



Photo: UN Women/Younghwa Choi

Action Brief:

Safe Technologies in Providing Remote Services

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This Action Brief was written by Robin Mauney and Haruka Ishii with contributions from Valentina Volpe, Dina Deligiorgis, Melissa Alvarado, Nighina Azizov, Camila Santander Sanjines and Younghwa Choi at the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and Ratna Mathai-Luke at the International Labour Organization (ILO).

This Action Brief was developed as part of the Safe and Fair Programme: Realizing women migrant workers' rights and opportunities in the ASEAN region (2018–2023). Safe and Fair is part of the multi-year EU-UN Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls, funded by the European Union, and is implemented by ILO and UN Women in collaboration with UNODC. It delivers technical assistance and support with the overall objective of making labour migration safe and fair for all women in the ASEAN region.

This brief is part of a series of action briefs illustrating lessons learnt and promising approaches as the result of the implementation of the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative in South-East Asia. The other briefs in the series include:

- Peer Networks Empower Women Migrant Workers
- Women Migrant Workers and Mental Health
- Role of Embassies in Addressing Violence against Women Migrant Workers

For additional resources and more information on the initiative, see:
www.spotlightinitiative.org/safe-and-fair

What's the Issue?

Remote technologies have proven critical for connecting survivors of violence against women with services

Helplines are not new, yet have become lifelines in providing support, information and referrals to individuals experiencing abuse, especially during crises and for hard-to-reach populations, including women migrant workers. The increasing demand for remote services is far more complex than it may seem. Using mobile phones, computers and software requires that technologies are well-designed with specific privacy and security settings and that service providers utilizing them are trained on survivor-centred approaches when not delivering support in person. Trainings for service providers interacting with survivors of violence against women include how to employ safety measures, coaching survivors through privacy settings on their computers and phones, adaptation of communication skills and other measures to ensure the safe and ethical delivery of services in a secure and confidential manner.

Hotline and helpline operators are increasingly moving to remote work. This requires the development of new protocols and modification of existing standard operating procedures, systems and policies to account for the challenges that phones and the internet pose. These challenges range from the manner in which personnel procure and use technology (e.g. phones, computers, database/cloud services and apps) to practical (e.g. ensuring a private space without interruption to conduct phone or video chats- for example, when the crisis worker is working from home) and logistical considerations (e.g. making sure that all personal content in paper or electronic formats are stored with the highest standards of privacy governed by an information sharing protocol).

Technological tools have different strengths, weaknesses and risks in terms of service provision. Referral pathways and service directories must be constantly updated in rapidly changing contexts- such as during the global COVID-19 pandemic- to maintain a clear understanding of available and functioning support to make referrals and to coordinate services. Without modifications to technologies and service directories, women at risk of or experiencing abuse can be put at further harm or escalated danger.

Technologies have expanded support services for violence, harassment and exploitation, but not without risks

Women migrant workers and some service providers are using 'uncustomized' apps such as Messenger, WhatsApp, Signal, Line, WeChat, Viber, Zalo, and others because of their wide use, low or no cost, and ease of access. A study using focus group discussions with 105 potential and returned women migrant workers who owned or had access to a mobile phone in four ASEAN countries of origin: Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar and the Philippines found that Facebook and Facebook Messenger were by far the most commonly accessed apps by these groups.¹

¹ ILO and UN Women. 2020. [Brief: Mobile women and mobile phones: Women migrant workers' use of information and communication technologies in ASEAN.](#)

While these apps are important tools to reach women migrant workers, most settings are not customized for privacy and security, requiring service providers to coach women through the set-up process before engaging with actual counseling and service delivery.² For example, women migrant workers might not understand the risks that disclosing abuse publicly via social media platforms can put them at further risk of violence or harm; that having GPS services enabled can allow the perpetrator to track her movements; and that chats which are not automatically erased or in ‘dark mode’ can be intercepted.

Communications through remote technologies such as chats, calls, video interactions, or internet searches that are intercepted by perpetrators such as intimate partners and employers, family members or authorities, may prompt retaliation or increase abuse and/or may notify authorities who may be tracking undocumented migrants to sanction and deport them.³

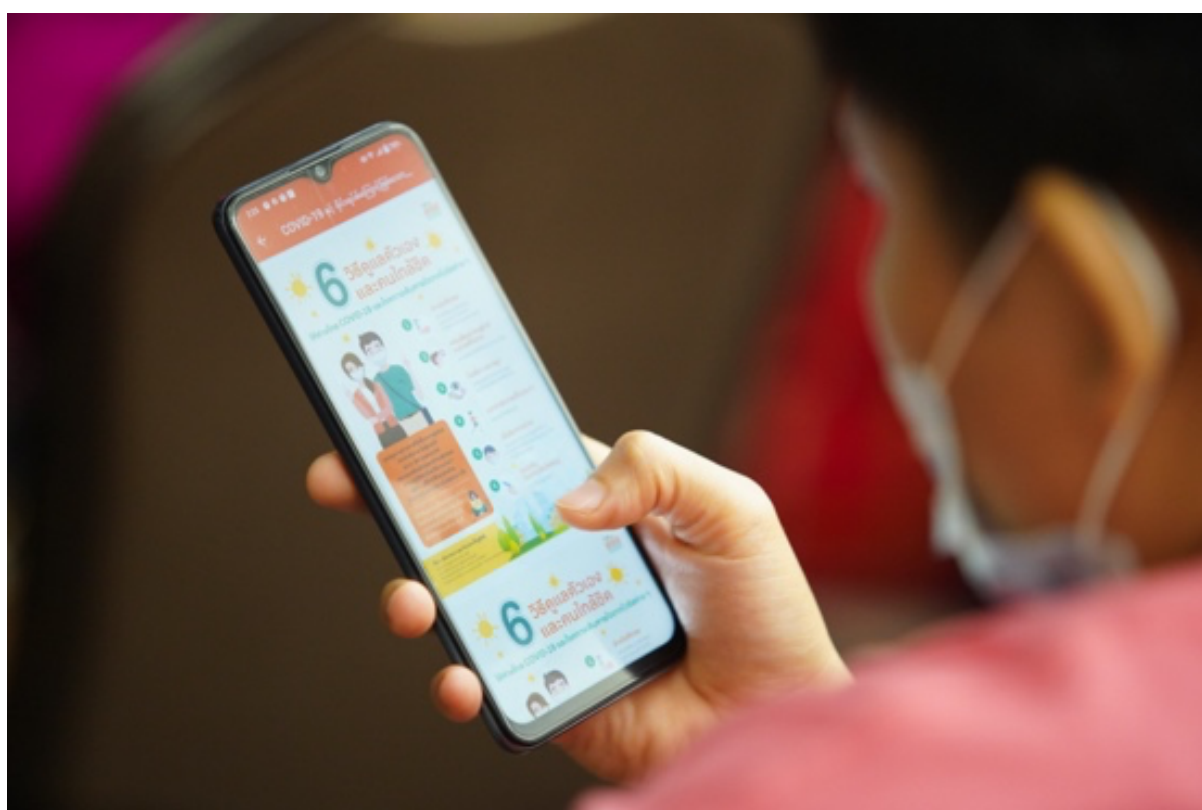


Photo: Media Active/Nopporn Liengjai

Women migrant workers have varying degrees of access to technology

Women migrant workers have varying degrees of access to technology and technological skills. Phones are more commonly available, and many have internet access through their phones, using them to search for information, keep in touch with families, and expand their

² UN Women. 2021. [Technical Brief: Safe Technology for the Provision of Services to Women Migrant Workers at Risk or Subject to Violence.](#)

³ *Ibid.*

networks with other migrant workers.⁴ While having internet access is generally positive, women migrant workers may be using public internet networks that tend to be less secure and pose challenges for the delivery of safe support services.

Migrant domestic workers, especially those who live with their employers, tend to face additional challenges in access to technology. Due to the isolated nature of their working conditions, migrant domestic workers might be forced to use the private internet connection that is in place in their employer's household, or they might be denied phone use while working and even after hours. A Safe and Fair survey from 2019 found that only 6 percent of employers surveyed in Japan allowed domestic workers to access their phones outside of working hours, with 31 percent of employers surveyed in Malaysia, 37 percent in Thailand and 47 percent in Singapore allowed access.⁵ Some employers also insist on taking away the workers' phone completely. This puts the worker's safety at further risk as the employer might access private content and communications on the worker's phone. It also limits the worker's ability to seek help when needed. Together with the movement restrictions some migrant domestic workers face, such as limited or no days off and not being allowed to leave the household during or outside working hours, severely restrict migrant domestic workers' access to general services and social support, as well as those that might be needed in cases of abuse.



Photo: UN Women/Nicholas Axelrod, and Luke Duggleby

⁴ ILO and UN Women. 2020. Brief: Mobile women and mobile phones: Women migrant workers' use of information and communication technologies in ASEAN.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Language can be a barrier to remote service provision for women migrant workers

Helplines, hotlines, and apps are often in the language of the country of destination, meaning that women migrant workers who don't speak that language are not able to communicate their experiences and needs effectively when seeking help. According to UN Women, technologies that provide automated translation would not be appropriate, since verbatim translation may not be coherent or may inadvertently communicate the wrong thing, possibly leading women seeking support to feel insecure and that the source is not trustworthy.⁶

Interpretation services with persons, while the preferred method, requires that they be sensitized to communicating with survivors of violence upholding safe and ethical principles (such as using language that does not discriminate or blame the victim; providing quality information that focuses on consent and empowerment, and ensuring confidentiality throughout the interaction). As availability and coordination of translation may be challenging to manage, women may be deterred from engaging in the first place or may find it difficult to continue with case management and referrals.



Photo: UN Women/Fahad Abdullah Kaizer

⁶ UN Women. 2021. Technical Brief: Safe Technology for the Provision of Services to Women Migrant Workers at Risk or Subject to Violence

How Do We Make a Difference?

Understanding the Risks and Benefits of Remote Technology

Recognizing the important role that remote technology has in ensuring women migrant workers have access to information, support services and referrals, Safe and Fair developed two resource tools for ensuring the approaches applied are safe, appropriate and accessible. These are:

- [Safe Technology for the Provision of Services to Women Migrant Workers at Risk of or Subject to Violence](#). This brief provides important guidance with specific technical considerations for use of different methods of communication with survivors and women at risk of experiencing abuse, such as phones, SMS, app-based texting, video calls, websites, social media platforms and website pop-up chats.
- [Remote Service Provision for Women Migrant Workers at Risk of or Subject to Violence](#). This brief provides guidance on what should be in place during remote service provision in terms of resources and knowledge, including cultural competence. It also provides guidance on attending to women, such as how to answer the call, safety planning, counseling/crisis management, referral and coordination, and how to better target women in advertising the availability of helplines.

These briefs have been disseminated widely to governmental and non-governmental partners throughout the ASEAN region and are serving as reference materials for a global audience.



Making information, support services and referrals more accessible through applying innovative use of technology and improving helplines.

In recent years, helplines have become even more valuable sources of information, support, and referral for women migrant workers affected by violence. During the COVID-19 pandemic the availability of safe technology options increased the accessibility and availability of remote support services with these expansions maintained. Ensuring these remote tools are operational, available and accessible has proved to be a crucial link to information and services providing much needed support to survivors, for their healing and resilience, in the aftermath of abuse.

In **Cambodia**, the [Child Helpline Cambodia](#), serving both women and children, has established telephone and internet support connected to social media outlets, such as Facebook Messenger, to raise awareness of the service and increase access through channels that are commonly used by women migrant workers. Through linking with social media, information about available support is more widespread.



Photo: UN Women/Child Helpline Cambodia

The new ‘My Journey’ Mobile App in Cambodia, is providing safe migration information and emergency contacts for women migrant workers with a link to the helpline for immediate connection to support. To ensure widespread information on the helplines, Cambodia has advertised on Facebook pages, through radio programming, and had printed the numbers on COVID-19 personal protective equipment that were disseminated in communities.

In **Malaysia**, [Women’s Aid Organization](#) (WAO) implemented a WhatsApp hotline called ‘Think I Need Aid’ or TINA to complement its traditional landline service. Through the hotline women can receive support by texting with a counsellor, in addition to making appointments for face-to-face consultations and receiving referrals to shelters and other services.

WAO moved from a traditional hotline service to one that is more dynamic and can field many calls at once. Through the Nubitel call centre service, the organization has also been able to make three-way calls securely allowing translators and other service providers to securely join the conversation with the survivor.

With circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, WAO undertook measures to ensure service provision is practical and effective, so that any survivor of violence could access relevant and clear information and tailored responses. The organization has also ensured that women migrant workers are assisted through case management despite limited physical mobility.

In **Thailand** the national 1300 Hotline staff of the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security was equipped with communication skills and guidance to effectively refer violence cases to other relevant essential service providers ensuring survivor-centred approaches.

In **Viet Nam**, the [Center for Studies and Applied Sciences in Gender – Family - Women and Adolescents](#), has provided their hotline number at the top of their website and a Messenger icon button (for live chat) on the left margin on every page of their site. This has increased engagement with survivors as these features are fixed, so that users do not have to navigate through different pages to access the information, nor do they need to go back to the page where they initially saw the hotline number and Messenger icon.

The Centre for Women and Development (of the Vietnam Women’s Union) and the Peace House shelter trained their operators to respond to survivors’ needs through Messenger, Zalo and WhatsApp, which are available to survivors of violence 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, unlike traditional in-person services which have limited operating hours.

Expanding availability of appropriate and trained language support

Language can be a significant barrier for women migrant workers to access information and seek support. Often information is available in the language of the country of destination (printed, online, etc.). As a result, women migrant workers are often reluctant to seek help or uncertain about available assistance.

In two countries with high numbers of women migrant workers, **Malaysia** and **Thailand**, interpretation services coupled with training on violence against women responses have helped to ensure that service providers- such as helplines- are available to women migrant workers in an ethical, empowering and safe manner.

Translation services in Malaysia include Bahasa Indonesian, Tagalog, Vietnamese and Burmese. In Thailand, these include Khmer, Laotian and Burmese.



Photo: UN Women/Ana Norman Bermudez

Building and Strengthening Staff and Volunteer Capacity

Although the use of helplines are not new, the increased demand and rapid expansion have required increasing the capacity of staff and volunteers to safely use these technologies.

In **Malaysia**, the number of calls began to increase to Women's Aid Organization (WAO) when movement restrictions were put in place during COVID-19 and the hotline was transformed from a landline that could only field one call at a time to a service platform (called CRM2), allowing management of the increased call volumes and expansion to 24-hour coverage. While the technology had to be carefully considered and implemented, so

did training of staff. Crisis support officers and staff social workers were trained to attend to all hotline calls with utmost privacy and confidentiality to triage each call based on the priority and a safety needs assessment. An updated service mapping was conducted to facilitate referrals of women migrant workers to available services based on their needs along with a new standard operating procedure to ensure consistency in service delivery across personnel.

In **Cambodia**, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs staff at the national and sub-national levels increased advertising of services contact information during COVID-19, while providing their staff with additional training on how to assist survivors (including women migrant workers). They also supplied case workers with customized ‘work only’ tablets and smartphones to be able to use the technology and respond to survivors in a safe and timely manner, connecting them to support and protection services.



Photo: UN Women/Pathumporn Thongking

Reaching women migrant workers

Throughout the ASEAN region, service directories listing organizations that are operational, along with helpline numbers have been recognized as an important tool to link women with services. To ensure that the latest information is available, Safe and Fair prioritized updating service directories developed with leading organizations providing support to women migrant worker survivors of violence in Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam. Services featured in the directory are multi-sectoral and include health, police/justice, social and labour-related services. A [regional service directory](#) with information on helplines/hotlines and shelters has been provided, as they are a core set of essential services responding to the needs of women migrant workers subject to violence in the region.

Safe and Fair:
Realizing women migrant workers' rights and opportunities in the ASEAN region

Spotlight Initiative
To eliminate violence against women and girls

Violence against Women Service Directory for Women Migrant Workers in the ASEAN region

English

bit.ly/services4wmw

Action Brief: Women Migrant Workers and Mental Health

The joint ILO-UN Women Safe and Fair Programme: Realizing women migrant workers' rights and opportunities in the ASEAN region (part of the multi-year EU-UN Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls) undertook a qualitative study involving potential and returned women migrant workers in four countries of origin in the ASEAN region – Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, and the Philippines. The study covers intra-ASEAN labour migration, including women who intended to migrate to, or had just returned from, Malaysia, Singapore, or Thailand. The study provides insight into women migrant workers' use of mobile phones, and how women migrant workers could access more accurate information throughout the migration process and increase their connections with peers.

The Spotlight Initiative is a global, multi-year partnership between the European Union and the United Nations to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls by 2030. It is the world's largest targeted effort to end all forms of violence against women and girls. Launched with a seed funding commitment of €500 million from the European Union, the Spotlight Initiative represents an unprecedented global effort to invest in gender equality as a precondition and driver for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. As a demonstration fund for action on the Sustainable Development Goals, the Spotlight Initiative is demonstrating that a significant, concerted and comprehensive investment in gender equality and ending violence can make a transformative difference in the lives of women and girls.

For matters related to the Safe and Fair Programme please contact:

Deepa Bharathi
Chief Technical Adviser, Safe and Fair Programme
ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
e-mail: bharathi@ilo.org

Melissa Alvarado
Ending Violence against Women Specialist, Safe and Fair Programme
UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
e-mail: melissa.alvarado@unwomen.org



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