



# Ensuring Decent Work and Reducing Vulnerabilities for Women and Children in the Context of Labour Migration in Southeast Asia

Project brief

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<b>Short title:</b>	PROTECT, Protection of the Rights of Women and Children in Labour Migration
<b>Overall objective:</b>	To protect the rights of women migrant workers and migrant children in Southeast Asia
<b>Primary target groups:</b>	Women migrant workers, children, and at-risk groups in the context of trafficking and smuggling
<b>Geographical coverage:</b>	Southeast Asia (focus on Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand)
<b>Budget:</b>	Total budget- USD 14,991,152; EU contribution-EUR 13,000,000 (equivalent to USD 14,280,500)
<b>Duration:</b>	1 January 2024 - 31 December 2026 (36 months)
<b>Implementation arrangements:</b>	ILO (lead), UN Women, UNODC, and UNICEF

## PROTECT

Protection of the Rights of Women and Children in Labour Migration Project (PROTECT) is a joint project implemented by ILO, UN Women, UNICEF and UNODC, funded by the EU.



## Context and background

With 10.6 million migrants in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region (based on national statistics, which may not account for undocumented migrants)<sup>1</sup> - nearly half of whom are women, and 1.3 million are children<sup>2</sup> - migration offers considerable development opportunities to both countries of origin and destination, and to migrants themselves.<sup>3,4</sup> For instance, the Asia and Pacific region has accounted for 40 to 45 percent of the world's remittance inflows since 2010 and labour migration has served “as a multigenerational poverty reduction strategy”.<sup>5</sup> Yet these opportunities can be adversely affected by risks of labour exploitation, decent work deficits, violence against women and girls (VAWG) and harassment (including violence and harassment in the world of work), and human trafficking and smuggling across the migration cycle, in particular for women, and women migrant workers in low wage occupations. Age, gender, and migrant status,

among other characteristics related to identity can amplify these risks - both in terms of their occurrence, the ability to access and avail oneself of services and also in terms of the harmful impact on survivors and their families.

Women migrant workers tend to be mostly engaged in elementary occupations (such as agriculture, construction, domestic work), characterised by low-wages, informality, temporariness, decent work deficits, and insufficient social protection coverage; women migrants have limited access to essential services, including those to support survivors of violence. Additionally, uneven economic development and the demand for low-wage labour in ASEAN region have been major factors driving human trafficking and migrant smuggling within the region, and from the region to other parts of the world. A new and growing trend that is affecting the region is trafficking for the purpose of forced criminality to commit online scams and financial fraud.

Children accompanying migrant workers and in destination countries face multiple challenges (especially if undocumented), including inadequate

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- 1 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (UN DESA 2020). International Migrant Stock 2020.
  - 2 UNICEF data.
  - 3 World Bank (2019). Leveraging Economic Migration for Development: A Briefing for the World Bank Board. Washington, DC: World Bank.; Gibson, John, David McKenzie, Halahingano Rohorua and Steven Stillman (2015). The Long-Term Impacts of International Migration: Evidence from a Lottery. IZA Discussion Papers 9492; Mobarak, Ahmed Mushfiq, Iffath Sharif and Maheshwor Shrestha (2021). Returns to International Migration: Evidence from a Bangladesh-Malaysia Visa Lottery. IZA Discussion Paper No. 14232.
  - 4 The 2020 review of the implementation of the Global Compact in Asia and the Pacific notes that labour migration under the framework of national laws and bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in the ASEAN region has increased steadily, see: Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific et al., Asia-Pacific Migration Report 2020, United Nations Publication, Bangkok, 2020, p 71.
  - 5 McAdam, M. (2020). COVID-19 impacts on the labour migration and mobility of young women and girls in South-East Asia and the Pacific. International Organization for Migration (IOM). Geneva.

access to child protection and other social services, risks of sexual and physical abuse, exploitation and trafficking.

In 2020, the usual drivers of migration were disrupted by the global pandemic caused by COVID-19. Migration corridors, which are normally very active, were closed for several months. Responding to labour shortages and employer requests, governments have had to prioritise economic recovery over lockdowns, and resume labour migration.

The PROTECT project will promote decent work, while reducing the vulnerabilities of women and children in the context of labour migration, in particular through preventing and responding to violence against women and children, human trafficking and migrant smuggling. It will do this through addressing legal, policy and institutional gaps and barriers faced by women migrant workers and children in the context of labour migration, including in the protection of fundamental principles and rights at work, as well as enhance their access to safe, orderly, and regular migration by addressing violence, exploitation, forced labour and trafficking. To ensure that laws and policies can be effectively implemented, the project will enhance national and regional capacities and mechanisms for policy implementation, service provision and prevention efforts, while empowering women migrant workers and children to strengthen their voice, knowledge, skills and access services.

## Project objectives

The overall objective of the PROTECT project is **to protect the rights of women migrant workers and migrant children in Southeast Asia.**

The specific objectives of the project are:

1. To strengthen national legislation, policies and regional frameworks for the protection of women migrant workers, children and other vulnerable groups in line with international standards.
2. To improve national and regional prevention and protection mechanisms to reduce rights' violations against migrant women, children, and other vulnerable groups, including victims of trafficking and smuggled migrants.

3. To increase the access of at-risk groups, women migrant workers and children to information, social and legal services, counselling, and association to prevent abuse, exploitation, harassment, violence, and trafficking in human beings.



## Strategic approach

Activities in the project will vary by country to reflect different priorities and migration realities for migrant women, children, and at-risk groups; depending on the country's stage of development and the status of existing regulatory frameworks, and government, private sector, social and development partner capacity to co-fund activities and absorb funding. The following **strategic approaches** will be taken during the implementation of the project:

### Corridor approach

A corridor approach to programming will ensure that the project benefits migrants across the migration continuum. Migration corridor cooperation will be encouraged especially with regards to the migratory pathways towards Thailand from Cambodia; and towards Malaysia from Indonesia based on bilateral cooperation, as well as with regards to new trends and emerging corridors.

## Multidisciplinary approach

Having a joint and expanded programmatic approach bringing together labour migration, gender equality and ending violence against women, child rights and anti-trafficking stakeholders is effective in provision of advocacy and technical advice to governments towards the achievement of relevant SDGs. The project will leverage these links and on the technical and sectoral competencies of the government, private sector, social and development partners to ensure that these elements are addressed coherently while ensuring gender-sensitive (and responsive), intersectional and rights-based approaches.



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## Target group

The project is designed to address the needs of women migrants, children and at-risk groups in the context of labour migration, especially in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. Among them are women migrant workers, particularly those in low wage occupations who are at greater risk of abuse, forced labour and other forms of exploitation, violence and harassment, and human trafficking; children of migrant workers in destination countries, and children in child labour, children at risk of immigration detention, stateless children, unaccompanied and separated children; and at-risk populations to human trafficking and smuggling.



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## Implementation arrangements

The PROTECT project is a joint project implemented by ILO, UN Women, UNICEF and UNODC. ILO is responsible for leading and coordinating the project.

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