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> **"Migration Trends in ASEAN and GMS: Changing Demographics and Flows"**
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Note prepared to facilitate discussion on "Facilitating Free Cross-border Labour Movement and Better Skill Recognition Arrangements".

Introduction

This short paper was prepared to facilitate the discussion on "Facilitating Free Cross-border Labour Movement and Better Skill Recognition Arrangements" during the Mekong Forum 2013 held in Khon Kaen on 10-11 July 2013. The paper draws heavily on previous research conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) on the issue of labour mobility in the GMS, along with relevant studies focusing on Thailand and various documents and papers on ASEAN migration recently prepared by the Organization.

This paper is organized in three main parts: first, it provides an overview of the current migration trends and patterns in the GMS and ASEAN and it highlights relevant issues and challenges. Secondly, it puts forward a series of selected responses that have been developed in the region to address the challenges posed by mobility. The paper concludes with some recommendations.

1. Current Migration Trends, Patterns and Challenges

1.1. ASEAN[1]
ASEAN as a region has a total population of 600 million, the third largest after China and India[2]. It is ranked to be the 8th largest economy in the world[3]. Its growth rate is expected to increase as a more integrated, interdependent regional market comes into force in 2015 through the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community.
Key economic and demographic indicators show that ASEAN is in fact a group of countries with extremely diverse variables.

Countries	Population (in thousand)[4]	Total GDP (current US$ in million)[5]	GDP per capita (current US$)1	Net migration rate4	Poverty headcount ($2/day)1	Total Fertility Rates2	% of working age population 5	Unemployment rate3
Net migrant-receiving countries								

Brunei Darussalam	415	12,402	29,915	1.7	NA	2.0	42%	2.6%
Malaysia	28,909	238,849	8,262	0.6	2.3%	2.6	53%	3.2%
Singapore	5,077	223,015	43,929	6.6	NA	1.3	36%	2.0%
Thailand	67,312	318,709	4,735	1.1	26.5%	1.6	41%	0.6%
Net migrant-sending countries								
Cambodia	15,269	11,168	731	-1.7	56.5%	2.6	54%	0.0%
Indonesia	234,181	708,032	3,023	-0.8	50.6%	2.1	48%	6.1%
Lao PDR	6,230	6,508	1,045	-2.3	66.0%	2.7	60%	2.5%
Myanmar	60,163	43,025	715	-0.4	-	2.0	44%	5.4%
Philippines	94,013	189,326	2,014	-2.0	45.0%	3.1	63%	7.0%
Viet Nam	86,930	107,650	1,238	-0.5	38.5%	1.8	41%	4.5%

Net migrant-receiving countries in ASEAN include Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, and together they host approximately 5 million regular migrants, and around 8.6 million migrants in total – including irregular migrants. The majority of migrants in all net migrant-receiving countries in ASEAN, somewhere between 60 – 90 per cent, are from other ASEAN countries.

Country	Number of migrants
Brunei	148,123[6]
Malaysia	2,109,954 (regular) – 3,000,000 (est. including irregular)[7]
Singapore	1,494,200[8]
Thailand	1,615,385 (regular/documented) – 4,000,000 (est. Including irregular)[9]

Excess labour supply on one hand and high labour demand on the other are understood to be among the main influencing factors of international migration in ASEAN. These are driven by several factors including changing demographics in the region with more economically developed countries experiencing a decrease in birth rates and a decline in the labour force, while poorer countries have high birth rates, large labour forces and not enough jobs to offer to all (this pattern is all the more noticeable in the GMS. Please refer to the next section of this paper).

Wage differentials represent another key factor explaining migration in ASEAN. Over 150 million people, or 25 per cent of the total population, are reported to live on less than US$2 a day, and they are largely concentrated in countries in net migrant-sending countries.

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[6] The World Bank "Bilateral Estimates of Migrant Stocks, 2010".
[7] IOM "Labour Migration from Indonesia", p. 41.
[8] Singapore Department of Statistics "Population Trends: 2012", p. v.
[9] IOM "Migrant Information Note, Issue #20, June 2013

Migration trends in ASEAN suggest: 1) people are more likely to travel across borders for better income even if there are jobs available within their own countries; 2) employers may seek migrant labour even if there is local labour available; and 3) there may be a mismatch between the educational/skills levels of local workers and labour market needs.

Another key feature of intra-ASEAN migration lies in its irregularity. In Malaysia and Thailand, a significant share of the migratory flows is irregular. In Malaysia, the predominant number of irregular migrants comes from Indonesia, and also from Myanmar, albeit in smaller numbers. For some net migrant-sending countries such as the Philippines and Viet Nam, other countries in ASEAN are not necessarily the main destinations. The Philippines Overseas Employment Agency estimates that in 2009, only 5 per cent of the 3.8 million Filipino regular temporary migrants were in ASEAN, though the percentage of Filipino irregular migrants in ASEAN is estimated at a higher percentage of 29 per cent[10]. The Vietnamese Department of Overseas Labour reported that during the period of 2000 – 2010, 25 per cent of deployed workers went to Malaysia and much smaller numbers to other ASEAN countries[11]. Official statistics of Indonesia showed that 38 per cent of some 700,000 migrants deployed abroad in 2009 were to other ASEAN countries.[12] However, taking into account the large irregular migratory flows from Indonesia to Malaysia, the actual volume of intra-regional migration from Indonesia is understood to be much greater.

1.2 A focus on the GMS migration trends and patters: similarities and differences with ASEAN
The Greater Mekong Subregion[13] represents only a portion of ASEAN but it presents some of the same migration trends, patterns and challenges as those reported above. It is important that the GMS is seen and analysed within the context of ASEAN and the AEC, especially in light of the realization of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) by 2015. The AEC aims to substantially increase the region's economic, cultural and political integration while the AEC Blueprint mentions the need for increased labour mobility, focusing on skilled professionals. In this framework.

The GMS is a highly fluid area characterized mainly by lower skilled workers moving across borders in search of better lives for themselves and their families. Figures of the total flows and stock of migrants in this region are difficult to obtain due to the irregular nature of the movements. However, recent estimates have calculated the total stock of migrants in the GMS as 4 million. Myanmar (2 million) and Viet Nam (1 million) were reported as the countries that accounted for the highest share of the total stock.

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[10] Philippines Overseas Employment Agency, "Stock Estimate of Overseas Filipinos", 2009/
[11] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam, "Review of Vietnamese Migration Aroad", 2012
[12] IOM, "Labour Migration from Indonesia", 2010, p.11.
[13] The Greater Mekong Subregion comprises of six countries: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam and Guanxi Zhuang and Yunnan Province of PRC.

Labour migration in the GMS is driven by two main factors: (1) unequal social and economic development, including demographic factors and (2) existing links between and within countries such as faster and easier transportation and communications. Additionally, porous borders and weak enforcement of legislation by the governments in the region are enabling factors that contribute to increased mobility.

Depending on the relationship between development, aging, and migration, the GMS countries can be divided into three main categories:

1) **Countries where the economy cannot absorb all new labour supply**. The main destinations for migrants originating from these countries are intra-GMS. Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar are in this group.
2) **Countries where a surplus labour supply is changing to a labour shortage**. Destinations of migrants from these countries are both in and extra-GMS. Viet Nam and China are under this group.
3) **Countries that experience labour shortage and whose economies need migrants.** Destination is primarily extra-GMS and only Thailand – the sole GMS country with a non-negative net migration rate - falls within this group in the GMS.

The bulk of intra-GMS labour migration concerns low-skilled workers and Thailand represents the major destination country although migration also occurs among other GMS countries – between Viet Nam and Cambodia, Yunnan Province of China and Lao PDR, Lao PDR and Viet Nam, the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Viet Nam, and Myanmar, Viet Nam and GMS provinces of the PRC.

Agriculture, construction, household work, and fisheries are the main job sectors in which most migrants are found in Thailand. Migration in Thailand seems to reflect the general trend of intra-GMS migration, mostly involving migrants engaged in 3D jobs (dirty, dangerous and difficult), with low wages.

Internal migration and urbanization is a growing phenomenon in the GMS with countries such as Thailand and Viet Nam experiencing rapid growth and a progressive increase in rural-urban migration. Good management of migration flows should hence accompany policies directed towards urbanization.

A recent trend in migration in the GMS is represented by cross-border mobility. The creation of economic corridors is facilitating not only trade but also movements of people across borders. This phenomenon has contributed to the growth of border towns with the expansion of slums and daily irregular border crossings that are difficult to control.

In addition to the ongoing and most recent trends and patterns of migration, a few developments in the region are contributing to further reshaping migration flows among the countries. On one hand, the recent opening of Myanmar brings economic opportunities and it is likely that this will impact on the labour migration trends

within the subregion. Investment in the country will have an important impact on neighbouring countries.

The recent minimum wage increase in Thailand also has the potential to impact on migration patterns to and within the country.

The main issues related to labour migration in the GMS are the following:
1. **Readiness for economic integration in the framework of ASEAN**-- Labour migration policies should facilitate labour mobility, also in light of the approaching realization of the AEC in 2015 and its provision regarding free mobility of selected skilled occupations. Currently, issues remain regarding the existence of sound skills recognition frameworks and effective labour migration policies.
2. **Regularization of migration**—Irregular migration is a major concern relating to labour migration in the region. It contributes to enhancing migrants' vulnerabilities and the potential for exploitation and trafficking, while in the long run it also compromises the labour productivity of the countries in question.
3. **Migrant workers rights**—a big challenge in the GMS and ASEAN is represented by the weak protection of migrant workers' rights. Due to the irregular status and very poor bargaining power that low skilled migrant workers have , migrants often ends up victims of exploitation, abuses and sometimes of human trafficking.
4. **Migration of women and children**—Migration is increasingly feminized in the GMS. Given gender-based discrimination and women's typically low skills and education, women are generally more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation than men. Migrant women are often under the legal working age such as in the case of young Cambodians being exploited as domestic workers in Malaysia.
5. **Data availability**: Data on labour migration is scanty and research should be encouraged to better identify trends and patterns of migration and address related challenges in the most appropriate way.

2. Some responses to the challenges and existing gaps

Against the above mentioned limitations and challenges posed by increased labour mobility in ASEAN, governments -at times in collaboration with international organizations and civil society - have taken some steps towards addressing some of these issues. Responses include:

1) Recognizing that cooperation to address labour migration issues in the sub region is crucial, a number of Memoranda of Understanding have been signed between GMS countries and beyond to facilitate labour mobility. Regularization programmes and amnesties have also been implemented over the years. While such measures are good in principle and are certainly needed to foster safe and regular migration they do not seem to have offered to date an effective solution to limit irregular flows in

the region, which are also fuelled by the lengthy, costly and often non-transparent processes required for regular migration.

2) To respond to the challenges posed by the upcoming realization of the AEC by 2015 and the need to foster increased mobility of labour - specifically in eight selected high skilled professions - Governments have put in place measures to improve skills recognition frameworks and skills competencies. Among others, the development of skills certification systems at a subregional level has been promoted to foster movement of workers among countries and to prepare for realization of the AEC ; this pilot included Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Viet Nam.

3) In order to ensure that migrants are protected against rights abuses, legal instruments have been developed at the regional level. The ASEAN Declaration of Promotion and Protection of Rights of Migrants was successfully developed and agreed upon by ASEAN Member States. The challenge lies in its implementation and monitoring of the existing instruments. Information campaigns on safe migration and migrant rights are also crucial and are among measures that governments, international organizations and civil society have been successfully conducting together in the region. Platforms to foster dialogue and cooperation on migration among relevant stakeholders, such as the ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour, have also been established. Finally, some countries are making efforts to promote enhanced regularization to address issues related to exploitation and brokerage during the recruitment phase of migration. Much remains to be done to ensure that migrants' rights are fully respected and that migrants are not subject to exploitation and abuse.

3. Recommendations
The GMS needs a strategic sub-regional policy that addresses the existing labour migration challenges.
Among recommendations that governments should find useful are:
- Increase protection mechanisms for migrant workers in cross-border settings
- Strengthen capacity and legal framework in managing migration
- Enhance social protection for migrants and their families
- Promote ethical recruitment and employment
- Strengthen return and reintegration support for migrants
- Increase knowledge management mechanisms

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