵

In June 2017, the new Thai law on foreign employees and migrant workers, entitled “Royal Decree on Managing the Work of Aliens B.E. 2560,” came into effect and introduced increased penalties for both undocumented workers and their employers. In July, Lao and Thai government officials met in Luang Prabang to discuss the process of regularising undocumented Laos workers.³⁶ One month later, the Lao Worker Status Adjustment Office was established in Bangkok, stationed by 32 officials from different government agencies of Lao PDR and employment agencies. The office aimed to support “Lao workers by facilitating their document requirements” in Thailand without going back to Laos. Estimates show that 71,000 Lao citizens were working in Thailand with pink cards as of August 2017.³⁷

Under the MOU on Labour Cooperation between Laos and Thailand in 2016, the fourth Post-Arrival and Reintegration Centre for Migrant Workers was opened in April in Mukdahan, Thailand, with the participation of both Lao and Thai government representatives. This centre served to assist both potential Laos migrant workers who wished to work in Thailand and returnees from Thailand.³⁸



Fruit vendors in a border town in Loa

³² Malayluck Sipaphay, “Lao Labour Market Still Faces Low Labour Skills Standard”, July 2017, <http://kpl.gov.la/En/Detail.aspx?id=26425>.

³³ OTIT, “New Technical Intern Training Program”, 2018, <http://www.otit.go.jp/files/user/300614-1.pdf>.

³⁴ Malayluck Sipaphay, “Lao Labour Market Still Faces Low Labour Skills Standard”, July 2017, <http://kpl.gov.la/En/Detail.aspx?id=26425>.

³⁵ Manythone Keolangsy, “Labour Inspection Remains Ineffective”, August 2018, <http://kpl.gov.la/En/Detail.aspx?id=27511>.

³⁶ KPL, “Laos, Thailand Discuss Legalisation of Informal Workers”, July 2017, <http://kpl.gov.la/En/Detail.aspx?id=26157>.

³⁷ Soukthavy, Thephavong, “Gov’t Opens Lao Worker Status Adjustment Office in Thailand”, August 2017, <http://kpl.gov.la/En/Detail.aspx?id=27458>.

³⁸ Lao News Agency, “Laos, Thailand Open Worker Admission Centre in Thailand’s Mukdahan,” August 2017, <http://kpl.gov.la/En/Detail.aspx?id=33122/>.

Thailand

Thailand's coup-led military government continued to apply top-down and security-driven approaches to manage inbound labour migration, often justifying them as necessary measures to counter the problem of labour trafficking—the issue that has attracted the most international attention. In October 2016, the Thai government issued a Cabinet Resolution that required all migrant workers to complete the National Verification (NV) process and obtain personal documents issued by their countries of origin before their work permits expire on 31 March, 2018.³⁹ However, delays in the process of obtaining identification documents as well as difficulties for migrant workers in traveling to areas of Thailand where they can apply for the required national documentation meant that many workers could not complete the NV process in time.

On 23 June 2017, citing “unavoidable urgencies” in protecting Thailand's economy and national security, the Thai government introduced the Royal Ordinance on Foreign Workers Management with little prior notice. Prime Minister Prayut Chanocha further explained that the new law was necessary for Thailand to live up to its international commitment on human trafficking. While the Royal Ordinance had some positive elements, such as Article 49 which states that labour recruitment processes must not exact any fees from migrant workers, it created much chaos and panic.⁴⁰

“Zero tolerance on illegal labour” formed the core principle of the law.⁴¹ Employers would face a fine of 800,000 baht for every undocumented worker they were discovered to be employing, an increase from 400,000 baht from before the ordinance was released. At the same time, undocumented migrant workers could face up to five years in prison and/or a fine of up to 100,000 baht.⁴² Such a change in policy was followed by raids and mass deportation of undocumented workers, and an exodus of migrant workers out of Thailand owing to fear. Between 23-28 June 2018 alone, several thousand fled.⁴³ This movement of migrants was similar to the one that took place in 2014 when the government announced a crackdown on undocumented migrant workers.

As a result of the ordinance, some employers laid off workers to avoid penalties while others encouraged migrant workers to leave Thailand,⁴⁴ creating a visible labour shortage across various sectors, including the agricultural, construction, service and seafood industries. This prompted various industry associations to urge the government to halt the implementation of the Ordinance.⁴⁵

Amidst widespread panic surrounding the policy, the Thai government issued a 180-day grace period for employers and migrants to get used to the new law before penalties are fully enforced on January 1, 2018.⁵¹ At the same time, the government provided a 15-day window for employers who have hired undocumented workers to register their employees⁴⁷ at 101 different locations across the nation that were newly set up specifically for this registration process.⁴⁸ In spite of this measure, employers could

³⁹“The Ministry of Labour warns employer who have hired undocumented workers about punishments after March 31, 2018 (in Thai)” *Thairath*, March 3, 2017, <https://www.thairath.co.th/content/873191>.

⁴⁰Ruji Auethavornpipat, “Thailand's new migrant worker policy is a step onto uncertain ground” *East Asia Forum*, August 10, 2017, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/08/10/thailands-new-migrant-worker-policy-is-a-step-onto-uncertain-ground/>.

⁴¹ Penchan Charoensuthipan, “770,000 migrant workers being ‘legalised’”, *Bangkok Post*, August 21, 2017, <https://www.pressreader.com/thailand/bangkok-post/20170821/28150504633573>.

⁴²Ruji Auethavornpipat, “Thailand's new migrant worker policy is a step onto uncertain ground”.

⁴³ “Thousands of migrant workers head home” *The Sunday Nation*, July 2, 2017, <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/news/national/30319673>.

⁴⁴Ruji Auethavornpipat, “Thailand's new migrant worker policy is a step onto uncertain ground”.

⁴⁵ “Thousands of migrant workers head home”, *The Sunday Nation*, July 2, 2017, <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/news/national/30319673>.

⁴⁶ Pratch Rujivanarom, “Few migrant workers register” *The Nation*, August 08, 2017, <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/detail/politics/30323118>.

⁴⁷ Penchan Charoensuthipan & Om Jotikasthira, “Migrant Registration swings into action”, *Bangkok Post*, July 25, 2017, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/news/general/1293307/migrant-registration-swings-into-action>.

⁴⁸ Labour office of Thung Yang Daeng Province, “Guideline for registering undocumented migrant workers”, August 4, 2017, <http://www.plc.go.th/thungyangdaeng/index.php/2017-08-01-07-24-01/16-2017-08-04-04-25-17>

only register undocumented migrant workers from Cambodia, Myanmar, and Lao PDR, completely overlooking the presence of workers from Vietnam—a move that has caused even more fear among Vietnamese migrant workers. Mr. Ananchai Uthaiwattanachep, the Ministry of Labour's Inspector-General and spokesperson, has subsequently justified the measure by citing the low number of Vietnamese workers who registered in 2015—a mere 1500 people and an additional 100 who have renewed their documents a year after. In addition to that, Mr. Uthaiwattanachep claimed that the measure excluded Vietnam because it mainly targeted countries bordering Thailand—Thailand was working separately with Vietnam to improve their existing MOU on employment signed in 2015.⁴⁹

As for the NV process, the Thai government has extended the deadline for migrants to complete the process and obtain the necessary legal documents to June 2018.⁵⁰ According to the Ministry of Labour, as of December 2017, 1,248,611 migrant workers entered into Thailand irregularly but later completed the NV process, 550,188 migrant workers migrated through MOUs, and 19,909 migrant workers registered as seasonal workers under section 14 of Working of Alien Act B.E. 2551.⁵¹



Cambodian women managing domestic chores after work at a migrant community in Rayong, Thailand

Cambodian migrant workers relaxing after work Rayong, Thailand



⁴⁹Labour office of Thung Yang Daeng Province, "Guideline for registrating undocumented migrant workers", August 4, 2017, <http://www.plc.go.th/thungyangdaeng/index.php/2017-08-01-07-24-01/16-2017-08-04-04-25-17>.

⁵⁰ Penchan Charoensuthipan, "Verification deadline put off until June", *Bangkok Post*, 30 December, 2017, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/news/general/1387962/verification-deadline-put-off-until-june>.

⁵¹ The Department of Employment, "Statistic report on the registration of migrant workers in Thailand," December, 2017, https://www.doe.go.th/prd/assets/upload/files/alien_th/94ec1760f83293298787bf9d0fd3496a.pdf.

Vietnam

According to official reports, the average number of migrants leaving Vietnam was more than 100,000 people per year from 2014 to 2017. The remittance was estimated to be around 2 billion USD every year.⁵²

Japan and Taiwan were the two main major destination countries for Vietnamese migrant workers. In 2017, there were 134,751 workers abroad. Among them, 54,504, including 24,502 females, went to Japan, marking an increase of 36.47% compared to 2016. Among 15 migrants' countries of origin, Vietnam was the largest sending country to Japan. At the same time, nearly 67,000 Vietnamese workers, including 25,530 females, migrated to Taiwan for work in 2017, accounting for nearly 50% of the total population of Vietnamese overseas migrant workers. Vietnam became the second biggest sending country to Taiwan after Indonesia, with many Vietnamese workers engaging in the industrial and manufacturing sector there.⁵³

In 2017, the Vietnamese government also continued efforts to promote the rights of Vietnamese overseas migrant workers. In June, the Prime Minister approved a programme on vocational training–Employment and Labour Security 2016-2020–by adopting the decision no. 899/QĐ-TTg. The programme aimed to improve the skills and language proficiency of workers, especially for 8,800 workers in specific sectors, in order to make preparations for sending 6,200 Vietnamese workers abroad.

315 licensed recruiting agencies were in operation in 2017, an increase of 40% compared to 2016.⁵⁴ At the end of 2017, the circular no. 35/2017/TT-BLĐTBXH was promulgated to regulate the management, operation, and use of the database on migrant workers under contracts. The new policy included procedures for licensing recruiting agencies, information of recruitment agencies, and reporting mechanisms for Vietnamese overseas workers. This circular will come into effect in February 2018.

On 22 March 2017, Cambodia and Vietnam signed the MOU on Labour Cooperation, which aimed to strengthen cooperation, share experiences, jointly study occupational and vocational training, observe labour law, and settle labour disputes between the two countries. Furthermore, both countries agreed to cooperate on managing migrant workers and facilitate legal procedures for migrant workers in border areas.⁵⁵

In preparation for the new TITP that came into effect in Japan in November 2017, Japan and Vietnam signed the new Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) on the Technical Intern Training Program in June. In October, the Japanese Organisation for Technical Intern Training (OTIT), a legal entity established in January 2017 under the new TITP, and the Vietnamese Department of Overseas Labour (DOLAB) signed another agreement to cooperate on and implement the new TITP.

In December 2017, a workshop was organized in Penang, Malaysia to discuss mechanisms to increase the number of Vietnamese migrant workers in Malaysia. 50 representatives from Vietnamese recruiting agencies and Malaysian agency brokers and employers were present at the event.⁵⁶

⁵² MOLISA, “Công đoàn tham gia bảo vệ người đi xuất khẩu lao động ở nước ngoài” (Trade union participats to protect overseas migrant workers), May 2018, <http://www.molisa.gov.vn/vi/Pages/chitiettin.aspx?IDNews=27922>.

⁵³ MOLISA, “Cục Quản lý Lao động ngoài nước tổng kết công tác năm 2017, triển khai nhiệm vụ năm 2018” (Department of Overseas Labours reports on the work in 2017 and sets targets in 2018, January 2018, <http://www.molisa.gov.vn/vi/Pages/chitiettin.aspx?IDNews=27543>).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ VOV, Vietnam, “Cambodia sign MoU on labour cooperation”, March 2017, <https://english.vov.vn/society/vietnam-cambodia-sign-mou-on-labour-cooperation-346088.vov>.

⁵⁶ DOLAB, “Thúc đẩy hoạt động đưa lao động Việt Nam sang làm việc tại Malaysia” (Promoting to send Vietnamese labours to work in Malaysia), December 2017, <http://www.tamico.com.vn/thuc-day-hoat-dong-dua-lao-dong-viet-nam-sang-lam-viec-tai-malaysia-n703.html>.

Achievements in 2017

In 2017, MMN continued its work in 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 strengthening the network members' knowledge and skills in advocating for migrants' rights, facilitating mutual exchanges, and reaching out to new members to expand operational basis.

All of MMN's projects work together towards the goal of protecting and promoting the rights of migrants, decriminalising migration and promoting tolerance, advancing mutual respect and harmony, and creating solidarity. While all our projects are coordinated through the MMN Secretariat with guidance from the Steering Committee and in some cases external advisors, MMN emphasises teamwork and close collaboration between its members and Secretariat staff. Ultimately, the 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.

While MMN continued comprehensive information monitoring on labour migration issues in the GMS, MMN's work in 2017 also gave special emphasis to the four themes. Firstly, it carried out and completed a project focusing on the roles of countries of origin in protecting migrants' rights. The resulting publication, *Safe from the Start: The Roles of Countries of Origin in Protecting Migrants*, summarised key findings of research carried out in 2016. The publication was then launched in 2017 during the the MMN Policy Dialogue on the Roles of Countries of Origin, which resulted in a historic outcome as reported below. Secondly, with fresh support from Solidar Suisse, MMN embarked on a new collaborative research project on migrants in the agricultural sector. MMN has long identified agriculture as an understudied area, despite the significant number of migrants working in the sector. Under the research project, MMN will examine the work and lives of migrants producing corn, cassava, palm oil, and rubber—crops that tend to be produced on industrial scales. Thirdly, MMN continued its efforts to advocate for migrants' rights to ASEAN. In 2017, MMN attended government meetings during the ASEAN People's Forum, where it provided suggestions, influenced the discussion where possible, issued a statement, and organised workshops—all with the aim to increase awareness of the issues faced by migrants in Mekong. MMN representatives also attended the ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour. Fourthly, MMN continued its collaboration with the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) to implement a collaborative research project on the impact of the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) on migration in Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia to better understand how these development strategies in the region impact women's livelihood options.

MMN's work in 2017 was supported by Open Society Foundation, Solidar Suisse, Oxfam, Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development (CCFD), International Development Resource Centre (IDRC), and anonymous donors.

Please see the following sections for more information about the achievement in 2017.

1. Research and Advocacy on Roles of Countries of Origin

1.1 Publication of *Safe from the Start: Roles of Countries of Origin in Protecting Migrants*

From 2016 to 2017, MMN carried out a comparative research project focusing on the roles that countries of origin should play in protecting their nationals migrating abroad from preparing for departure to providing overseas assistance and assisting their return and reintegration. Through case studies of the measures taken by the Filipino and Indonesian governments to protect their nationals migrating to Hong Kong, the report took stock of the lessons to be learned from the experiences of these longstanding countries of origin. By applying lessons learnt from these case studies, the report examined the shortcomings and gaps that existed in the current policies and practices of Myanmar and Cambodia, the two main labour surplus countries in the GMS. This comparative analysis was instructive as it allowed MMN to develop recommendations aimed at protecting the rights and well-being of migrants within the framework of the sub-region's nascent migration governance systems.

In order to examine the various approaches of countries of origin, the study focused on the following areas of policy and practice: (1) establishing migration mechanisms; (2) information dissemination;

(3) regulation of recruitment agencies; (4) provision of overseas assistance; (5) international co-operation; (6) provision of overseas welfare funds and social security; and (7) facilitating reintegration.

Through key informant interviews and migrant worker consultations, the research has found that various lessons can be taken from the Philippines and Indonesia's experiences of managing labour migration and applied to Cambodia and Myanmar as they develop their own laws and policy frameworks. These include:

1. The importance of effective pre-departure training (PDT) and information dissemination within communities where migration is common;
2. Clear mandates and coordination among responsible agencies;
3. Genuine monitoring, enforcement, and sanctions for rule violations;
4. Provision of comprehensive overseas assistance;
5. Not overly relying on migration as a long-term poverty reduction strategy; and
6. Provision of domestic livelihood opportunities so that migration is an option among many rather than a survival necessity.

For the purposes of this study, MMN project partners organised four consultations with migrants currently working in Thailand, one consultation with migrant returnees in Myanmar, and one consultation with migrant returnees in Cambodia. Overall, a total of 162 migrants and returnees participated in the consultation exercise: 27 Cambodian and 19 Burmese returnees, and 35 Cambodian and 81 Burmese migrants currently in Thailand.

In addition, MMN researchers held day-long consultation meetings with local civil society organisations (CSOs) who work on migrant labour rights issues in Cambodia and Myanmar. The consultation was held in Cambodia in December 2015 and in Myanmar in June 2016.

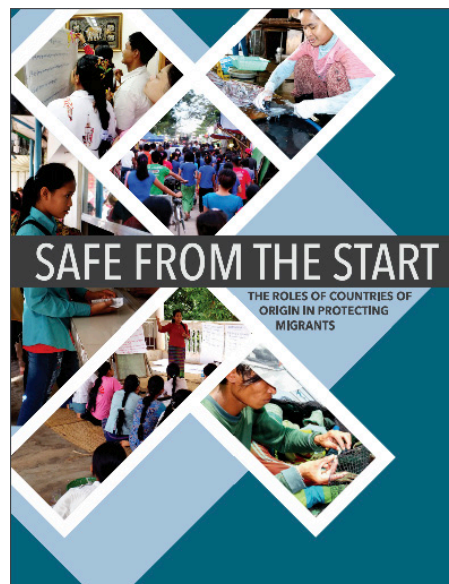
25 participants attended the consultation in Cambodia and 21 in Myanmar. At these meetings, MMN shared its initial research findings on labour migration governance in their countries, to which participants provided feedback. At the CSO consultation in Myanmar, a resource person from the ILO also presented on current migration policies and practices in Myanmar. Participants then discussed together what they considered to be the most important policy gaps from the perspective of migrant workers. At the CSO consultation in Cambodia, Ms. Chou Bun Eng, Secretary of State of Cambodia's Ministry of Interior, Permanent Deputy Chair of the National Committee for Counter Trafficking and Mr. Chuop Narath, Deputy General Director, Department of Labour, Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training presented on current migration policies and practices in Cambodia along with an MMN representative who presented preliminary findings from this study.

In both CSO consultations in Cambodia and Myanmar, participants collectively formulated suggested recommendations and identified key policy areas, which have informed the recommendations listed at the end of this report. The analysis and recommendations in the final report reflected the outcome of the above-mentioned consultations with migrant workers and returnees, as well as input from the CSO consultations. Many of the analyses are also supported by our key informant interviews and other studies in the literature.

In July 2017, MMN released the final report entitled *Safe from the Start: Roles of Countries of Origin during the Policy Dialogue on Roles of Countries of Origin* organised in Yangon, Myanmar (as reported below). Both Burmese and Khmer versions were released at the same time as the English version.

Please find below the links to the final report.

English version: http://www.mekongmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Safe-from-the-Start_English.pdf



Burmese version: http://www.mekongmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Safe-from-the-Start_Burmese.pdf

Khmer version: http://www.mekongmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Safe-from-the-Start_Khmer.pdf

1.2 Policy Dialogue on Roles of Countries of Origin

On 20 to 21 July, MMN organised the Policy Dialogue on the Roles of Countries of Origin in Yangon, Myanmar. Over 50 representatives of the Cambodian and Myanmar governments, private recruitment agencies, the Philippine Embassy in Yangon, ILO, IOM, and CSOs from Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, and the Philippines attended the meeting to hear research findings and recommendations from MMN's study, and discuss the roles countries of origin—particularly Cambodia and Myanmar—should play in protecting their nationals migrating abroad. Representatives from the Cambodian and Myanmar governments vowed to meet to discuss recommendations to jointly advocate for greater protection of migrant workers to the government of Thailand. The act of collaboration was prompted by Her Excellency Ms. Chou Bun Eng, Secretary of State of Cambodia's Ministry of Interior, and Permanent Deputy Chair of the National Committee For Counter Trafficking, who also agreed to host the next meeting.

Proceedings of this policy dialogue can be found at the link below:
<http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=5953>

The press release about the policy dialogue can be found on the MMN webpage at the following link:
<http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=5819>.

Video highlights of the policy dialogue (overall) can be also viewed at the following link:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=252&v=8IAQby25Dq8

In addition, highlight of each panel can be also viewed from the links below:

Panel 1: Establishing Migration Mechanisms

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LpUVvpyTCh4>

Panel 2: Information Dissemination

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79iWtKnhv9o>

Panel 3: Regulation of Recruitment Agencies

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdGD8kmOwCU>

Panel 4: Overseas Assistance

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gguoEAEf-Tg>

Panel 5: International Cooperation

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

Panel 6: Overseas Welfare Funds and Social Security

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Q0iJGbePcM>

Panel 7: Reintegration

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPBi1XU4yXc>



Her Excellency Ms. Chou Bun Eng, Secretary of State, Ministry of Interior, Permanent Deputy Chair, National Committee for Counter Trafficking, Kingdom of Cambodia



Group Picture at the Policy Dialogue



Director General U Win Shein, Department of Labour, Myanmar

1.3 Creating increased and targeted pressure on countries of origin

The Policy Dialogue led to significant media coverage including a Phnom Penh Post article and a report by Eleven News (TV news) in Myanmar. Following the Phnom Penh Post article that highlighted one of MMN's findings on the lack of support migrants tend to receive from their respective embassies, the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Cambodian Embassy in Bangkok issued a press release announcing that they "provide sufficient consular service and assistance to all migrants." While the content of the government press release was rather vague in that it failed to specify the kinds of support they provide, the release of such a statement was a clear indication that the government felt pressured to prove valid their work in supporting their nationals abroad.

Below are the links to the media coverage:

Phnom Penh Post

<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/migrant-worker-protections-lacking-reports-find>

Eleven Broadcasting (TV, Myanmar)

https://www.facebook.com/elevenbroadcasting/videos/1941120479477760/?autoplay_reason=all_page_organic_allowed&video_container_type=0&video_creator_product_type=2&app_id=2392950137&live_video_guests=0

In addition to that, the MMN report led to broader discussions on the theme of the roles of countries of origin among academic circles. MMN's publication, for instance, inspired the director of Southeast Asia (SEA) Junction to collaborate with MMN's Regional Coordinator, Ms. Reiko Harima, to host a panel discussion entitled "Safe from the Start" on 24 September in Bangkok. Panelists at the SEA Junction included Ms. Reiko Harima, Her Excellency Ms. Chou Bun Eng, Secretary of State, Ministry of Interior, Permanent Deputy Chair of National Committee for Counter Trafficking, Royal Government of Cambodia, Ms. Jackie Pollock, Technical Chief Director, International Labour Organisation, Myanmar, and Ms. Marla Asis, Director, Research and Publications, Scalabrini Migration Centre, Philippines. The discussion was moderated by Dr. Rosalia Sciortino Sumaryono, Associate Professor, Mahidol University. Around 30 participants attended the event, including researchers, representatives of the UN, and international NGOs and CSOs.



Panelists at the SEA Junction Event

1.4 Myanmar national consultation concerning Roles of Countries of Origin in Providing Social Protection to Migrant Workers, September 2017

During the Policy Dialogue held in Yangon, the government representatives from Myanmar suggested that they would like to have a country-level preparatory meeting ahead of the next multi-country Policy Dialogue on the Roles of Countries of Origin. Following this suggestion, MMN organised a one-day consultation meeting in collaboration with the Myanmar's MOLIP and the ILO. The meeting was held in Nay Pi Daw, Myanmar.

60 participants attended the meeting, many of whom were representatives of various government ministries, but also some from private recruitment agencies and CSOs. Ms Reiko Harima, MMN Regional Coordinator, presented on the highlights of the earlier Policy Dialogue and key findings of the MMN study, facilitated some sessions, and gave concluding remarks. Government representatives, including the Deputy Director of Myanmar's MOLIP, the Chairperson of the Myanmar Overseas Employment Agency Federation (MOEAF), and representatives of CSOs and ILO Myanmar joined the panel discussions.

2. Research on Migrants in Agriculture

Among several industries that heavily rely on migrant labour in Thailand, MMN has long identified the agriculture sector as an understudied area. In 2017, with the support of Solidar Suisse, MMN started a new project to carry out a collaborative research and advocacy project that pays special attention to migrants in agriculture. Despite the introduction of policies and programs by the Thai government and a number of NGOs to prevent trafficking and the exploitation of migrant workers in the fishing industry, the conditions faced by migrant workers in the fishing industry remained dire. In light of this, MMN's project will also critically examine the implications of the existing policies on migrant labourers in the fishing industry.

In 2017, MMN carried out desk research on migrant labour in the fishing and agricultural sectors and organised a project consultation meeting, while respective MMN project partners carried out preliminary studies on the theme. During the project consultation meeting organised in Bangkok in September 2017, the MMN Secretariat presented a summary of the findings from the desk research followed by a discussion of the work plan with project partners from Cambodia, Myanmar, and Thailand. This resulted in a work plan to carry out primary research on migrants in agriculture, as well as plans to examine relevant policies and programs concerning migrants in the fishing sector the following year.

At the meeting, project partners also agreed that the study should cover four types of monocrops: cassava, corn, rubber, and palm oil—the production of which requires intensive labour and often the employment of migrant workers. Project partners clarified that monocrops are defined as crops that are mass-produced to maximize profit, have devastating impacts on the environment, and involve extensive input in the production process. During the meeting, project partners also came up with key issues confronting migrant workers in the agriculture sector and agreed that the study should cover the following issues:

- Social inclusion/exclusion (language barriers as well as physical distance from the towns);
- Children's access to education;
- Living conditions;
- Conditions of long-term/older migrants;
- Documentation (i.e. MOUs and border passes);
- Migration patterns/migrating alone or with their family
- Child labour;
- Family rights;
- Recruitment practices;
- Security & safety;
- Access to services; and
- Access to justice (i.e. compensation)/rule of law

At the end of 2017, all of the project partners completed a total of 100 preliminary interviews. These findings will form the basis for full research to be conducted in 2018.

3. Advocacy on ASEAN

3.1 UN Women Study on Impact of ASEAN Economic Integration on Women Migrant Workers in Asian-Validation Workshop, 9-11 April 2017

On 9-11 April, UN Women and the Indonesian Ministry of Labour organised a validation workshop on the UNW/ASEAN/FES Study on the Impact of ASEAN Economic Integration on Women Migrant Workers in ASEAN. The objective of the meeting was to validate the findings from the UN Women and ASEAN's joint study on labour migration in ASEAN. Government representatives from all of the 10 ASEAN member states, mostly from the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, were present, along with a couple of CSO representatives. MMN Regional Coordinator, Ms Reiko Harima, attended the workshop and provided feedback to ensure issues faced by migrants in the Mekong were reflected in the final report.

3.2 ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum (ACSC/APF) 2017, 10-14 November 2017, Manila, Philippines



MMN Publication Booth at the ACSC/APF



Interactive Activities at the MMN workshop

The ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum (ACSC/APF) 2017 took place at the University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines from 10-14 November and adopted the theme of "Beyond Boundaries: Strengthening Peoples' Solidarities for a Just, Equitable, and Humane Southeast Asia." Although this year marks the 50th Anniversary of ASEAN, civil society across the region continues to be excluded from ASEAN's development and high-level decision-making processes.

On Saturday, 11 November, MMN organised a workshop in collaboration with MMN member organisations, including Legal Support for Children and Women (LSCW) from Cambodia, Future Light Center (FLC) from Myanmar, and Foundation for Education and Development (FED) from Thailand, as part of the Labor Mobility and Mixed Migration Convergence Space.

The MMN workshop was titled: "Bottom of ASEAN: Examining the impact of the precarious status and work of migrant workers and their families." The main objectives of this workshop included: (1) generating critical discussion on how current economic models and labour migration policies in the GMS and ASEAN are creating precarious situations for and further marginalising migrant workers across the region; and (2) providing a space for participants to jointly strategise and develop recommendations for alternative development models that increase protections, including both social and labour protections, for all migrant workers and their families.

Approximately 30 participants attended the workshop, representing CSOs from several ASEAN countries, including Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam.

3.3 MMN Statement on ASEAN Consensus, November 2017

In November 2017, MMN issued the following statement about the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers, signed by the Heads of ASEAN States during the 31st ASEAN Summit. The statement was prepared in consultation with all the network members, and contained a summary of the MMN members' collective opinions and feelings towards the ASEAN Consensus.

Please find the full statement on the next page.

The statement can also be found from the following link:

<http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=6052>

Mekong Migration Network (MMN) cautiously welcomes the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers, signed by the Heads of ASEAN States during the 31st ASEAN Summit.

Mekong Migration Network Statement
22 November 2017

Mekong Migration Network (MMN) cautiously welcomes the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers, signed by the Heads of ASEAN States during the 31st ASEAN Summit.

MMN is a sub-regional network of civil society organisations (CSOs) working to protect and promote migrants' rights in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). Given the significant impact that ASEAN policies on the protection of migrant workers will have in the GMS, MMN has actively engaged in ASEAN policy dialogues wherever possible.

MMN recalls the optimism and excitement among CSOs at the signing of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers in 2007. Although the scope of the Declaration was limited, it nonetheless conveyed the expectation that ASEAN was intent on protecting and promoting the rights of migrant workers. With a commitment to contribute constructively to the follow-up process, various migrants' rights networks, including MMN, joined forces to formulate the "Civil Society Proposal: ASEAN Framework Instrument on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers". Our joint proposal was submitted to ASEAN in 2009 and was warmly welcomed by Dr. Donald Tambunan, the then head of the Social Welfare, Women, Labour and Migrant Workers Division of the ASEAN Secretariat.

Since then, in preparation for the formulation of an effective instrument, countless CSO and government meetings have been held, including the annual ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour (AFML). The Consensus is a result of these decade-long efforts. On a positive note, the instrument recognises the contribution of migrants to both sending and receiving countries, and reaffirms the respect for and promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as the principles of democracy, the rule of law and good governance.

While we are disappointed that the Consensus has practical limitations, since it is not legally binding and the clauses are subject to national laws, regulations and policies, we nonetheless hold out optimism in the positive spirit and moral principles expressed within the Consensus. We sincerely hope that Singapore, the next chair of ASEAN, will display progressive leadership in developing the follow-up action plan.

In particular, we urge ASEAN states to consider the following areas in developing its action plan:
Mediation – While the responsibilities of receiving and sending countries are spelled out within the Consensus, greater clarity is required in terms of how respective countries will resolve situations where there is a contradiction or inconsistency in policies between sending and receiving countries. We urge ASEAN to develop an effective system of mediation whereby disputes and policy incoherence can be discussed and resolved in a constructive, non-confrontational and cooperative manner.

1. Mediation – While the responsibilities of receiving and sending countries are spelled out within the Consensus, greater clarity is required in terms of how respective countries will resolve situations where there is a contradiction or inconsistency in policies between sending and receiving countries. We urge ASEAN to develop an effective system of mediation whereby disputes and policy incoherence can be discussed and resolved in a constructive, non-confrontational and cooperative manner.

2. Monitoring – While the responsibilities of ASEAN states are elaborated within the Consensus, no mention is made as to how they will work towards fulfilling their commitments. We urge ASEAN to establish effective monitoring mechanisms to oversee the progress made by member states on issues such as changes made to prevailing laws, regulations and policies to reflect the spirit of the Consensus. As implementation of the Consensus is subject to national laws, regulations and policies, there is an urgent need to develop a coherent approach to implementation to avoid ad hoc application. Furthermore, given the relatively weak negotiation position of sending countries, we urge ASEAN to pay special attention to

the challenges faced by sending countries, while encouraging receiving states to facilitate efforts made by sending countries to protect the rights of their citizens overseas.

3. Meaningful Dialogue with CSOs – In pursuance of the people-oriented community described in ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together, we urge ASEAN to continue an informed and meaningful dialogue with CSOs, including trade unions and migrant-led associations, throughout the follow-up process, notably in relation to the formulation of its action plan and subsequent monitoring and reporting of its implementation.

4. Inclusive Approach to Rights Protection – In the GMS, where countries share long land borders and where migration is characterised by its mixed nature, it is difficult to identify migrant workers “who become undocumented through no fault of their own”. We urge ASEAN states to take the reality of migration in the region into consideration, avoid criminalising undocumented migrants, and be inclusive in its approach to applying rights protection, such as by recognising migrant workers’ right to a family life. Moreover, given notable absence of ASEAN policies on refugee protection, we urge ASEAN to adhere to the principle of non-refoulement and provide protection to the most vulnerable members of the migrant population who are in need of protection.

5. Uphold the Principle of Non-discrimination – We welcome the fact that the Consensus undertakes to adhere to the principle of fair treatment with respect to gender and nationality. We urge ASEAN to take proactive steps to ensure that this principle of non-discrimination is upheld broadly, including, but not limited to, at the time of recruitment, in workplaces, when accessing social services and when accessing justice systems. For example, we would urge Member States to pay special attention to the principles of fair treatment and non-discrimination in relation to meeting mandatory “health requirements” of receiving states. Such screening should be carried out with the sole purpose of protecting public health by preventing the spread of communicable diseases and not for the purpose of discriminating against certain populations, including, but not limited to, pregnant women and people living with HIV.

Finally, MMN wishes to reiterate the significant contribution made by migrant workers – both professional and low paid workers – in the region. While ASEAN is moving towards easing restrictions on the movement of professional workers in the region, migration policies for low paid workers, who are the majority of the workforce in the region, remain restrictive. We would like to highlight the findings from the recent World Bank report, *Migrating for Opportunities*, which states that easing restrictions on labour migration in ASEAN can boost workers’ welfare and deepen regional economic integration. We hope that ASEAN will take this finding into consideration when formulating migration policies and work towards easing restrictions on labour migration. After all, we hope that ASEAN is moving towards achieving the “caring and sharing” community to which all members of society, including migrant workers and their families, feel they belong.

4. Research and Advocacy on Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and Migration

SEZs have emerged as a prominent strategy in the pursuit of regional economic integration in the GMS. They 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.⁴⁹

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 those

⁴⁹ Farole, Thomas. *Special Economic Zones in Africa: Comparing Performance and Learning from Global Experiences*. World Bank, 2011.

those stated in national labour laws; and degraded occupational health and safety.⁵⁰ Women, who make up the majority of the workforce in many industrial zones, are more likely to experience violations of workers' and human rights.⁵¹

In order to attract and maintain investment, states suppress labour rights while deregulating trade practices in a 'race to the bottom.'⁵² This approach is supported by the very structure of SEZs, which often includes lax regulations and the existence of exploitable migrant labour.

MMN/AIT Collaborative Research Project on Special Economic Zones and the Garment Industry

Financially supported by IDRC Canada, this three-year joint project between MMN and AIT is exploring the policies and practices of the garment industry operating in industrial zones and SEZs in Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia, as well as their impact on women migrant workers' working and living conditions and life choices. The project is investigating 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, relationship with local communities, and social and cultural norms.

The MMN partners involved in this project include:

Future Light Center (FLC), Myanmar

Legal Support for Children and Women (LSCW), Cambodia

Foundation for Education and Development (FED), Thailand

Yaung Chi Oo Workers' Association (YCOWA), Thailand

MAP Foundation, Thailand

Labour Rights Promotion Network (LPN), Thailand

The project commenced in 2016 and, throughout 2017, has involved preliminary studies and a feasibility study of three of the five study sites—Phnom Penh, Cambodia; Svay Rieng, Cambodia; and Bangkok/Samut Sakhon/Nakhon Pathom, Thailand—as well as enumerator trainings with local research teams, and the facilitation of a questionnaire with garment factory workers across each of the five study sites: Yangon, Myanmar; Mae Sot, Tak, Thailand; Bangkok/Samut Sakhon, Thailand; Phnom Penh, Cambodia; and Svay Rieng, Cambodia.

Preliminary and feasibility studies – February 2017

Throughout February, the MMN Secretariat, AIT, and project partners continued to carry out preliminary studies and a feasibility study in Phnom Penh and Svay Rieng, Cambodia, and Bangkok, Samut Sakhon, and Nakhon Pathom, Thailand, with the objectives of familiarizing representatives of the MMN Secretariat, AIT, and project partners with each other; jointly discussing research questions, methods, and benefits; identifying potential study sites; and conducting preliminary interviews with key informants and garment factory workers to better understand the context of each area.

Phnom Penh and Svay Rieng, Cambodia, 4-6 February 2017

From 4 to 6 February, the research team, including members of the MMN Secretariat, AIT, and project partner LSCW, conducted a feasibility study of Bavet City in Svay Rieng Province, and a follow-up study of Phnom Penh. In Bavet, a city demarcated by the Cambodia-Vietnam border, the research team met with a representative of the Svay Rieng Provincial Labour Department and Manhattan Special Economic Zone Management Committee, and interviewed garment factory workers residing in Manhattan SEZ dormitories as well as adjacent villages. In Phnom Penh, the team carried out additional key informant

⁵⁰ Export Processing Zones-Symbols of Exploitation and a Development Dead-End. ICFTU, 2003; Gunawardana, Samantha, "Struggle, Perseverance, and Organizations in Sri Lanka's Export Processing Zones," in Kate Bronfenbrenner ed., *Global Unions: Challenging Transnational Capital through Cross-Border Campaigns*, Cornell University Press, 2007; Gopalakrishnan, Shankar, "Negative Aspects of Special Economic Zones in China," in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28 April 2007.

⁵¹ Mekong Migration Network, *In-depth Study: Border Economic Zones and Migration*. Wanida Press, 2013.

⁵² *Ibid*

interviews with a representative of the ILO and the International Finance Corporation's (IFC) joint Better Factories Cambodia programme, as well as an official from the Council for the Development of Cambodia's (CDC) Special Economic Zone Board.

Bangkok, Samut Sakhon and Nakhon Pathom, Thailand, 25-26 February 2017

From 25 to 26 February, the MMN Secretariat and AIT, with support from FED, conducted a preliminary study of Bangkok and neighbouring provinces, namely Samut Sakhon and Nakhon Pathom, which host a large concentration of garment factories and migrant workers in central Thailand. During the field visit, the research team met with managers of a Migrant Learning Centre in Samut Sakhon and facilitated a focus group discussion with Myanmar migrant garment factory workers whose children attend classes at the centre. The team then traveled to Nakhon Pathom to interview leaders and Myanmar migrant garment factory workers who are members of the Om Noi-Om Yai Union Area Group.

Enumerator trainings – May-June, October 2017

Based on findings from preliminary studies and internal discussions, the MMN Secretariat, AIT, and project partners collaboratively drafted, tested, revised, and translated a questionnaire for garment factory workers. The objective of the questionnaire was to gather qualitative and quantitative primary data in relation to workers' working and living conditions, migration and employment histories, participation in collective action, and life choices. In May, June, and October 2017, the MMN Secretariat and AIT conducted trainings in Yangon, Myanmar (18-19 May); Phnom Penh, Cambodia (22-23, 28-29 May); and Mae Sot, Tak (5-6 June), and Samut Sakhon (8 October), Thailand, to familiarise researchers with the questionnaire in order to have a common understanding of the objective of each question and required responses. During the training, research teams drafted work plans outlining how to conduct the questionnaires, including how to select factories and respondents, as well as how to check the completeness and consistency of questionnaire results and send the results to the MMN Secretariat. Throughout the remainder of 2017, local research teams conducted 200 questionnaires in each study site.

5. Other Advocacy and Networking Initiatives

International Labour Day 2017, Chiang Mai, Thailand

From 30 April to 1 May 2017, MMN co-organised a 2-day event in honour of International Labour Day (also known as 'May Day') at UNISERV, Chiang Mai University, Thailand, in collaboration with the Northern Labour Network. Over 200 participants attended the event including migrant workers employed in various industries, representatives of CSOs, academics, Thai government officials, and members of the Northern Labour Network. Sunday 30 April, the first day of the event, commenced



Congregation at the Chiang Mai City Hall to submit recommendations to the Vice Governor

with welcoming speeches and was followed by activities revolving around the theme of 'decent work'. Representatives of the Chiang Mai Provincial Employment Office and Chiang Mai Provincial Labour Office joined the event and responded to some of the questions raised by participants. On Monday 1 May, over 100 people paraded through the streets and congregated outside of City Hall. A poem to celebrate May Day, a press statement, and recommendations were presented by worker representatives, and followed by the submission of the recommendations to the Chiang Mai Vice Governor Mr. Prajuab Kantiya.

For more information on this event, please visit: <http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=5719#more-5719>



Music Performances at the exhibition worker, employer, and the media.

Exhibition on the history of Northern Thailand's labour movement, Chiang Mai, Thailand

From 21 to 23 April, MMN co-organized an exhibition on the history of Northern Thailand's labour movement in collaboration with 19 other organizations working on labour issues across Thailand's northern provinces. Presentations, seminar discussions, and an exhibition—including photos and a multimedia documentary from MMN's "Beyond 'Tolerance': Living Together with Migrants" project—drew an audience to the third floor of Chiang Mai's Central Airport Plaza over the course of the 3 days. During the exhibition, members of Workers Solidarity Association—an independent association founded by Shan migrant workers living in Chiang Mai—performed a cultural dance and shared stories and photos of their working conditions and everyday realities, which strived to counter narratives of migrant workers 'stealing' jobs from local people. The exhibition concluded with a final seminar discussion highlighting the social and economic contributions of migrant workers in Thailand from the perspective of an academic, NGO

For more information on this event, please visit: <http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=5678#more-5678>

International Women's Day 2017, Chiang Mai, Thailand

On 8 March, International Women's Day, women in Chiang Mai, including representatives of MMN, stood in solidarity with women across Thailand and around the world. The seeds of International Women's Day were planted over 100 years ago when women took to the streets demanding shorter working hours, better pay, and the right to vote. On 8 March, Chiang Mai-based civil society organisations and women's advocates came together to celebrate the achievements of women from the past and present, and to raise their voices to bring awareness to the struggles women continue to face and demand change. Over 150 people gathered to march the perimeter of Chiang Mai's old city wearing t-shirts branded with the slogan "Women Own the Change" and carrying signs that read "Equal Work for Equal Pay."

For more information on this event, please see an article published by Chiang Mai Citylife: <http://www.chiangmaicitylife.com/citylife-articles/international-womens-march1/>

Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Global Compact on Migration, Bangkok, Thailand

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration—also referred to as the Global Compact for Migration (GCM)—will be a non-binding intergovernmental agreement that sets out a framework for international cooperation on all aspects of migration, including humanitarian, developmental, and human rights-related aspects. The preparatory processes involved in the development of the GCM included a number of global, regional, sub-regional, and national consultations, which spanned April to November 2017 and offered a degree of civil society and other stakeholder participation. From 6-8 November 2017, MMN Secretariat members observed the Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for the GCM hosted by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in Bangkok. The objective of the 3-day meeting was to "provide a forum to identify key migration issues, challenges and priorities for the Asia-Pacific region; to identify existing national, bilateral, subregional and regional arrangements in place to ensure safe, orderly and regular migration; and to arrive at a set of conclusions that can serve as a regional input into the global stocktaking meeting due to be held in Mexico in December 2017." The meeting was attended by 35 UN member states, 2 associate members, 4 permanent observers, United Nations Secretariat, bodies and relevant specialised agencies, intergovernmental organisations, and other entities, including international NGOs, regional and sub-regional networks, and national civil society organisations.

For more information on this meeting, please visit: <http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=6094#more-6094>

Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women Convening, Bangkok, Thailand

From 17 to 20 August, MMN Regional Coordinator Reiko Harima participated in a convening organised by the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) on “Human Trafficking, Forced Labour and Modern Slavery: Understanding Popular Narratives, & Planning Strategic Action” in Bangkok, Thailand. The primary goal of this convening was to understand the human rights implications of frameworks such as human trafficking, forced labour and modern slavery that claim to address rights violations in the context of people’s migration and work today through prevention, protection and prosecution and more broadly, state control of human mobility in a globalised world.

Toyota Foundation and Kobe University International Workshop and Symposium, Kobe, Japan

From 20 to 22 January, MMN Regional Coordinator Reiko Harima participated in and presented on issues concerning social exclusion of migrants in the Mekong at a workshop co-organised by the Toyota Foundation and Kobe University, entitled “Multicultural Society: International migration and diversified communities”, which was held at the Kobe Center for Overseas Migration and Cultural Interaction, Kobe, Japan. The workshop acknowledged recent increases in international marriages, migrant workers, and refugees in Asian countries and the associated challenges some communities are facing, such as intercultural understanding, social inclusion, and socioeconomic disparities, while also recognizing that some local communities are utilising cultural diversities as an asset for development. The aim of this workshop was to learn about best practices from different countries and develop suggestions for communities and policy makers in respective countries.

IKEA Internal Training, Bangkok, Thailand

On 30 October, MMN Regional Coordinator Reiko Harima was invited as a resource person to an IKEA internal meeting for discussions on the business sectors’ roles in ensuring ethical recruitment practices in supply chains.

Global Forum on Migration and Development, Berlin, Germany

The Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) provides space for global debate on migration and development by bringing together governments to discuss the multi-dimensional aspects, opportunities, and challenges related to migration and its inter-linkages with development. In 2017, GFMD Open Day was organised on 29 June, and GMFD Civil Society Day was organised on 30 June to 1 July, in Berlin, Germany. MMN representatives participated in these events.

Regional Forum on Strengthening Women’s Rights Advocacy in ASEAN, Quezon City, Philippines

MMN Regional Coordinator Reiko Harima participated in a regional forum on “Strengthening Women’s Rights Advocacy in ASEAN: Policy Alternatives for Regional Integration, Governance and Justice” that was held from 7-8 November in Quezon City, Philippines, ahead of the 31st ASEAN Summit. The workshop was co-organised by Weaving Women’s Voices in Southeast Asia (WEAVE) and Regions Refocus, in collaboration with Strengthening Human Rights and Peace Research Education in ASEAN/ Southeast Asia (SHAPE-SEA), Friedrich-Ebert- Stiftung, and Gender Transformative and Responsible Agribusiness Investments in South East Asia (GRAISEA).

Christian Conference of Asia Regional Consultation, Chiang Mai, Thailand

From 11 to 12 July, MMN Regional Coordinator Reiko Harima participated in a regional consultation on “Towards Revitalizing the Ecumenical Movement in Asia”, which was an attempt of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) in the context of the Diamond Jubilee of the CCA to reflect on the ecumenical movement in Asia.

Secretariat Calendar 2017

January

- 22 Attended the Symposium on Multicultural Society: International migration and diversified communities, organised by the Kobe Center for Overseas Migration and Cultural Interaction, Kobe University, Kobe, Japan, and presented on key issues concerning migration in the Greater Mekong Subregion

February

- 4-6 Assisted in organising a follow-up study for the Phnom Penh study site and feasibility study for the Bavet study site for the joint MMN-AIT project "Special Economic Zones and the Garment Industry," Cambodia
- 25-26 Assisted in organising a preliminary study for the Samut Sakhon/Bangkok study site for the joint MMN-AIT project "Special Economic Zones and the Garment Industry," Thailand

March

- 7-10 MMN Secretariat Annual Planning Meeting, Chiang Mai, Thailand
- 8 Assisted in organising an International Women's Day Event in collaboration with Chiang Mai-based civil society organisations, Chiang Mai, Thailand
- 15 Attended a preparatory meeting for May Day 2017 event, Chiang Mai, Thailand
- 16 Attended an International Women's Day Evaluation meeting, Chiang Mai, Thailand

April

- 21-23 Assisted in organising the Northern Labour Movement Exhibition in collaboration with the Northern Labour Network, Chiang Mai, Thailand
- 30-May 1 Co-organised the May Day Event in collaboration with the Northern Labour Network, Chiang Mai, Thailand

May

- 18-19 Organised an enumerator training for the Yangon study site for the joint MMN-AIT project "Special Economic Zones and the Garment Industry," Yangon, Myanmar
- 22-23 Organised an enumerator training for the Phnom Penh and Bavet study sites for the joint MMN-AIT project "Special Economic Zones and the Garment Industry," Phnom Penh, Cambodia
- 28-29

June

- 1-2 Attended a Workshop on "Current Status of Vietnam Garment Sector Working Conditions and Working Method" organised by Institute for Workers and Trade Unions in collaboration with Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Southeast Asia, Hanoi, Vietnam
- 3 MMN coordination meeting with Vietnamese member organizations, Hanoi, Vietnam
- 5-6 Assisted in organising an enumerator training for the Mae Sot study site for the joint MMN-AIT project "Special Economic Zones and the Garment Industry," Mae Sot, Thailand
- 29 Attended "Global Forum on Migration and Development Open Day", Berlin, Germany
- 30-July 1 Attended the "Global Forum on Migration and Development, Civil Society Day", Berlin, Germany

July

- 11-12 Attended the “Regional Consultation on Revitalizing the Ecumenical Movement – Migration & Human Trafficking”, Chiang Mai, Thailand
- 13-15 Presented at and attended the event entitled “Power. Fashion. People” organised by Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, Berlin, Germany
- 15 Presented at the “13th International Conference on Thai Studies (ICTS)”, hosted by Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, Thailand
- 20-21 Organised a multi-stakeholder Policy Dialogue for the MMN project “Roles of Countries of Origin,” Yangon, Myanmar
- 22 Organised a MMN planning meeting on Roles of Countries of Origin project, Yangon, Myanmar

August

- 3 Met with Samut Sakhon field research partners for the “Special Economic Zone and the Garment Industry” project, Bangkok, Thailand
- 4-5 Attended the Asia’s regional consultation on the “Global Compact for Migration (GCM)” organised by Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA), Bangkok, Thailand
- 17-21 Attended the GAATW-BTS workshop on “Human Trafficking, Forced Labour and Modern Slavery: Understanding Popular Narratives, Analysing our Work & Planning Strategic Action”, Bangkok, Thailand
- 25 Organised the MMN Foundation board’s annual general meeting, Chiang Mai, Thailand

September

- 6-8 Attended the “Oxfam Social Protection Program” partners’ workshop, Hanoi, Vietnam
- 22 Organised the “Internal Strategy and Planning Meeting” concerning current migration policies in Thailand, Bangkok, Thailand
- 23-24 First project consultation meeting for the MMN project “Protecting the Rights of Migrant Workers in Informal Sectors in the Mekong”, Bangkok, Thailand
- 29 Organised “Myanmar National Preparatory Meeting: Roles of Countries of Origin in Providing Social Protection” in collaboration with the International Labour Organization and Myanmar Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar

October

- 8 Organised an enumerator training for the Samut Sakhon/Bangkok study site as part of the joint MMN-AIT project “Special Economic Zones and the Garment Industry,” Samut Sakhon, Thailand
- 30 Attended the IKEA CSR team’s workshop on “Recruitment Practices in Supply Chain”, and presented on the issues concerning migrant labour in Thailand, Bangkok, Thailand

November

- 6-8 Participated in the “Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting” for the Global Compact on Migration hosted by UN ESCAP, Bangkok, Thailand

7-8 Participated in the “Regional Forum on Strengthening Women’s Rights Advocacy in ASEAN: Policy Alternatives for Regional Integration, Governance and Justice” organised by WEAVE, Regions Refocus, Shape-SEA, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and GRAISEA, Quezon City, Philippines

10-14 Participated in and facilitated a workshop for the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ ASEAN Peoples’ Forum (ACSC/APF), Quezon City, Philippines

December

17-18 Co-organised the “International Migrants Day 2017” event in Chiang Mai in collaboration with the Northern Labour Network (NLN), Chiang Mai, Thailand

20 Organised the MMN Foundation board meeting, Chiang Mai, Thailand

Recognise, Respect and Promote the Human Rights of All Migrants in the Mekong