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# MIGRANT WORKERS IN ASEAN

**ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly  
Seminar: The Role of Parliamentarians in the  
Protection and Promotion of the Rights of  
Migrant Workers in ASEAN**

**3-6 April, 2011**

**Sunway Hotel, Phnom Penh, Cambodia**



# PRESENTATION OUTLINE

- **Overview of labour migration**
- **ASEAN demographics and reasons for migration**
- **Intra-ASEAN migration patterns**
- **Migration trends in select ASEAN countries**
  - **Cambodia**
  - **Philippines**
  - **Malaysia**
  - **Thailand**
- **The ASEAN framework on labour migration**
- **Existing challenges**

# LABOUR MOBILITY



## Countries of origin

- High population; young population
- Domestic unemployment
- Unemployment of highly skilled
- Migration, a means to address domestic unemployment

## Countries of destination

- Declining population; aging population
- Labor shortage in 3D sectors
- Recently, shortage of highly skilled
- Migration, a means to address labor and skills shortage

# DEFINITION OF LABOUR MIGRATION



- All perspectives recognize that labour migration is a transnational process involving at least two states: where migrants come from (origin) and where they go (destination).
- The classification of states as origin, transit or destination is neither fixed nor mutually exclusive.

**IMPORTANT:** Migration involves not just states but, above all, human beings.

*“... it appears evidently from experience that a man is of all sorts of baggage, the most difficult to be transported.”*

Adam Smith (Quoted by M. Asis, 2006)

# CHARACTERISTICS OF LABOUR MIGRATION IN ASIA



- **Labour migration is strictly temporary**
  - Limited work contract (usually two years)
  - Limited to a specific sector/employer (difficult to change sectors/employers)
  - No family reunification for less skilled migrants (also restrictions in marrying locals)
  
- **Labour migration is gendered: male migration responds to labour shortage in the 3D public sectors; female migration responds to the shortage in the private sector, i.e., shortage of care and domestic workers**
  
- **Unauthorized migration is substantial.**
  
- **The migration industry is an important stakeholder.**

# COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN & DESTINATION IN ASIA



## Major countries of origin

- Indonesia
- Philippines
- Viet Nam
- Myanmar
- Cambodia
- Lao PDR
- Bangladesh
- India
- Nepal
- Pakistan
- PRC

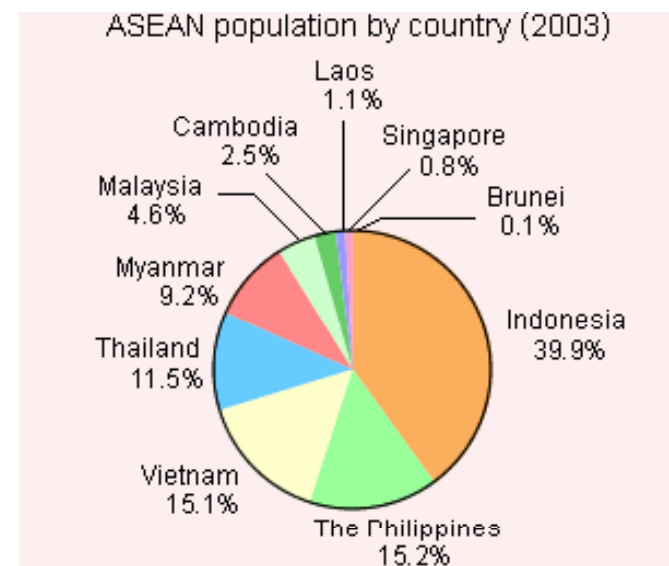
## Major countries/areas of destination

- Brunei Darussalam
- Malaysia
- Singapore
- Thailand
- Hong Kong, China
- Japan
- Republic of Korea
- Taipei, China
- Gulf countries

# ASEAN DEMOGRAPHICS



- **Total Population: 567 million, working pop: 263 million**
- **Asia migrant workers: 13.5 million**
- **5.3 million within ASEAN**
- **Over 28.8 million live on less than US \$1 per day**
- **148 million on less than US \$2 per day**



# ***WHY MIGRATE?***



## **PULL FACTORS**

- **Rapid growth and development**
- **Labour shortage (particularly in Thailand and Malaysia)**
- **Changing demographics**
- **Labour market needs in high income countries**

# *WHY MIGRATE?*



## **PUSH FACTORS**

- **Slow growth**
- **High unemployment rates**
- **Better wages abroad**
- **“Labour export” policy for economic development**
- **Wage differentials**
- **Crisis pressures in less developed countries**



# ALSO...



- **Established inter-country networks based on family, culture and history.**

# HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS



- **1970s characterized by migration to Gulf countries for construction and infrastructure projects after oil prices increased in 1973-1974**
- **1980s shift in migration for service jobs**
- **1980s-90s - Recruitment costs previously borne by employers now being charged to migrants -**
  - **In Asia, recruitment costs have risen over time despite experience and networks – Why?**
- **Sub-regional flows: South Asia-Gulf, within Southeast Asia, and within/to East Asia**

# **INTRA-ASEAN LABOUR MIGRATION TODAY**



- **3 countries host 90% intra-ASEAN migrants**
  - **Malaysia (35%)**
  - **Thailand (35%)**
  - **Singapore (21%)**
  
- **Remittances inflow in ASEAN for 2010: US\$39.55 billion with Philippines accounting for 54%**
  
- **Lack of rural employment -- new countries (CLMV) now also encouraging workers to migrate, in competition with Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines – world financial crisis downturn**

# **LABOUR MIGRATION TRENDS IN SELECT ASEAN COUNTRIES**

# CAMBODIA



- **Steady increase in regular and irregular migration**
- **Main destination countries for regular migrants in 2009:**
  - **Malaysia - 52%**
  - **Thailand - 34%**
  - **Korea - 18%**
- **Estimated 180,000 undocumented Cambodian migrant workers abroad**
- **Main destination countries for undocumented migrants in 2009:**
  - **Thailand - 93%**
  - **Malaysia - 3%**
- **Regular migrants account for 3%; Irregular for 93%**
- **Remittances inflow for 2009: 3% of GDP, USD 338 million**

# PHILIPPINES



- **Dominated by temporary migrants – increasing number of migrants being rehired**
- **Migration mainly to the Middle East and East Asia for temporary migrants**
- **Substantial number of permanent migrants are present in North America**
- **Relatively new phenomenon: more female temporary migrants than male**
- **Largest group of temporary migrants is currently household service (domestic) workers**
- **Remittances inflow in 2009: 11.7% GDP, USD 19.8 billion**

# MALAYSIA



- **Since 2009, 1.9 million foreign workers in Malaysia (in addition to roughly 500,000 – 1 million undocumented migrant workers)**
- **Increase in legally recruited migrant workers from 532,000 to 1.9 million**
- **Remittances inflow in 2009: 0.5% GDP, USD 1.1 billion**

# THAILAND

- **Labour exporting (to Japan, Singapore, Malaysia) and importing (from Cambodia, Vietnam) country**
- **In 2008, main destination countries for regular Thai migrants: Asian countries - 63%; Middle East - 23%**
- **Remittances inflow in 2009: 0.6% GDP, USD 1.6 billion**

# PATHWAYS FOR MIGRATION



- **Government to Government (Bilateral) Agreements – Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**
- **Private to Private – Private recruitment agencies identify migrants for private companies/employers**
- **Public to Private – Public recruitment agencies (Department of Employment) identify workers for private companies/employers**
- **Informal and irregular recruitment via brokers and unofficial networks**



# **THE ASEAN FRAMEWORK ON LABOUR MIGRATION**

# **ASEAN DECLARATION ON THE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF THE RIGHTS OF MIGRANT WORKERS (2007)**



- **Sets out responsibilities of ASEAN, and labour-receiving and sending countries**
- **Does not include undocumented migrant workers or families of migrant workers**
- **Timeframe for implementation is yet to be established**
- **Article 22 tasks ASEAN parties to: “develop an ASEAN instrument on the protection and promotion of the rights of migrant workers”**

# **ASEAN COMMITTEE ON MIGRANT WORKERS (ACMW): IMPLEMENTATION OF DECLARATION**



- **ACMW reports to the annual ASEAN Senior Labour Officials Meeting (SLOM) on implementation**
- **15-16 Sep 2008 (Singapore) – First meeting**
- **Four areas of cooperation agreed:**
  - **Protection and promotion of rights of migrant workers**
  - **Strengthening good governance in recruiting process**
  - **Countering human trafficking**
  - **Drafting of “Instrument” per Article 22**

# IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES



- **Skilled labour vs. unskilled labour**
- **Documented workers vs. undocumented workers**
- **Protecting migrant workers' families**
- **ASEAN norms vs. national laws**
- **How to create a legally binding “instrument” as per Art. 22. How will it link to the ASEAN charter?**
- **Handling cases of labour exploitation**



**THANKS!!**

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