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MEKONG
MIGRATION
NETWORK

ANNUAL REPORT 2015

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Acronyms

ACTIP	ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children
ACWC	ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children
ACSC	ASEAN Civil Society Conference
AEC	ASEAN Economic Community
AFML	ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour
AICHR	ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights
AMC	Asian Migrant Centre
APF	ASEAN Peoples' Forum
APWLD	Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
COMMIT	Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking
DOLAB	Department of Overseas Labour, Vietnam
GMS	Greater Mekong Subregion
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICRMW	International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MIRO	Minority Rights Organization
MMN	Mekong Migration Network
MOEAF	Myanmar Overseas Employment Agencies Federation
MOLES	Myanmar Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security
MOLISA	Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, Vietnam
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRC	Migrant Resource Centre
NCPO	National Council for Peace and Order, Thailand
NLD	National League for Democracy
NV	National Verification
OSS	One-Stop Service
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
TIP	Trafficking In Persons
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

About MMN

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. Htoo Chit

Foundation for Education and Development (FED), Thailand

During MMN's 6th General Conference held in March 2015, Mr. Htoo Chit became a member of the SC representing Burmese communities in Thailand, and the chairperson of the SC.

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.

Ms. Thet Thet Aung

88 Generation Peace and Open Society, Myanmar

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

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.

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.

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 as a member of the SC representing MMN members in China.

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.

Ms. Reiko Harima

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

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

MMN Secretariat

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

MMN Secretariat Team 2015

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

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

Ms. Hkun Sa Mun Htoi, *MMN Information and Advocacy Officer, September 2011 to date*

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

Consultants

Ms. Gabrielle Curtis, *May 2015 to date*

Ms. Rebecca Napier-Moore, *November 2014-March 2015*

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

Interns and Volunteers

Mr. Shreyas Ravish, *intern, Yale University Yale-China Program, June-July 2015*

Mr. Andrew Wong, *intern, Hong Kong University Social Justice Summer Internship Program, June-July 2015*

Ms. Emily Jo Yee, *intern, Hong Kong University Social Justice Summer Internship Program, June-July 2015*

Ms. Saravalee Khadee, *volunteer at the Chiang Mai office as part of the Sapan Siang Project, February-May 2015*

Ms. Phurisara Taesawat, *volunteer at the Chiang Mai office as part of the Sapan Siang Project, February-May 2015*

Ms. Charlotte Gautier, *intern at the Chiang Mai office, October 2014-February 2015*

Ms. Ashley Saxby-Pinkerton, *intern at Chiang Mai office, October 2015 to date*

Acknowledgement

On behalf of the MMN Secretariat, I would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the MMN members who have tirelessly worked to advance the rights of migrants, the MMN Steering Committee members who contributed their expertise in realising MMN's goals and strengthening the network, and all the staff members, interns and volunteers of the Secretariat.

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 to manage MMN operations in Thailand. The Asian Migrant Centre, the initiator of the network in 2001, has also continued to host the network's Secretariat in Hong Kong and contributed its expertise in carrying out regional work.

We would like to welcome the new members of the Steering Committee who were elected in March 2015. We look forward to the active contribution of the new Steering Committee to strengthen MMN.

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 2015 included the following: Oxfam, Toyota Foundation, Open Society Foundation, and the Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development (CCFD).

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

Reiko Harima
Regional Coordinator, Mekong Migration Network



Ms. Reiko Harima (third from left) at the MMN Sixth General Conference

Message from the Steering Committee



Old and new members of the Steering Committee at a photo-taking session at the 2015 MMN General Conference

Launched in 2003, the Mekong Migration Network (MMN) is passionate and dedicated about protecting and promoting the rights of migrant workers and their families. Migrants in the region face many difficulties: human trafficking, labour exploitation, extrajudicial killing, and injustice.

MMN has carried out a number of research projects to deepen our understanding on migrant issues in the region, which enable us in turn to perform evidence-based advocacy work. Advocacy is crucial in raising awareness of migrant workers' issues to provide information and support, which allows migrants to express their concerns, defend and promote their rights and responsibilities. MMN works together with local, national state, and non-state agencies, to understand the issues and find solutions at a national, regional and international level.

I would like to thank MMN members that work tirelessly to advance the rights of migrants. Sincere appreciation is extended to the Secretariat's hard work without whose dedication, the network could not have achieved so much success.

Finally, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to the generous contributions from MMN's supporters. Without their support, it would not have been possible for MMN to pursue our critical goals.

In solidarity,

Htoo Chit
Chairperson of the Steering Committee (March 2015-March 2016)
Mekong Migration Network (MMN)

Overview of Migration in the Greater Mekong Subregion in 2015

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

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

The largely informal nature of migration flows in the region has led many of the governments in the region to become focused on issues of national security, the prevention of undocumented migration, the elimination of trafficking, and the regularisation of migrants' immigration statuses.



Migrant workers repairing fishing nets in Rayong, Thailand

Already in 2002 and 2003, Myanmar, Lao PDR, and Cambodia separately signed bilateral Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with Thailand, which occurred in two processes: the Nationality Verification (NV) process allows migrants already residing in Thailand to receive official identification documentation (temporary passports) from their respective country of origin, thereby enabling them to apply for a work permit. The second process facilitated the recruitment of new workers from their country of origin to Thailand through recruitment agencies. While these measures have increased the number of migrants with legal status, it remains to be seen how they have impacted labour conditions, access to justice, and/or quality of life of migrants. A large number of migrants have also fallen out of the regularisation process and continue to remain undocumented. In 2015, Myanmar, Lao PDR, and Cambodia reviewed their MOUs with Thailand—a process that resulted in the development of a replacement MOU between Cambodia and Thailand in December, which includes clauses on skill development and re-employment, and a similar MOU between Thailand and Vietnam.¹

Since its rise to power during the coup of May 2014, the Thai military government, otherwise known as the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), has established a new process of registering undocumented migrants. One-Stop Service (OSS) centres were set up around the country for migrants to obtain a temporary residential permit and work permit (also known as a ‘pink card’) as interim documents as well as to renew temporary passports of migrants that expired in 2015. Migrants who obtained the pink card were still required to complete the NV process in order to stay and work in Thailand, however, those who failed to secure a pink card by the deadline could not complete the NV process. Inefficient coordination among the respective governments meant that most migrants could not complete the NV process within the year and faced uncertainty when renewing their pink cards.



Border immigration clearances between Thailand and Cambodia.

All GMS countries, except China, belong to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which aims to promote economic growth, stability, and peace in the region. Although member countries signed the Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers in 2007, there has been little success in establishing an implementation mechanism. As a result, the Declaration has had no real impact on how member countries tackle migration issues. Towards the end of 2015, ASEAN claimed that it had met its goals set out in the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) blueprint for greater economic integration. Regarding migration, however, only transnational workers employed in select professions will be able to enjoy the benefits of AEC, including freer movement in the region, which are a distant reality for the majority of migrant workers who work at the bottom of economic structures.

¹ Australian Aid / ILO, “Triangle II Quarterly Briefing Note”, July-Sept 2016, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/briefingnote/wcms_469496.pdf

GMS governments have continued to be visible in their cooperation towards preventing human trafficking, investigating and prosecuting perpetrators, protecting victims, and building the capacity to stop trafficking. This has been demonstrated through the numerous agreements that have been signed, as well as the implementation of the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking (COMMIT). In November 2015, the 10 ASEAN leaders signed the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ACTIP), which is aimed at establishing a legal framework for the region to effectively address the issue of trafficking in persons.

At the same time, the setting up of industrial infrastructure in Special Economic Zones (SEZs) alongside national borders has emerged as an important part of GMS state strategy to encourage foreign investment and stimulate overall economic growth in the region. To date, several such zones have been established or are in the process of being planned. However, a lack of access to trade unions and other services pose a potential risk to the rights of workers (migrants included) employed in these zones. In the case of Thailand, the government sees the establishment of SEZs as a security strategy to keep migrant workers along the borders.

2015 Overview

Myanmar

Since the formation of a nominally civilian government after the November 2010 elections and subsequent political reforms, there has been greater political space in Myanmar to address labour migration issues. Since 2011, Thailand and Myanmar have established stronger bilateral collaboration in implementing the 2003 MOU processes. In December 2015, the Office of Foreign Workers Administration of Thailand's Ministry of Labour reported there are almost 1 million Burmese migrant workers who are registered through the MOU and NV processes, and 454,268 Burmese migrants, including migrant workers and their dependents, who have renewed their documents through OSS centres.

In November 2015, the National League for Democracy (NLD) won an outright majority in both houses of parliament during the country's first openly contested poll in 25 years. The NLD's electoral victory has created hope for political reforms enabling migrants to exercise their rights. There have also been greater efforts by the government to reach out to their nationals working abroad, with the appointment of labour attachés in key destination countries in the GMS, Middle East, and East Asia, although there has been widespread criticism that the labour attachés are not able to respond to the needs of migrant workers effectively and in a timely manner. In addition to labour attachés, consular representatives respond to migrants' issues in two major cities in Thailand. These developments have taken place alongside a large increase in the number of overseas employment agencies within the country. As of 2015, the Myanmar Overseas Employment Agencies Federation (MOEAF) reported there are 247 licensed overseas employment agencies active within Myanmar.

Since 2014, four Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs) supported by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) have opened in areas of the country with high rates of outbound migration, with a fifth one planned near the Myawaddy-Mae Sot border. The MRCs provide pre-departure orientation and job counselling to potential migrant workers, essential information to migrants in transit areas, and access to complaint mechanisms to report cases of exploitation or abuse. In addition to MRCs, the country has set up a Migrant Workers Reporting Counter at the Yangon Airport and a Complaint Mechanisms Centre in Nay Pyi Taw and Yangon.²

The political transition in Myanmar was also followed by changes in legislation. The 1999 Law Relating to Overseas Employment in coordination with stakeholders was reviewed and key areas for reform relating to overseas employment agencies were identified. The Myanmar Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (MOLES) also reviewed the 2003 Thai-Myanmar bilateral MOU on employment in 2015. Several ministerial meetings were held in 2015 with plans to draft a new MOU dealing with migration and human trafficking.

² H.E. U Aye Myint, "Opening remarks at ARF workshop on security, stability and international migration in ASEAN region", 10-11 March 2015, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar



A worker at a furniture factory in Myanmar

Despite positive political reforms in the capital, conflicts in ethnic states continued this year. Rohingya people continued to flee the country against a backdrop of violence, persecution, and harsh conditions in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Rakhine State. The Myanmar government signed a ceasefire agreement with eight different armed groups this year but has yet to reach effective peace agreements with the seven other major groups, including those in Kachin and Shan State, where fighting continues to erupt.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) estimated in March that there were approximately 662,400 IDPs as a result of the conflict—146,500 from Rakhine State, 98,400 from Kachin and northern Shan State, as well as up to 398,000 in the southeast.³ In early October, UNHCR estimated that 6,000 people were displaced in southern Shan State after an outbreak of violence, although most of these people subsequently returned. Their reported count of IDPs in Kachin and Northern Shan State the same month was 100,241.⁴ The Diplomat reports that 60,000 refugees have left Shan for China's Yunnan Province throughout the year; over one third of the population in Shan's Kokang area was estimated to have been absent at the time of the November 2015 elections.⁵

Cambodia

Cambodia has continued the regularisation of migration as per the MOU with Thailand through the NV and MOU processes. According to the Thai Office of Foreign Workers Administration, 209,793 Cambodian migrant workers had a permit to work legally in Thailand as of December 2015. Furthermore, 455,947 Cambodian migrants and their dependents have renewed their registered documents through OSS centres. At the end of 2015, Cambodia and Thailand signed an MOU on Labour Cooperation and an Agreement on Employment of Workers. The revised bilateral MOU allows Cambodian migrants to return home for 30 days—instead of the previous three-year requirement—before returning to Thailand for work. Given the limited economic opportunities and low wages in the country, outbound migration is likely to continue.

³ IDMC, "Myanmar IDP Figure Analysis", March 2015, <http://www.internal-displacement.org/south-and-south-east-asia/myanmar/figures-analysis>

⁴ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Myanmar: Internal Displacement in Kachin and northern Shan", Oct 2015, available at http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Affected_Map_IDP_Kachin_N.Shan_Oct2015_A4.pdf

⁵ "Between China and Myanmar: The Battleground Region of Northeastern Myanmar Faces an Uncertain Future", *The Diplomat*, 7 March 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/03/between-china-and-myanmar-the-battleground-region-of-northeastern-myanmar-faces-an-uncertain-future>

After the military coup in Thailand in May 2014, more than 220,000 migrants crossed into Cambodia in fear of a military crackdown on undocumented migrant workers. This was one of the biggest human movements in Southeast Asia since the 1970s.⁶ The scale of this return caused local governments to re-evaluate their migration policies, resulting in a stronger promotion of regular migration, the establishment of more efficient procedures, as well as the development of reintegration programs for returnees.

As part of these new policies, passport costs for Cambodian workers and students were reduced, and efforts were made to increase the speed at which government offices can issue registration documents, such as birth certificates and family record books, to help returning migrants secure documents before leaving the country once more. Cambodia's Labour Migration Policy for 2015-2018 was signed and aimed to establish legal frameworks and mechanisms in line with international standards, enhance the role of ASEAN in ensuring access to



Cambodian workers crossing the border into Thailand

decent work for all migrant workers, improve governance practices in managing migration, and utilise migrants' capital to achieve national development goals.⁷ However, there are still many hurdles facing migrants attempting to access the regular migration process, which remains complicated, costly, and lengthy. Many migrants are still likely to pay an agent or broker to migrate irregularly.

With regards to inward migration, Cambodia's Immigration Department reported that 160,000 Vietnamese were living in the country between 2010 and 2014⁸—a figure that varies greatly between sources. While some Vietnamese were new arrivals to Cambodia, many ethnic Vietnamese have been living in Cambodia for generations. Some live inside Cambodia along the borders working as traders. Others move to fishing villages on the Tonle Sap River or to big cities like Phnom Penh. In spite of the historical presence of ethnic Vietnamese, the government has denied many of them Cambodian citizenship, effectively rendering them stateless. In 2015, immigration police have carried out dozens of raids in an effort to clamp down on undocumented migrant workers. This has been a continued process since the parliamentary election in July 2013, where the nature of Vietnamese residency became a major campaign issue. Throughout this year, immigration police deported a total of 4,424 foreigners, including 3,978 from Vietnam, putting them all on a permanent no-entry list.⁹

⁶ Hodal, Kate, "Cambodia blames Thailand as 220,000 migrant labourers cross border", *The Guardian*, 18 June 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/18/cambodia-thailand-migrant-labourers-border>

⁷ MOLVT "Policy for Labour Migration for Cambodia", Dec 2014, <http://un-act.org/publication/view/policy-on-labour-migration-for-cambodia>

⁸ Promchertchoo, Pichayada, "Anti-Vietnamese sentiment likely to run high ahead of Cambodian elections", *Channel NewsAsia*, 2 Feb 2017, <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/anti-vietnamese-sentiment-likely-to-run-high-ahead-of-cambodian--7618896>

⁹ Chanveasna, Ros, "Over 4,000 Foreigners Deported in 2015", *Khmer Times*, 5 Jan 2016, <http://www.khmer-timeskh.com/news/19486/over-4-000-foreigners-deported-in-2015/>

China

According to government estimates, there were approximately 100,000 Burmese and 32,000 Vietnamese in the People's Republic of China as of 2011. In Yunnan Province alone (part of the GMS), there were around 47,000 migrants, 35,000 of whom were Burmese living in Ruili City.¹⁰ Since its implementation in 1979, China's one-child policy has inadvertently caused a disproportionately high percentage of men in the country's population. This gender imbalance has resulted in a demand by Chinese bachelors for women from Vietnam and Myanmar as wives. Despite the recent phase out of the policy, this trend is likely to continue into the near future.¹¹

Refugees have been crossing the China-Myanmar border from Myanmar's Kokang region in northern Shan State since fighting broke out there in February 2015. Arrivals face shortages of food and aid in makeshift camps, all the while facing potential deportation. UN officials have not been allowed to cross into China to assess the situation.¹²

Lao PDR

In spite of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) government's continued efforts to implement the NV and MOU processes for workers migrating to or already residing in Thailand, many workers have continued to migrate without documents owing to the complexities and expenses involved. According to the Thai Office of Foreign Workers Administration's annual report, 28,561 and 39,261 Laotian workers were registered in Thailand through the MOU and NV processes respectively, and 139,111 Laotian migrants—including workers and their dependents—renewed their documents through OSS centres.

In October 2015, officials from Lao PDR met with Thai representatives to discuss the drafting of an MOU on employment, and another MOU on labour protection and skill development for workers hired in Thailand. The two countries also discussed and agreed on easing cross-border migration by launching a bus service. The same year, the Lao PDR government signed an MOU with Thailand to establish a social development centre in Vientiane for the rehabilitation of victims of human trafficking.¹³

The Lao PDR government has made efforts to fill a labour gap by enacting new measures to increase foreign workers. Approximately 30,000 Vietnamese,¹⁴ in addition to a considerable number of Chinese, migrant workers in Lao PDR were employed in the construction sector as of 2012 due to Vietnamese and Chinese investors and contractors' preference of employing their compatriots. The government has also endeavoured to make employment in Lao more attractive to its citizens. The government increased the minimum wage from LAK 626,000 (USD 77) per month in 2012 to LAK 900,000 (USD 111) per month in 2015.¹⁵ In light of the significant number of Laotians working in Thailand, with the majority of them migrating irregularly, the increase in the minimum wage was designed to attract Laotian workers to take up jobs in the manufacturing sector in SEZs inside Lao.¹⁶

¹⁰ Mekong Migration Network, "Self-Care & Health-Care", April 2015

¹¹ "Food, Shelter Running Out for 100,000 Kokang Refugees in China's Yunnan", *Radio Free Asia*, 19th Feb 2015, <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/refugees-02192015095448.html>

¹² Song, Lili, "No Easy Refuge in Ancestral Land: Kokang Refugees Receive Inadequate Humanitarian Assistance and Legal Protection in China", *Rights in Exile*, 1 May 2015, available at <http://rightsinexile.tumblr.com/post/117893906462/no-easy-refuge-in-ancestral-land-kokang-refugees>

¹³ Pongthing, Nanthida, "New Thai-Lao Centre to Help Tackle Trafficking", *The Nation*, 27th Oct 2015, <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/national/New-Lao-Thai-centre-to-help-tackle-trafficking-30271667.html>

¹⁴ "Cộng đồng người Việt tại Lào mừng lễ Vu Lan", *Voice of Vietnam*, 31 Aug 2012, <http://vov.vn/nguoi-viet/kieu-bao/cong-dong-nguoi-viet-tai-lao-mung-le-vu-lan-223176.vov>

¹⁵ Sengpaseuth, Phetphoxay, "Minimum wage hike still problematic", *Vientiane Times*, 29th January 2018, http://www.vientianetimes.org.la/FreeContent/FreeContent_Minimum_24.php

¹⁶ The Economist Intelligence Unit, "Government announces huge rise in the minimum wage", 23rd February 2015, http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1022861886&Country=Laos&topic=Economy&subtopic=-Fore_2

Since 2014, the government implemented a new labour law restricting foreign worker employment terms to one year, with a maximum of five years renewal, in an effort to manage the expected influx of foreign workers into Lao PDR. At the same time, however, the government announced plans to hire 130,000 foreign workers in the manufacturing and construction industries over the next five years. In the first half of 2015, the government also approved requests by businesses to hire over 40,000 foreign workers, up from 24,600 in 2014.¹⁷

Thailand

Thailand continued to rely on ad hoc and short-term policies in an attempt to meet labour demands and manage migration. Most notably, Thai authorities established additional OSS centres to streamline the regularisation of migrants. However, the centralisation of the new process under the NCPO was inconsistent with the previous system, which slowed the administration of the process further.

In 2015, the New Social Security Act (Amendment No.4) was announced, which provided more flexible allowances to employees. On the other hand, the Thai government designated the Secretary of Labour to proceed with the drafting of the Social Security Act for foreign workers with the purpose of separating the social security fund and benefits between Thai people and foreign workers. Prior to this policy, migrants who completed the NV process and fully legalised their status, as well as workers who migrated to Thailand through a recruitment agency pursuant to the MOU process (“MOU migrants”), were entitled to receive seven benefits. 485,736 migrants were enrolled in the scheme as of April 2015.¹⁸

With regards to long-term policies concerning refugees, UNHRC drafted the “Strategic Roadmap for Voluntary Repatriation” for 2015-2017 in March this year. There remain 120,000 refugees living in nine refugee camps on the Thai-Myanmar border. Another 100,000 refugees have been resettled to third countries¹⁹ and several thousand have returned home voluntarily.²⁰ Despite the fact that UNHCR has maintained that no one will be forced to return, fewer funds are being provided by foreign agencies to maintain operations within refugee camps.

In 2015, Rohingya refugees from Burma/Myanmar also continued to flee into Thailand. Myanmar’s authorities consider the Rohingya as undocumented migrants from Bangladesh, despite the fact that many have lived in Myanmar for generations. They are subsequently refused citizenship in Myanmar and face restrictions in terms of movement, family size, and jobs. Both Thailand and Malaysia have in the past turned back refugee boats attempting to dock on their shores, claiming that they lack the resources to accept refugees and fearing that they would open a floodgate for migrants.²¹ In May, mass graves of Rohingya trafficking victims were discovered near the Thai-Malaysia border.²² In response, the Thai government led a massive crackdown on human trafficking, which included mass arrests and prosecution of any suspected human traffickers. Fearing arrest, smugglers and boat crews abandoned thousands of refugees at sea causing a humanitarian crisis in which hundreds died.

¹⁷ “Vietnamese workers may ease labour shortages”, *The Economist*, 9 April 2015, http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=783054862&Country=Laos&topic=Economy&subtopic=Forec_7

¹⁸ International Organization for Migration, “Migrant Information Note Issue #27”, May 2015, https://thailand.iom.int/sites/default/files/document/publications/MIN%2BNo%2B27%2BENG_FINAL.pdf

¹⁹ Tang, Alison, “After 30 years in Thailand, a glimmer of hope for refugees from Myanmar”, *Business Insider*, 11 May 2016, <http://www.businessinsider.com/r-after-30-years-in-thailand-a-glimmer-of-hope-for-refugees-from-myanmar-2016-5>

²⁰ Webb, Simon, “Around 25,000 Rohingya left Myanmar camps in past year: U.N.”, *Reuters*, 21 March 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-migrants/around-25000-rohingya-left-myanmar-camps-in-past-year-u-n-idUSKCNOWN16W>

²¹ “Malaysia and Thailand turn away hundreds on migrant boats”, *Associated Press* (published in *The Guardian*), 14 May 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/14/malaysia-turns-back-migrant-boat-with-more-than-500-aboard>

²² Human Rights Watch, “Thailand: Mass Graves of Rohingya Found in Trafficking Camp”, 1 May 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/05/01/thailand-mass-graves-rohingya-found-trafficking-camp>



Cambodian worker at a seafood processing operation in Rayong, Thailand

Although Malaysia and Indonesia have since agreed to take in and provide humanitarian assistance to thousands of migrants trapped at sea to alleviate the crisis, Thailand has thus far been unwilling to accept any migrants into the country.²³

In 2014, Thailand was downgraded to a 'Tier 3' rating in the U.S. State Department's Trafficking In Persons (TIP) report due to numerous reports of labour abuses in the fishing industry. Although the Thai government has acted to combat human trafficking and labour rights abuses in the fishing sector—including by amending the Fisheries Act, creating a special task force, and regularly inspecting fishing vessels—it remained at Tier 3 in 2015. In April, the European Union yellow-carded the Thai fishing industry and gave the country six months to fix illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing activities, threatening at the same time to impose an embargo on Thai seafood exports into the EU if the Thai government failed to improve the situation. Despite this, ongoing corruption and slow implementation efforts have delayed progress, and the EU has not carried through with its plans to ban Thai seafood exports after the six-month period ended in October.²⁴

²³ Cochrane, Joe, "Indonesia and Malaysia Agree to Care for Stranded Migrants", *The New York Times*, 20 May 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/05/01/thailand-mass-graves-rohingya-found-trafficking-camp>

²⁴ White, Cliff, "Will Thailand get an EU red card? ", *Seafood Source*, 10 June 2016, <https://www.seafoodsource.com/commentary/will-thailand-get-an-eu-red-card>

Vietnam

In order to alleviate unemployment, the Vietnamese government continued its programme of sending workers abroad. Concurrently, there was also a sharp increase in foreign workers migrating to Vietnam. The government, in response, restructured its immigration law to enact stricter controls on inward labour migration. Workers who previously entered the country on a tourist visa to find work and changed their visa status within the country would no longer be able to do so.²⁵ Migrants must have a proper visa before entering the country for employment purposes or they must exit in order to obtain the correct documentation. In addition, effective as of 1 January 2015, Vietnam raised the minimum monthly wage by 15 percent to VND 2.15 million to 3.1 million, depending on location.²⁶

According to figures released by the Department of Overseas Labour (DOLAB), over 115,000 Vietnamese workers (of which 33.3 percent were women) left to work abroad in 2015. Taiwan was the most popular destination for overseas Vietnamese workers (57.87 percent), followed by Japan (23.23 percent). In September 2015, the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) signed a number of MOUs about the selection and employment of Vietnamese workers in the Republic of Korea, Thailand, and Malaysia.²⁷

In February, a cabinet resolution by the Thai government allowed undocumented Vietnamese migrants residing in Thailand to register for work permits in the sectors of fishing, construction, domestic and hospitality work.²⁸ An estimated 3,000 Vietnamese will be permitted to apply to work for one year as a result of this resolution.²⁹ In July, the two countries signed an MOU on Labour Cooperation and an Agreement on Employment of Workers.³⁰

²⁵ Vietnam Visa, "New Vietnam Immigration Law Effects on January 2015", 2014, <http://www.vietnam-immigration.org.vn/news/view/new-vietnam-immigration-law-effects-on-january-2015.html>

²⁶ MOLISA, "Vietnam approves minimum-wage hike of 15 percent in 2015", 11 Oct 2014, <http://www.molisa.gov.vn/en/Pages/Detail-news.aspx?IDNews=198520>

²⁷ "Nearly 116,000 labourers sent abroad in 2015", *The Voice of Vietnam*, 29 Jan 2016, <http://english.vov.vn/society/nearly-116000-labourers-sent-abroad-in-2015-311451.vov>

²⁸ Mekong Migration Network, "Ministry to register Vietnamese workers", 11 Feb 2015, <http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=3113>

²⁹ Mekong Migration Network, "3,000 Vietnamese allowed to work in Thailand for one year, National News Bureau of Thailand", 10 Nov 2015, <http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=4679>

³⁰ MOLISA, "MOU on Labour between Vietnam and Thailand", 19 Sept 2015, <http://www.molisa.gov.vn/en/Pages/Detail-news.aspx?IDNews=2247>

Achievements in 2015



MMN members at the MMN Sixth General Conference

Throughout 2015, MMN continued its work promoting and protecting the rights of migrants in the region through joint advocacy, information monitoring, research, capacity building, and networking. MMN continued to strengthen its organisational capacity, reach out to new members, and expand its operational bases. In particular, MMN forged partnerships with Myanmar civil society organisations, something that was previously very difficult to do due to the sensitivity of migration issues under the military government. Two organisations, namely 88 Generation Peace and Open Society (Labour Department) and Labour Rights Defenders and Promoters, have formally joined MMN as members, while many other organisations have also regularly collaborated with MMN on various projects.

The activities and projects MMN implemented in 2015 largely fall under the following themes:

Research and advocacy

1. Migrant Women and Health
2. Embracing diversity/living together/social inclusion
3. Roles of countries of origin

Capacity building

4. Workshop on ASEAN Integration and Labour Migration in the Mekong

Advocacy and networking

5. MMN 6th Biennial General Conference, 18-19 March 2015
6. ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum
7. MMN International Migrants Day Event, 18 December 2015

Information monitoring and sharing

8. MMN website
9. MMN listserv

These activities and projects complement each other in pursuit of MMN's goal to achieve the protection and promotion of migrants' rights, the decriminalisation of migrants, the promotion of tolerance, the advancement of mutual respect and harmony, and the creation of solidarity. While all of MMN's activities and projects are coordinated by 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 members. Most of the projects are multifaceted and serve several functions including advocacy, knowledge building, capacity strengthening, awareness raising, developing evidence based tools for advocacy, and strengthening mutual understanding and partnership among migrant advocates in the region.

Please see the following sections for more information on MMN's achievements in 2015.

Research and Advocacy

1. Migrant Women and Health

Inflexible health care systems in the GMS often exclude people who are not living in their hometown, who do not have documentation, and/or who have not contributed to a health care scheme. Due to these exclusions and other factors, migrant women often lack access to health care and treatment, rendering them vulnerable in times of ill health. While all undocumented workers face similar hardships, it is particularly challenging for women who often face additional burdens and discrimination because of their gender.

In order to provide evidence showcasing the vulnerability of migrant women on matters of health, and to jointly develop recommendations for policy reforms and changes in practices, MMN, along with research partners in six Mekong countries, jointly conducted research on this topic with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The partners for this project were the following:

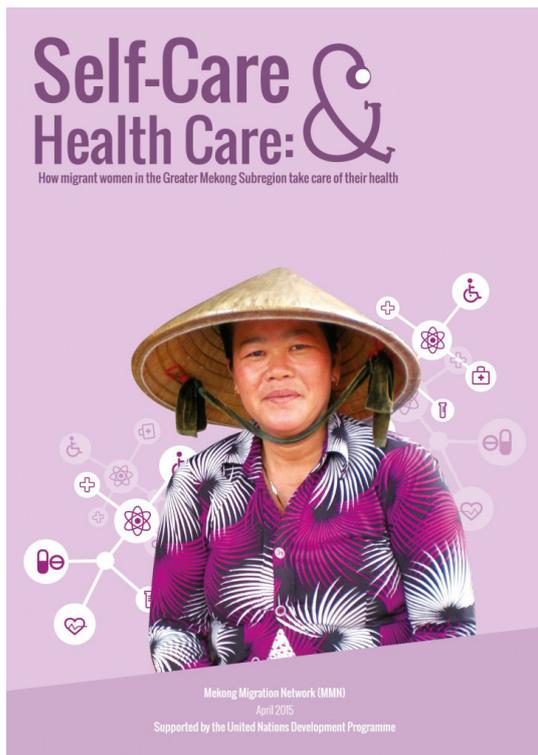
MAP Foundation, Thailand
EMPOWER Foundation, Thailand
Legal Support for Children and Women (LSCW), Cambodia
Yunnan Reproductive Health Institute, China
Women Galaxy, Myanmar
Sex Workers in Myanmar (SWIM) network, Myanmar
Centre for Research and Consultancy for Development (CRCD), Vietnam
National University of Laos, Lao PDR

The first project consultation meeting was organised in November 2014. During this meeting, the MMN Secretariat and project partners jointly developed a research design, which was then followed by field research that was conducted between November 2014 and February 2015. From 13-15 March 2015, MMN held a consultation meeting with partner organisations to share their findings, collectively

Burmese migrant women seeking health care at the Mae Tao clinic, Mae Sot, Thailand (Photo by Mr. John Hulme)



analyse the results, and formulate conclusions and recommendations. The recommendations were aimed at governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), health care professionals, and ASEAN members on how to better support migrant women's health.



On the 27th of May 2015, the International Day of Action for Women's Health, MMN launched a report titled: *Self-Care & Health Care: How Migrant Women in the Greater Mekong Subregion Take Care of their Health*. The study found that migrant women's vulnerability to sickness stems from various factors, including poor living conditions, unsafe and physically demanding work, poverty wages, and a precarious legal status. A lack of long-term health care policies for migrants, combined with poor enforcement of migrants' labour rights, also pose significant barriers to a migrant woman's ability to stay healthy and access health care. Across the region there are gaps in health care for migrant women with the most pronounced gaps being in sexual, reproductive and mental health services.

It is particularly challenging for migrant women to negotiate their health rights at home, in hospitals, and at work, as they face gender-based discrimination. Once they return to their home countries, migrant women more often than not face problems re-registering, and, as a result, receive limited to no access to public health care.

Self-Care & Health Care report

Key recommendations made in the report:

1. GMS governments must implement the commitments made by ASEAN and improve migrants' access to health services;
2. GMS host governments should facilitate access to reproductive and sexual health services and provide interpretation/translation to access health care services;
3. Host governments should promote and enforce compliance of maternity and sick leave policies; and
4. Countries of origin should provide labour attachés with adequate training on the needs of migrant women and provide relevant information on health services available for migrant women.

A full report is available online on the MMN website in English in PDF format:

http://www.mekongmigration.org/Self-Care%20and%20Health%20Care_final.pdf

It is also available in print in English.

The executive summary of the report is available on the MMN website in PDF format in English and in six Mekong languages:

[http://www.mekongmigration.org/Executive%20Summary-%20Self Care%20and%20Health%20Care-Final.pdf](http://www.mekongmigration.org/Executive%20Summary-%20Self%20Care%20and%20Health%20Care-Final.pdf)

It is also available in print in all seven languages.

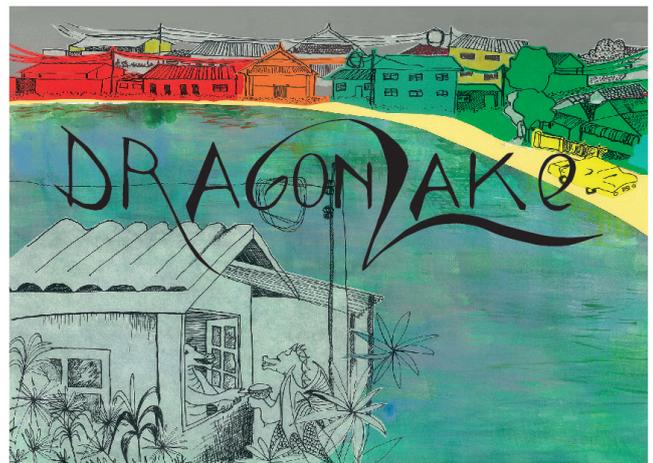
2. Embracing Diversity/ Living Together/ Social Inclusion

Over the last few decades, millions of people have migrated between Mekong countries and beyond in search of security and a better life. However, while millions of migrants can be described as living “side-by-side” with local communities, the two populations are seldom described as living “together.” Resultantly, migrants are often left in a state of isolation that prevents them from playing a more visible role as members of a community. Migrants continue to be treated by destination governments as if they are purely “temporary.”

How long is “temporary”? How long can one stay somewhere without hoping for a sense of belonging and acceptance? How long before one is allowed to play a full role in society? Little attention has been given to the social inclusion of migrants in GMS societies, and what needs to be done to go beyond “tolerance” and embrace the friendship and contributions migrants bring to society. MMN has been working for years to achieve the social cohesion and inclusion of migrants.

MMN’s previous efforts included organising the February 2013 “Mekong Symposium on Migration: Migrants from the Mekong Neighbourhood Living Together,” which took place in Bangkok, as well as publishing *Dragon Lake*, a children’s book aimed at encouraging critical thinking and embracing diversity among children, in addition to creating lesson plans on the history of migration.

In a continued effort to promote the social inclusion of migrants, MMN commenced a project entitled: “Beyond ‘Tolerance’: Working hand-in-hand to promote the social inclusion of migrants and their families” in November 2015 with the support of the Toyota Foundation.



Dragon Lake, MMN Children’s book

The “Beyond ‘Tolerance’” project aims to tackle the issue of social exclusion of migrants, in the context of origin countries, specifically Cambodia and Myanmar, as well as destination countries, focusing on Thailand and Japan. It also aims to provide opportunities for civil society organisations (CSOs) to exchange information and strategies, as well as explore areas for collaboration. The major components of the project will include visits to the four countries concerned, the production of a multimedia presentation that will include photographs and interviews, a series of talks and exhibitions in Bangkok, Yangon, and Phnom Penh, along with an advocacy paper. The project is planned to be fully implemented and completed by October 2016. The main project partners include the following:

Ms. Reiko Harima, MMN, project representative
MAP Foundation, Thailand
Legal Support for Children and Women (LSCW), Cambodia
Cambodian Women Crisis Centre (CWCC), Cambodia
88 Generation Peace and Open Society, Myanmar
Assistant Professor Yuriko Saito, Meijigakuin University, Japan
Mr. John Hulme, Documentary Photographer

3. Roles of Countries of Origin

While destination countries should rightly bear much of the responsibility for the protection of migrant workers inside their territory, countries of origin must also play a proactive role in ensuring that their nationals migrating abroad are protected. With this principle in mind, and with countries of origin in the GMS, such as Myanmar and Cambodia, currently rapidly revising their migration policies, MMN launched a new project in April 2015 that focuses on examining the roles of countries of origin.



The first consultation meeting for the Roles of Countries of Origin project

The project aims to:

1. Identify strengths and gaps in migration governance policies and systems, including the use of recruitment agencies from traditional migrant-sending countries, such as the Philippines and Indonesia;
2. Examine the role of countries of origin in protecting migrant workers, with a special focus on Myanmar and Cambodia;
3. Develop recommendations for Myanmar and Cambodia with regards to their migration governance policies and mechanisms; and
4. Organise a policy dialogue to discuss recommendations.

The objectives of the first project consultation meeting, held from 23-24 July 2015 in Bangkok, were to present the project to partners, develop a concrete work plan and strategy, and to develop a list of research questions. The following organisations decided to join the project as project partners:

MAP Foundation, Thailand
Cambodian Women Crisis Centre, Cambodia
Foundation for Education and Development, Thailand,
Foundation for AIDS Rights, Thailand
88 Generation Peace and Open Society, Myanmar
Burmese Women's Union, Myanmar

Following the development of a work plan during the consultation meeting, the MMN Secretariat and project partners carried out the following activities:

- Key informant interviews, Hong Kong, July 2015
- Key informant interviews, Philippines, November 2015
- Key informant interviews, Indonesia, December 2015
- Desk research, May-December 2015
- Consultation with migrant workers, Mae Sot, November 2015
- Consultation with migrant returnees, December 2015
- Consultation with CSOs, Cambodia, December 2015

The research is expected to be completed in 2016 and the findings and recommendations will be presented to relevant stakeholders during a Policy Dialogue on Roles of Countries of Origin to be organised by MMN.

Capacity Building

4. Workshop on ASEAN Integration and Labour Migration in the Mekong

In 2014, MMN started collaborating with Oxfam on its regional program to promote the social protection of marginalized workers in the region, focusing specifically on matters of social security for migrants, decent access to health care, and labour rights protection.

Under this program, MMN started a series of projects aimed at capacity building of migrants' rights advocates in the GMS to strengthen their knowledge and skills in utilizing the ASEAN mechanisms



to promote migrants' rights. There are a number of activities planned for 2014 to 2016, including organising a regional workshop on ASEAN, developing training modules on ASEAN advocacy catered for migrants' rights advocates in the GMS, organising a regional training program, hosting a workshop during the ASEAN People's Forum APF)/ASEAN Civil Society Conference (ACSC), engaging in the ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour (AFML) and collectively developing policy briefs on key themes to be distributed at relevant regional meetings.

MMN members brainstorming at the workshop

As ASEAN officially declared the establishment of the AEC at the end of 2015, there has been increased discussion as to what implications it may have on migration in the region. To exchange views on this matter, MMN organised a workshop, with the support of Oxfam, in Phnom Penh from 16-17 March 2015 entitled: "ASEAN Integration and Labour Migration in the Mekong."

The workshop had two primary objectives: the first was to explore the link between ASEAN integration and migration; and the second was to assist in the capacity building of migrant rights advocates in the region, aiming to strengthen their knowledge and capacity to utilise existing human rights mechanisms within ASEAN in order to protect and promote the rights of migrants. The workshop provided an opportunity for participants to examine and discuss potential engagements for civil society groups in ASEAN, and to brainstorm future advocacy opportunities for ASEAN bodies, including the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), and the ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour (AFML).

More than 60 participants from CSOs, intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), research institutions, and private foundations from the GMS took part in the workshop.

Plenary sessions were conducted on topics including "ASEAN Economic Integration and Implications for Labour Migration in the Mekong" and "Human Rights Mechanisms within ASEAN". Mr. Rafendi Djamin, Indonesian Representative to the ASEAN Inter-governmental Commission on Human Rights, gave a presentation on "ASEAN Integration: The Current Framework Regarding the Movement of the People". Participants also heard from representatives from the ILO about mechanisms relating to ASEAN integration, and civil society and government representatives gave presentations on human rights bodies and mechanisms within ASEAN. Sunsanee Sutthisunsanee of Thailand's Law Reform Commission presented on the draft ASEAN Declaration on the Rights of Workers, and H.E. Dr. Vathana Sann from the General Council for Agricultural and Rural development, Cambodia, presented on the ASEAN social protection framework, and the importance of social security.

The workshop also provided an opportunity for participants to examine and discuss potential opportunities for civil society engagement with ASEAN, brainstorm future advocacy opportunities for ASEAN bodies including AICHR, ACWC, and AFML and improve knowledge and understanding on integration and mechanisms of ASEAN. Key outcomes included ideas for joint advocacy strategies and future capacity building and training to build on participants' knowledge gained from this workshop.



MMN members presenting on the results of their discussion

For a detailed report about the workshop, please see:

<http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=3139>

Advocacy and Networking

5. MMN 6th Biennial General Conference, 18-19 March 2015

In accordance with the MMN Terms of Partnership, MMN organises biennial General Conferences (GCs), the network's highest decision-making forum to which all member organisations are invited. The 6th Biennial General Conference was held on 18-19 March 2015, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The GC was chaired by the chair of the MMN Steering Committee (SC), Mr. Sokchar Mom.

Facilitated by the MMN Regional Coordinator, Reiko Harima, members reviewed the current Terms of Partnership. The MMN Secretariat additionally shared updates on MMN's recent and ongoing projects. Members discussed their respective MMN projects, exchanged ideas on the need for capacity building and training, and jointly adopted MMN's 2015-2016 work plan.

The General Conference also elected new members of the SC. The new SC is composed of the following individuals:

Mr. BRAHM PRESS, *MAP Foundation, Thailand*

Ms. THET THET AUNG, *88 Generation Peace and Open Society, Myanmar*

Ms. SOKUNTHEA CHANN, *Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC), Cambodia*

Ms. TRANG HOANG, *Research Center for Management and Sustainable Development (MSD), Vietnam*

Ms. KABVANIBANH PHOUXAY, *National University of Laos, Lao PDR*

Ms. HANJIALING, *Migrant Education and Action Research Centre, China*

Mr. HTOO CHIT, *Foundation for Education and Development (FED), Thailand*

Ms. REIKO HARIMA, *MMN Regional Coordinator*

The SC decided that Mr. Htoo Chit will serve as Chair of the Steering Committee until his term expires in March 2016. The SC will then decide who will be the new chairperson after March 2016.

The General Conference ended with all the members thanking Mr. Sokchar Mom, the outgoing Chair of the MMN SC, and Ms. Huynh Thi Ngoc Tuyet, from the Centre for Research and Consultancy for Development (CRCD), both of whom have greatly contributed to strengthening MMN over a number of years.

For the full report about the conference, please see:

<http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=3171>

6. ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ ASEAN Peoples' Forum



Interactive activities at the MMN workshop at the APF

Seeing it as a strategic venue for exchanging ideas with other CSOs and forging solidarity, MMN has participated in the ASEAN Civil Society Conference (ACSC)/ASEAN People's Forum (APF) since 2005. In April 2015, five representatives of MMN participated in the ACSC/APF and organised two workshops, one focusing on issues of social exclusion of migrants in ASEAN and the other focusing on living wages.

6-1. MMN Workshop at the ACSC/APF, "Living Together: Integration or Social Exclusion of Migrants in ASEAN?"

On the 23rd of April 2015, MMN organised a workshop entitled, "Living Together: Integration or Social Exclusion of Migrants in ASEAN?" at the ASEAN Peoples' Forum in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The workshop was co-organised by Legal Support for Children and Women, Cambodia, MAP Foundation, Thailand, and Workers Hub for Change, Malaysia.

The workshop looked at different topics regarding integration, such as migrant children's access to education, migrants' access to public health care, labour protection, and social security.

Participants of the workshop developed the following recommendations for ASEAN:

1. Provide social services, such as universal health care, pensions, and social security for migrant workers and members of their families across ASEAN countries;
2. Provide equal access to education for all children, and ensure that education for migrant children acknowledges and respects their language and culture; and
3. Facilitate dialogue on social cohesion and integration in ASEAN countries in order to change current perceptions of migrants.

For the full report about the workshop, please see:

<http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=3258>

6-2. ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum MMN Workshop at the APF "What's your work worth? Living Wage Now!"

On the 24th of April 2015, MMN, the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), Cambodia's United Sisterhood Alliance, and Thailand's MAP Foundation co-organised a workshop for the ACSC/APF in Kuala Lumpur entitled: "What is your work worth? Living Wage Now!"

The objectives of the workshop were:

1. To raise awareness on the need for decent work and living wages;
2. To share and build upon strategies and opportunities to advocate for a living wage; and
3. To mobilise civil society across Southeast Asia to campaign for a universal living wage.

The workshop called on ASEAN to engage with workers' representatives and trade unions to review current minimum wage rates and establish and enforce a living wage that reflects the real cost of living so that workers and their family members can live a dignified life.

The session closed with a call for justice for the victims of the Rana Plaza tragedy, which took place exactly two years before.

For the full report about the workshop, please see:

<http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=3254>

7. MMN International Migrants Day Event, 18 December 2015

Every year, MMN celebrates International Migrants Day (IMD) on 18 December, which represents the day the United Nations (UN) adopted the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICRMW). This day presents an opportunity to celebrate the enormous contribution migrants make to both the societies they live in and the countries they have left behind. In December 2015, MMN co-organised IMD celebrations in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and Yangon, Myanmar.

7-1. International Migrants Day, Chiang Mai, Thailand



Migrant workers performances at the International Migrants Day event.

The MMN Secretariat, MMN member organisations, and other migrant rights groups, including Workers Solidarity Association (WSA), MAP Foundation, Shan Youth Power (SYP), Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN), Migrant Workers Federation (MWF), Human Rights and Development Foundation (HRDF), and EMPOWER Foundation, organised the 25th IMD celebration in Chiang Mai. The day's theme of "Living Wages" highlighted the gap between the cost of living and the wages of migrant workers. Around 140 participants attended the celebration, including migrant workers, CSOs, academics, and government representatives.

Mr. Puttipong Sirimat, Deputy Governor of Chiang Mai, gave the opening speech in which he emphasised the important contributions of migrant workers to Chiang Mai's economy. He observed that Thailand's ageing population and slowing birth rate are making migrant workers vital for strengthening Thailand's stagnating economic growth and shrinking labour force. In addition, Mr. Puttipong Sirimat highlighted the challenges of solving issues of labour exploitation that migrant workers continue to face.

The opening speech was followed by a stage performance by migrant workers who presented information on issues of working conditions and wages experienced by migrant workers in various sectors, including agriculture, construction, manufacturing, domestic work, and services. For the finale, the performers demanded a living wage, safety and health in the workplace, and social welfare.

For more information about the IMD celebration in Chiang Mai, please see:

<http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=4757>

7-2. International Migrants Day, Yangon, Myanmar

On 20 December 2015, MMN, together with ILO Myanmar, Myanmar civil society organisations, and the Labour Organizations Network for Migrants, and United Against Child Trafficking (United ACT), organised the 2015 Migrants Day Fair to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. The Fair was dedicated to the theme “We Are All Migrants.”

At the event, ILO Myanmar launched the report, *Internal Labour Migration in Myanmar: Building an evidence-base on patterns in migration, human trafficking and forced labour*. This was the first report launched under the current Myanmar government. The report aims to fill an information gap to assist all actors in understanding internal labour migration in Myanmar.

Please see the next page for MMN’s IMD statement.

For more information about the IMD celebration in Yangon, please see:
<http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=4869>



Over 500 participants attending the event, including workers who are working at factories in industrial zones in the Yangon area

*Performances at the under the theme
“We Are All Migrants”*



Information Monitoring and Sharing

8. MMN Website

Throughout 2015, MMN regularly updated its webpage (www.mekongmigration.org), which includes press releases, migration-related news in the GMS, advocacy calls on thematic issues, and MMN publications.

9. MMN Listserv

MMN currently maintains two listservs. The first is a formal listserv for MMN members. It provides a space for MMN internal discussion on strategies, positions, work plans, and advocacy actions on specific issues. The MMN Secretariat manages this listserv.

The second listserv is accessible to anyone who wishes to subscribe to migration-related news in the GMS. News articles, MMN statements, press releases, and reports are circulated through this listserv.

MMN International Migrants Day Statement, 18 December 2015

“Today, 18 December 2015, marks the 25th anniversary of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICRMW). This is an apt opportunity to celebrate the enormous contribution migrants make to both the societies they live in and the countries they have left behind. Over many years, millions of migrants have powered the social and economic development of the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS). In this ever more interconnected region, patterns of migration are becoming increasingly complex, with migrants today forming the backbone of national economies, across both formal and informal sectors. However, their work continues to be undervalued and characterised by low wages and unsafe working conditions that few locals would ever tolerate. Labour rights violations such as breaches of minimum wage legislation, forced overtime, denial of paid sick leave, maternity leave and holidays, and substandard occupational safety and health, remain widespread.

Despite an urgent need to systematically address these issues, there continues to be a striking lack of political will, both at the national and regional levels, to protect the rights of migrants. Migration policies are in contrast increasingly driven by the demands of the corporate sector and the need to securitise migration flows to safeguard national security. There is an increased trend for GMS countries to establish Special Economic Zones (SEZs), some of which are designated to keep migrants along the borders and hence leading to isolation of migrants from mainstream society. We are concerned that forcing migrants to live in social exclusion is contrary to the principle of living together and is only likely to exacerbate existing problems.

With the ASEAN Economic Community due to be established by the end of 2015, this year has seen high level regional discussions on trade, investment and the freer movement of skilled labour. In spite of this unique opportunity, the regional body has shown an apparent lack of political will or capacity to realise protection mechanisms for all migrant workers. The process began by the signing of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers in 2007, appears to have stalled indefinitely and no framework instrument to implement the Declaration has been put in place. Moreover in a year that has seen large numbers of people in the region risking their lives out of desperation, ASEAN has failed to respond to this migration crisis, in accordance with its vision of creating a “sharing and caring” community.

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the ICRMW, we urge all national governments to sign and ratify this important convention. We also urge ASEAN to develop migration policies founded on the principle of protecting the rights found within this instrument. Migration policies based on economic utility at the expense of workers’ rights are neither sustainable nor compatible with international standards. Law and policies that respond to abusive practices found in the GMS are in urgent need and must take into an account the continuum of exploitation experienced.”

The statement is available online at:
<http://www.mekongmigration.org/?p=4739>

Secretariat Calendar 2015

January Two CSOs from Myanmar–88 Generation Peace and Open Society (Labour Department) and the Labour Rights Defenders and Promoters–formally applied for MMN membership

February

5 Attended the Australia-Mekong NGO Engagement Platform (AMNEP) Policy Forum, Bangkok, Thailand

9 Attended the preparation meeting for International Women’s Day 2015, Chiang Mai, Thailand

24 Attended the “Joint Consultation Meeting on Myanmar Migration Strategies” organised by the ILO’s GMS Triangle Project and presented on “Labour Migration Governance in Myanmar 2014: Achievements and Challenges”, Yangon, Myanmar

March

8 Joined the International Women’s Day 2015 event, Chiang Mai, Thailand

13-15 Organised the “2nd UNDP Project Consultation Meeting on Migrant Women and Health”, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

16-17 Organised the workshop on “ASEAN Integration and Labour Migration in the GMS”, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

18-19 Organised the MMN General Conference, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

20 Organised a meeting to discuss issues faced by Cambodian migrants in Malaysia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

25 Attended the “Consultation on the Gender Dimensions of Migration” organised by UN Women, and provided input to draft recommendations for the amendment of Myanmar’s 1999 Law relating to Overseas Employment, Yangon, Myanmar

25-26 Attended the “Bali Process Regional Symposium on Trafficking for the Purpose of Labour Exploitation”, and presented as a plenary speaker on the continuum of exploitation, Bangkok, Thailand

30 Attended a meeting with the ILO’s GMS Triangle Project’s Technical Team, Yangon, Myanmar

31 Joined the meeting with representatives from the Australian Embassy to introduce MMN, provide updates on MMN activities and discuss the gaps and challenges of working on migration issues in Myanmar, Yangon, Myanmar

April

21-25 Participated in the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People’s Forum (ASCS/APF) 2015, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

23 Organised the MMN workshop at the ACSC/APF 2015 entitled “Living Together: Integration or Social Exclusion of Migrants in ASEAN?”, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

24 Organised the MMN workshop at the APF entitled “What’s your work worth? Living Wage Now!”, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

May

- 22 Attended the UN Women Meeting on the “5-year National Plan of Action for the Management of International Labour Migration”, Yangon, Myanmar
- 27 Launched the UNDP-funded report *Self-Care & Health Care: How Migrant Women in the Greater Mekong Subregion Take Care of their Health* in advance of the International Day of Action for Women’s Health

June

- 2-3 Attended the “Workshop on Women in Agricultural Value Chain”, co-organised by Australia-Mekong NGO Engagement Platform (AMNEP) and CSR-Asia Bangkok, Thailand
- 21 Attended the opening ceremony of the first ‘Migrant Resource Centre’ in Yangon co-organised by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security and IOM, Yangon, Myanmar
- 25 Attended and presented the highlights of the newly published MMN report, *Self-Care & Health Care: How Migrant Women in the Greater Mekong Subregion Take Care of their Health*, at the Chiang Mai Provincial Coordinating Meeting (PCM – AIDS/TB)

July

- 13 Interviewed representatives of the Indonesian Consulate in Hong Kong as part of the study on Roles of Countries of Origin
- 14 Interviewed representatives of the Philippine Consulate in Hong Kong as part of the study on Roles of Countries of Origin
- 23-25 Organised the 1st Project Consultation Meeting on the MMN Roles of Countries of Origin Project, Bangkok, Thailand
- 25-27 Organised a preparatory meeting on ASEAN Advocacy Training, Bangkok, Thailand
- 31 Attended the JUNIMA (Joint UN Initiative on Migration, AIDS & Health) Steering Committee meeting and presented the highlights of the recently launched MMN report *Self-Care & Health Care” How Migrant Women in the Greater Mekong Subregion Take Care of their Health*, Bangkok, Thailand.

August

- 5 Attended the “Civil Society National Consultation on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)”, organized by UPR Info Asia with the support of UNESCAP’s Social Development Division, ILGA and UNESCO, Bangkok, Thailand
- 19-20 Attended the workshop on “Social Security in Destination Countries” and meeting on ‘Information on the GMS Triangle Project Phase II’ organised by the ILO’s GMS Triangle Project, Yangon, Myanmar
- 20 Attended the National Consultation on “Post-2015 Development Agenda: Focus on Migrants and Migration”, Office of Law Reform Commission of Thailand, Nonthaburi, Thailand

September

- 21 Attended the “Consultation Meeting on Myanmar Migration Strategies” organised by the ILO’s GMS Triangle Project and facilitated one session in the afternoon, Yangon, Myanmar
- 28-29 Attended the OHCHR global seminar on migrant domestic workers in an irregular situation, Bangkok, Thailand

- October** MMN Secretariat assisted as MMN's Roles of Countries of Origin project partners started organizing consultation meetings with migrants and returnees.
- 2** Attended the ASEAN Forum organized by the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre, Sydney University and presented as a panelist for the concurrent session on "mobility"
 - 9** Attended and provided input at the "Consultation on Communication Strategies to Promote Safe Migration" organised by UN Women, Yangon, Myanmar
 - 12** Attended a briefing meeting organized by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)
 - 13** Attended a strategy meeting on gender program organized by the DFAT
 - 12-15** Attended the KEPA Mekong's regional workshop 2015 entitled "Human Trafficking, Migration and Ethnicity" and presented one of the workshop's key presentations on "Migration and Ethnicity", Hoa Binh, Vietnam
 - 26** Attended the Toyota Foundation's grant award giving ceremony held in Tokyo, Japan
 - 27** Attended a workshop organized by the Toyota Foundation and presented on MMN's project on promoting social inclusion, a project supported by the Foundation
 - 26-28** Attended Regional Meeting on Labour Rights and Decent Work for Working Women in Asia, organized by Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC), Bangkok, Thailand
- November**
- 4** Attended the Myanmar CSOs and LOs Network for Migrants Meeting on the organization of the International Migrants Day event 2015, Yangon, Myanmar
 - 5-6** Attended the "ASEAN AICHR-SOMTC Joint Workshop on Human Rights-based Approach to Combat Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children", Yogyakarta, Indonesia
 - 23** Attended the Myanmar CSOs and LOs Network for Migrants Preparatory Meeting for organizing the International Migrants Day event 2015, Yangon, Myanmar
- December**
- 7** Attended the Myanmar CSOs and LOs Network for Migrants Preparatory Meeting for the International Migrants Day event 2015
 - 12** Organised the Coordination Meeting with the MMN members and partners in Myanmar, Yangon, Myanmar
 - 18** Co-organised the International Migrants Day 2015 event with Northern Labour Network in Chiang Mai, Thailand
 - 20** Co-organised the International Migrants Day event with the Myanmar CSOs and LOs Network for Migrants, Yangon, Myanmar

