



Mahidol Migration Center

Institute for Population and Social Research
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MMC NEWSLETTER

(IM)MOBILITIES IN TURBULENT TIMES:
NAVIGATING GLOBAL CRISES, POLICY
SHIFTS, AND NEW PATHWAYS FOR
JUSTICE AND RESILIENCE

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Migration: A Key to Navigating Demographic Change in APEC

The Mahidol Migration Center (MMC) was launched in 2010 to synthesize insights from researchers, policymakers, and civil society on migration-related themes. The MMC is pleased to present the 8th volume of our Newsletter, released alongside the 54th anniversary of the Institute for Population and Social Research (IPSR) and the 7th International MMC Regional Conference, 2025.

In this issue, I reflect on my experience as a panelist during an Asia - Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) 2025 KOREA Public-Private Dialogue: Demographic Response, where one interested topic was on **“how is migration used as a strategy to address and buffer against the challenges of demographic change in APEC region?”**



Demographic Change

Demographic shifts, especially population ageing, pose significant challenges to many APEC economies. With declining birth rates and increasing life expectancy, countries face shrinking workforces, tension on social welfare systems, and risks of reduced economic productivity.

Solving Labour Market Challenges

One major consequence of ageing populations is the shrinking working-age demographic, which leads to labour shortages in critical sectors such as healthcare, construction, and technology. APEC

advocates labour migration as an effective solution. By facilitating cross-border mobility, member economies can attract younger workers who sustain economic growth, contribute to tax revenues, and support public services.

APEC encourages efficient visa processes, recognition of foreign workers qualifications, and promoting temporary or circular migration programs. Such approaches help countries bridge immediate labour gaps without committing to permanent demographic shifts. Employer-led migration systems ensure immigration aligns with economic needs and labour market demands.

APEC further supports the movement of highly skilled migrants who drive innovation and competitiveness, enabling economies to adapt to rapid technological changes. At the same time, pathways for lower-skilled workers remain vital to maintain essential services and industries relying on manual labour.

Protecting Migrants and Host Societies

While migration generates economic advantages, it can also introduce social challenges. Without fortification, migrant workers may face exploitation, discrimination, and poor working/living conditions. APEC advocates fair labour standards, access to social services, and inclusive policies to integrate

migrants into host communities. Efforts include combating discrimination, supporting language acquisition, and addressing human trafficking. Protecting migrant rights ensures their full participation and inclusion within society.

A Balanced and Data-Driven Strategy

APEC strains that migration should complement broader policies such as upskilling local workers, raising retirement ages, and boosting labour force participation among women and older people. Migration alone cannot resolve all demographic challenges but can significantly ease the pressures on ageing populations.

Data plays a critical role. APEC supports enhanced collection

and sharing of labour market information to help governments accurately identify current and future skill shortages. With better data, policymakers can design targeted migration programs.

Conclusion

Migration is a vital strategy for APEC economies facing demographic ageing. It addresses labour shortages, sustains economic growth, and underpins social welfare systems. Through protection-focused policies and regional collaboration, APEC ensures migration benefits migrants, host communities, and economies. Hence, APEC members can transform demographic challenges into opportunities for resilience and sustainable development.

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Call Center Scams and Human Trafficking in Southeast Asia

Introduction

Southeast Asian countries are currently facing a severe human rights and transnational crime crisis: the intertwining of large-scale online scam operations and human trafficking. A particular model has emerged in the Mekong sub-region, notably in Cambodia, Myanmar, and Laos, where scam compounds operate not merely as criminal enterprises but as centers of modern slavery.



Image source: www.freepik.com

Victims, lured by promises of high-paying jobs in the tech or hospitality sectors, are instead trafficked across borders, and are forced to work under threat of violence to perpetrate romance, investment, and cryptocurrency scams on a global scale (UNOHCHR, 2023). The UN Agency reports on 29 August 2023 that **“Hundreds of thousands trafficked to work as online scammers in SE Asia”**. They are recruited from across Southeast Asia and South Asia, East Africa and Latin America. In Cambodia,

Sihanoukville became the epicenter. In Myanmar, areas along the Thai border, particularly in Karen State and regions controlled by ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) or People’s Militia Forces (PMFs) loyal to the junta, such as the Shwe Kokko and KK Park compounds, have become major hubs. The Guardian reports on 8 September 2025 that Myanmar scam centers may hold 100,000 trafficked people. In Laos, the Golden Triangle SEZ located in Bokeo province, is a notorious hotspot (Amnesty International, 2023).

Key trends of cyber scams in Southeast Asia include: (1) Forced Scamming: Victims are forced to work 12-18-hour shifts, running sophisticated scripts to lure foreigners, primarily through **“pig-butcher”** scams involving fake romance and fraudulent investment platforms; (2) Systematic Abuse: Those who resist, fail to meet quotas, or attempt to escape face torture, electric shocks, sexual violence, and solitary confinement. Some are ransomed back to their families; (3) Transnational Criminal Networks:

The operations are run by transnational organized crime syndicates, often with links to Chinese triads, and involve local corrupt officials who provide protection (US Dept of State, 2023); (4) Adaptation and Relocation: Increased international scrutiny has led traffickers to constantly relocate victims between compounds in different countries to evade law enforcement.

Thailand's and International Response

Thailand's geographic position makes it a primary transit hub for victims trafficked into Myanmar's border compounds and Cambodia. Thai police have made arrests of trafficking recruiters and smugglers. However, efforts are often hampered by corruption. Thailand has engaged in regional dialogues and bilateral talks with Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos. However, its influence is limited.

The international response to the problem remains fragmented and insufficient relative to the scale of the crisis. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) have published detailed reports on the crisis and provide technical assistance to member states on combating trafficking and strengthening legal frameworks. For ASEAN, it promotes regional cooperation through bodies like the ASEAN Intergovernmental

Commission on Human Rights (AICHR). For the US, the State Department's annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report has downgraded countries in the region (e.g., placing Cambodia on Tier 3 in 2022) to pressure them to deal with the problem. The U.S. also provides funding for anti-trafficking programs and law enforcement training in the region. For NGOs, Organizations like Liberty Shared and the Global Anti-Scam Organization (GASO) play a crucial role in victim assistance, data collection, and advocacy.

Policy Recommendations

Addressing this multifaceted crisis requires a coordinated, multi-pronged approach of Southeast Asian countries that targets the criminal networks, strengthens governance, and prioritizes victim protection as follows:

- (1). Strengthen law enforcement and judicial cooperation by establishing cross-border task forces with joint investigation teams and intelligence sharing between affected countries and source countries. They should also target financial flows by increasing financial intelligence unit (FIU) cooperation to track, freeze, and confiscate illicit proceeds from scam operations, focusing on cryptocurrency transactions and money laundering through casinos.
- (2). Victim-centered approach and protection is essential. Law enforcement, immigration officials,

and social workers should be trained to proactively identify victims of trafficking among those found in raids or fleeing compounds, rather than treating them as illegal migrants or criminals. Moreover, standardized repatriation and rehabilitation protocols for the safe, dignified, and rapid repatriation of victims should be developed.

- (3). To enhance international pressure and support, the international community should consider imposing targeted sanctions (asset freezes, travel bans) on individuals and companies known to own, operate, or provide security for scam compounds, as well as corrupt officials. All countries should refer to tools like the U.S. TIP Report to keep the issue at the forefront of bilateral and multilateral engagements.

Conclusion

The call center scam compounds in Cambodia, Myanmar, and Laos represent a horrifying convergence of cybercrime, human trafficking, and corruption on an industrial scale. A successful strategy must be equally transnational, coordinated, and relentless. It must move beyond symbolic raids to dismantle the financial infrastructure of these criminal networks, deal with corruption, and place the protection of the victims at the center of all efforts.

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Perception Matters: Media Coverage of Migrant Workers

Introduction

Migrant workers are indispensable to Thailand's economy, constituting more than 10 percent of the national labor force, and mainly come from Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam [1]. Despite their contributions to low-wage sectors, public perceptions remain largely negative [2]. Migrants are often depicted as outsiders, associated with crime, disease, national security threat, or social disorder. Media strongly shapes these perceptions, particularly where direct interaction with migrants is limited [3, 4]. As a primary source of information, media sets the agendas and primes emotions, shaping whether migrants are perceived as threats or contributors [5, 6]. These effects hinge on volume, tone and source diversity. More coverage with heightened concerns, negative framing, and echo chambers reinforce polarization and magnifies the perception of threat [4, 7]. Diverse representations, however, promotes nuanced understandings [3, 6].



In the mid-2000s, concerns about crime led Thai authorities to impose restrictions including curfews and limits on public gatherings [8]. Registered migrants are viewed more positively than unregistered, particularly in rural areas that experience more interaction [9]. In Bangkok, where interactions are limited, locals harbor more negative attitudes [2].

Reports consistently show persistent misconceptions about migrants' impact on employment, culture, and security [2, 8, 10]. This snap shot below examines how mainstream online newspapers portrayed migrant workers between May 2023 and May 2024, analyzing news representations of migrants and government officials.

Methodology

Articles were collected from one Thai-language and one English-language daily (May 2023–May 2024) using the tags “**alien worker (แรงงานต่างด้าว)**” and “**migrant worker (แรงงานข้ามชาติ)**.”

A qualitative textual analysis of images and headlines categorized portrayals into:

- **Migrant workers** as victims, criminals, or essential workers.
- **Government officials** as authority figures controlling migrants.

This strategy aligns with prior migration narrative studies [2, 9]. The period was selected to coincide with the post-election political

climate when migrant workers became a controversial topic. As preliminary work, we do not measure the magnitude of the story occurrences, but highlight trends.

Findings

Thai-Language Daily Newspaper

Analysis revealed a strong preference for the legal term **“alien worker (แรงงานต่างด้าว)”**, appearing in 22 stories, avoiding the term often used by migrant advocates- **“migrant worker (แรงงานข้ามชาติ)”**. Reports emphasized criminalization and de-personalization, with images showing migrants in mass being arrested by officials. In 2023, 22 stories linked **“alien workers”** to cross-border smuggling, human trafficking, and even violent crime. Images depicted immigration police in the act of arrest or Ministry of Labor press conferences, depicting migrants as passive criminals or victims.

English-Language Daily Newspaper
In contrast, the English daily used both **“migrant workers”** **“alien workers”** with greater thematic diversity, covering topics such as labor protests, corruption among immigration officials, hate speech and disinformation, health, human trafficking, asylum seekers, criminal activity. It occasionally highlighted migrant hardships, systemic corruption, and the role of advocacy groups. Empathy was more evident in headlines and images. This reflects the English-language daily’s

orientation toward international audiences, policymakers, and civil society actors, as opposed to the Thai daily’s emphasis on security.

Discussion and implication

Narrow media consumption, particularly in closed social media groups, fuels misinformation and hate speech in migrant-dependent countries [2, 10]. Thai online news stresses immigration control and crime, while English online news includes articles that address rights

and migration policy. Balanced reporting that includes migrant voices can counter stereotypes.

Given Thailand’s dependence on online media, media literacy is crucial to reduce misinformation and polarization. Independent journalist networks promoting evidence-based reporting are one pathway. While positive portrayals foster inclusivity [6], even balanced reporting can reinforce facts that decreases hate speech [3, 5, 6].

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Living between Places in the Digital Era: Translocal Embedding and Anchoring among Thai Migrant Workers in South Korea

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as social media and other mobile applications are part of daily life. They are also used by migrants to plan their migration, settle at destinations, and connect across dispersed locations.

This paper discusses social media use among Thai labor migrants in South Korea. Results are based on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in Thailand and South Korea in 2022, including participatory observation and 88 in-depth interviews.



South Korea has been a top destination for Thai labor migrants since 2004, when the Employment Permit System (EPS) was introduced as the official channel for low-semi skilled foreign workers. The system has strict requirements (e.g. age limit, Korean language competency) but uncertain chances of selection, especially for women.

Such limitations, along with the rise of budget air travel, non-restriction on travel visas for Thai passport holders, and expanded migrants networks, foster irregular migration. Previous studies highlighted precariousness and difficulties of living and working in South Korea as Thai workers (Tadee, 2016) including those of undocumented status (Smutkupt, 2014).

We found Thai migrants in South Korea use ICTs extensively. ICTs provide information, serve as entry points to communities, open market opportunities, and facilitate communication. They support both embedding, forming attachment to different spheres in different degrees in order to function in new settings (Ryan & Mulholland, 2015; Gryzmala-Kazłowska & Ryan, 2022), and

anchoring, finding a point of reference which provides stability amid changes (Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2016).

Planning their migration, social media and web services are used to gather EPS application information and search for jobs. In this regard, ICTs help with embedding locally in the Korean economy as employees or small business owners as some opt social media to grow their small business as side hustle.

Upon arrival, online communities such as Facebook groups help migrants familiarize themselves with new environments as they are constantly embedding in the social sphere in both Korean society and Thai communities. Embedding also extends into daily life via consumption as they adopt Korean online shopping platforms, the same way they do Korean public transportation mobile apps for daily commute. Furthermore, Thai migrants utilize ICTs for embedding in labor politics as they keep themselves updated with the most recent labor rights information.

Translocally, ICTs enable embedding in social and political sphere as they sustain ties with households and communities in Thailand and participate in translocal politics.

Alongside embedding, ICTs facilitate anchoring across locales. While there is no clear role of ICTs, their important institutional anchors are employment and legal status, but ICTs are vital for maintaining social anchors across locales – supporting relationships with family, migrant networks, and local Koreans. ICTs also assist with Korean language learning, allowing migrants to establish cognitive anchors.

ICTs guide access to housing and cultural activities, while supporting communication with landlords. They support migrants to find objective anchors in physical spaces such as homes and Thai temples. Beyond that, Facebook Live enables

remote religious practice, reinforcing subjective inner anchors in religion. Ultimately, ICTs provide subjective inner anchors in Thai identity through cooking videos, entertainment and news from Thailand.

Our findings suggest that ICTs are crucial in the migration trajectory from Thailand to South Korea, shaping both decision-making and settlement. Social media and other platforms function as sources of information, entry points into communities, and tools for embedding and anchoring across spheres and locations. By sustaining connections locally and translocally, ICTs enable migrants to live connected lives across locales in the digital era.

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Recruitment and Employment Practices of Migrant Workers in Bangkok Metropolitan Region's Construction Industry



The collapse of a high-rise building in Bangkok and the death of almost 100 workers, most of them migrants, during the recent earthquake originated in Central Burma, have been a stark reminder of the contribution of migrant labour to Thailand's construction sector and of the risks workers in construction are exposed to. The disaster also raised questions on compensation to victims and their families given their contractual conditions and regularization status.

A qualitative study by IPSR explored contracting patterns in two construction sites in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR) as part of the Baan Dek **"Building Social Impact (BSI) in the Thai construction sector"** project supported by Kindernothilfe (KNH) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

The research showed that contemporary migration in Thailand is marked by fluctuating legal status due to inconsistent in-country registration and increasing irregularity. The construction sector amplifies these regularization challenges through its casualized employment, dominance of subcontractors and the mismatch with regularization pathways. With Thai workers avoiding construction jobs due to low wages, poor working conditions, safety risks and insecure project-based employment, companies are turning to subcontracted migrant labour as a practical solution to fill labour gaps and control costs. At the same time, the construction industry is attractive to migrant workers, despite its hardships, because there is plenty of work even for the undocumented.

Irregular entry was the most popular route among interviewed migrant construction workers, especially for those who had to leave Myanmar without proper documentation. Many relied on relatives and friends, and

secondarily on trusted brokers to cross the border and secure their first jobs as construction workers. Except for Cambodian migrant workers, who had regularized their decade-long presence in Thailand's construction industry, most other workers managed to continue working in construction with an irregular status at rates exceeding official figures.

Research findings also indicated that the subcontracting system, now deeply embedded in the construction industry, fosters irregularity and widespread violations of the Labour Protection Act. Fragmented chains of commissioned entities blur employer-employee relationships and weaken accountability for regularizing migrant workers' legal status and complying with labour laws. Outsourcing enables companies to source lower-cost workers in an industry facing chronic labour shortages, pay substandard wages without benefits while containing costs.

Migrant construction workers remain precarious irrespective of legal status. Although Thailand's Labour Protection Act, applies in principle to all workers, in practice migrants, also when regular, must accept worse working conditions than Thai nationals. The most common grievance is delayed,

reduced and unpaid wages, severely impacting fragile livelihoods. Other systemic violations are discriminatory policing, lack of paid leave, denial of social protection, disregard of labour regulations concerning young persons, and unsafe workplace and living quarters.

Promises of benefits granted by regularization under MOUs or Cabinet Resolutions remain unfulfilled. Even workers with regular status face inadequate protections, with the only tangible advantage being enhanced legal protection from authorities. Yet this recognition also increases dependency on employers, limiting their ability to leave exploitative situations – an option still available to their irregular peers.

Women, children and young adults face particular vulnerabilities. Women shoulder the double burden of undervalued construction labour and unpaid domestic work in the camps, with no gender sensitive policies to meet their reproductive and child-caring needs. Young persons are deprived of regularization and education and often work in hazardous environments. Children born in Thailand have no complete documentation, face safety risks and are frequently assigned domestic responsibilities from an early age.

Migrants accept these conditions out of necessity, especially those who left Myanmar after the 2021 military coup. They are supported by long-established networks in Thailand for migration, employment, dispute resolution, and access to services. While brokers and recruitment agents are often blamed for unethical practice, most migrants regarded them as essential and counted on their ongoing support. Increasingly, brokers and subcontractors share the same nationality as workers, reinforcing social bonds central to recruitment and employment.

Looking ahead, Thailand will remain a major destination for migrant workers due to its ageing population, unmet labour demand, and growing regional disparities. Migrants will continue to sustain the construction industry, which Thai nationals increasingly avoid. However, if the migrant workforce is to be retained and migrants are to be ensured decent work and livelihoods, while also strengthening the sector's appeal within Thailand's domestic labour market, structural changes are urgently required at multiple levels to close gaps in compliance with labor laws and international standards.



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An Overlooked Public Health Challenge: Migrants' Self-Protection Against Air Pollution



Image source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3e/Smog_in_Korea.png

Air pollution has become an inescapable presence in many people's life, reaching across borders and posing a profound threat to public health on a global scale. Exposure to polluted air irritates the lungs and strains the heart, and it can set in motion a wide range of harmful processes in the body (Kampa and Castanas, 2008).

Since meeting the challenge of air pollution cannot rely solely on government regulation or technological innovation, the active engagement of ordinary people is needed. This is particularly relevant for migrants, who represent one of the social groups most vulnerable to the health consequences of air pollution. Migrants can play a crucial role in safeguarding their own health by taking steps to minimize exposure, for example, by using

indoor air purifiers and protective face masks, avoiding strenuous outdoor activity during high-pollution periods, remaining indoors and away from known hotspots, and limiting the infiltration of polluted outdoor air into living spaces. Given the formidable barriers that many countries face in reducing emissions at their source (e.g. Viana et al., 2020), such self-protective behaviors emerge as a vital complement to policy measures.

Migrants are especially vulnerable to the health impacts of air pollution due to limited access to reliable information, lower risk awareness, and barriers to protective behavior. Research shows that compared to native populations, migrants often have less knowledge of health risks (Shi et al., 2012) and make less use of public health services (Xu et al., 2022). They rely heavily on informal communication channels, such as word-of-mouth and mobile phones, rather than formal or advanced information technologies (Newell et al., 2016). Structural barriers further compound these issues, as many migrants struggle to access official information in a language they understand, making it harder to navigate health systems or respond during periods of high risk (Brønholt et al., 2021). These intersecting

challenges highlight how migration status amplifies environmental health risks, leaving migrants particularly exposed to the harms of air pollution.

These observations have important implications for research and policy. Migrant workers are a significant population in many countries, and their vulnerability to air pollution calls for more inclusive public health planning. Understanding how migrants perceive risks, seek information, and adopt protective

behaviors can guide policymakers in designing effective interventions. Such knowledge would help raise awareness, support information sharing, and empower migrants to reduce exposure. The limited evidence highlights the need for systematic research on the challenges migrants face, barriers to health system engagement, and effective risk communication channels. Policymakers must ensure migrant protection is a core part of environmental health strategies, not an afterthought.

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Migration trends. The sub-region has the world's largest migration corridors between Central Asian countries and the Russian Federation, including between Kazakhstan and Russia (ranked 8th) and Russia and Kazakhstan (ranked 11th in the world).¹ Migration flows in the subregion are very diverse and include migrants for permanent residence, returning ethnic migrants, as well as economic and labour migrants and educational migrants. The bulk of the migrant flow is made up of unskilled migrant workers, and a smaller part is made up of highly qualified specialists from Central Asian countries seeking employment in the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan.



New migration trends and migration policy in Central Asia and the Russian Federation



According to international organizations, the number of migrants from Central Asian countries in 2024 was estimated at 6,906,000 to 7,836,000. The largest groups of migrants are from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. The main country of residence and employment for migrants from Central Asian countries is the

Russian Federation, except for migrants from Turkmenistan, who mainly live and work in Türkiye. Kazakhstan is an important migration hub in Central Asia. Unlike Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan that are overwhelmingly countries of origin for economically motivated migration, Kazakhstan is a country of origin, transit and destination.

¹McAuliffe, M. and L.A. Oucho (eds.) (2024). World Migration Report 2024. International Organization for Migration (IOM), Geneva. 370 p. P. 23.
URL: https://securesustain.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/World-Migration-Report-2024-OIM_compressed.pdf

Labour migration has remained the most significant form of migration in the sub-region over the past twenty years. Despite geopolitical and geo-economic transformations, the main direction of migrant workers from Central Asian has been the Russian Federation and then Kazakhstan. Since the 2020s, the trend of diversification of labor migrant flows to new destinations, including countries in Europe, the US and Canada, East Asia, the Middle East and the Gulf countries, has become increasingly noticeable. The trend of reorientation of labour migrant flows from Central Asian countries to new geographical destinations is due to several factors.

‘Push’ factors. Despite the growth of the Central Asian economies, there is still a low level of wages in various sectors of the sending countries’ economies, as well as a **“demographic overhang”** (surplus of labour resources) in the sending countries. Other push factors are the formation of migration attitudes among young people in Central Asian countries, who study English and other foreign languages, receive education abroad, and link their life prospects with the search for work in economically developed countries with high standards of living. Significant transformations of the economy, such as tightening of migration policy and restrictions on the work of labour migrants in many regions of the Russian Federation, as well as the risks of mobilization into

the army are also forcing a significant proportion of labour migrants to seek new countries of employment.

‘Pull’ factors. Competition for labor migrants in Central Asian countries has increased significantly from countries with active demographic aging of the population and labor shortage (e.g. Japan, the Republic of Korea, the UK), which have launched programs for attracting, selecting, and pre-departure training unskilled workers and skilled specialists through international organizations, training centers, and private employment agencies. Agreements on organized recruitment and protection of the rights of labor migrants from Central Asia have also been signed with some countries in need of labor and social networks of migrants in the countries of the latest wave of labor migration have been developed, which have become sources of information and points of attraction for a greater number of new labor migrants.

Migration policy of host countries.

The Russian Federation and Kazakhstan actively use labor migration as a means of compensating for the growing deficit in the labor market. Despite the objective need for labor resources from Central Asian countries, labor migration policy has been developing ambiguously in the destination countries over the past few years. First of all, there is no explicitly declared policy for attracting

labor migrants from Central Asia at the level of strategic documents. In addition, migration policy towards labor migrants is periodically tightened. However, the strategic documents of the migration policy of the host countries include approaches to attracting and documenting the status of labor migrants, employing ethnic returning migrants, attracting highly qualified and skilled specialists, and opening access to the labor market for foreign students

Migration policy of sending countries.

Migration policies in the field of regulating labour migration in Central Asian countries have developed asynchronously over time. The policy of the Kyrgyz Republic has been developing most rapidly, and by now it has advanced more than other countries in signing bilateral agreements, protecting the rights of migrant workers, and developing the infrastructure of labour migration management. The second country is Tajikistan, which also has a fairly developed system of normative-legislative regulation and structure of labour migration management. Kazakhstan is also gradually becoming a partially sending country with a limited number of labour migrants, signing bilateral agreements on the supply of seasonal workers. Turkmenistan is still a rather closed country and tries to limit labour migration abroad.



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Persons with Disabilities and Migration in Thailand: Connecting UNCRPD Commitments and Addressing Policy Shortfalls



BOARDING ASSISTANCE

Thailand has been a ratified member of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) since July 29, 2008. Consequently, the Thai government is committed to promoting equality and removing barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from accessing and enjoying their rights. Therefore, persons with disabilities in Thailand should not be restricted by any policy or social barrier from migrating within the country or abroad. At the same time, migrants with disabilities who transit through Thailand to other nations or choose to relocate to Thailand should be treated the same as other migrants without disabilities. This paper will examine how Thailand's policies on persons with disabilities and migration align with the obligations under the UNCRPD.

Article 5: Equality and Non-Discrimination

This article states that people with disabilities are entitled to equal protection and benefits of the law without discrimination. Thailand established the Persons with Disabilities Empowerment Act, B.E. 2550 (2007), to protect people with disabilities. However, this act does not clearly specify protections for migrants with disabilities in Thailand. It leaves them vulnerable and could lead to discrimination when they need to access services provided for persons with disabilities by the Thai government.

Article 9: Accessibility

The government of each state should ensure that environmental, transportation, information, and communication systems are accessible to persons with disabilities. Therefore, Thailand, as a member state of the UNCPRD, should eliminate barriers at immigration offices, detention centers, and refugee camps to make these facilities more accessible for migrants with disabilities. Documents on the website of the Immigration Bureau, Royal Thai Police, are usually in PDF format. Individuals with visual impairments may find it challenging to complete these forms. Additionally, their website lacks a spoken interface system to assist blind users who are not familiar with screen-reading programs in accessing the information they need.

Article 18: Liberty of Movement and Nationality

This article affirms the rights of persons with disabilities to relocate, choose their residence, and acquire nationality. Therefore, no policy should be implemented to restrict the freedom of movement for persons with disabilities. In the Thailand case, following cabinet resolutions, there was no ban on migrants with disabilities registering; however, the system should be further reviewed to ensure it is sufficiently disability-sensitive.

Article 16: Freedom from Exploitation, Violence and Abuse

Migrants with disabilities are more vulnerable to labor exploitation and abuse because their disabilities decrease their bargaining power. Thailand's Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, B.E. 2551(2008), does not explicitly recognize disability as a risk factor for becoming a victim of human traffickers. The Act avoids using terms like 'a person with vulnerabilities due to physical, mental, educational, and other disadvantages,' which may cause concern that organizations overlook migrants with disabilities in their service or protection policies.

Article 28: Adequate Standard of Living and Social Protection

This article aims to ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities to an adequate standard of living and access to social protection are recognized by the state. In Thailand, documented migrants can access health and other social services because of their work status. Still, those unable to work due to disabilities are excluded, which is the same situation for undocumented migrants in refugee camps. Thai citizens with disabilities will receive a disability allowance from the government; however, this allowance



Image source: www.chatgpt.com

does not extend to migrants with disabilities. Therefore, social service gaps are filled by non-profit organizations, which struggle to secure funding because they rely heavily on available financial support.

Based on the above summary, Thailand has robust disability laws and policies for its citizens, but migrants with disabilities are not explicitly included. They face risks of discrimination, lack social protection, and encounter accessibility barriers. Therefore, the Thai government should ensure that all persons with disabilities in the country are protected, regardless of their status.



Migration, Pro-Environmental Behavior, and the Circular Economy: Opportunities and Challenges

The objective of this brief article is to explore how migration influences pro-environmental behavior and the development of the circular economy, highlighting the opportunities it creates as well as the challenges it poses for achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs).



Introduction

Migration plays a vital role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), impacting numerous targets across social, economic, and environmental dimensions. It not only advances sustainability but also addresses the vulnerabilities faced by migrants themselves (IOM, n.d.). Migrants contribute valuable skills, diversity, and innovation to their host communities while facilitating the transfer of values and social norms across borders. Although research on the environmental values that migrants bring back is limited, existing evidence suggests that

returnees often adopt and disseminate new pro-environmental norms (Chauvet & Mercier, 2014; Tuccio & Wahba, 2018).

Migration as a Driver of Innovation and Sustainability

Migration can stimulate innovation and drive sustainable growth, especially in areas such as renewable energy adoption, recycling, and circular economy practices. Migrants serve as agents of change by facilitating the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and technologies

that encourage environmentally responsible behaviors. Through these contributions, migration strengthens both local and global efforts to build resilient, resource-efficient societies.

The Ecological Costs of Migration

Despite these benefits, migration also entails ecological and social costs. Shijiang et al. (2022) highlight that migrants frequently encounter adaptation challenges, mental health issues, illness, and social isolation. Such factors can diminish motivation for pro-environmental actions,

particularly in the private sphere where personal sacrifice is necessary for collective benefits. In communities with high migration rates, weakened collective responsibility and difficulties in enforcing environmental norms may further undermine commitment to sustainable practices.

Resource Distribution and Inequality

Another challenge stems from the unequal distribution of resources associated with migration (Ali et al., 2023). This imbalance can contribute to increased waste, overconsumption, and disparities in access to the benefits of the circular economy. Without careful management, migration may inadvertently hinder efforts to achieve environmental equity

Conclusion and Future Directions

Migration holds transformative potential to both propel and impede pro-environmental behavior and the advancement of the circular economy. To fully unlock its positive impact, rigorous micro-level research is essential to deepen understanding of the complex interactions between migration, environmental practices, and broader sustainability frameworks. Embedding migration into sustainability strategies is

imperative to ensure equitable resource distribution while fostering a renewed sense of collective responsibility. Success in this arena demands strong collaboration among governments, businesses, and communities to craft innovative

policies that leverage migration as a catalyst for environmental innovation, while proactively addressing its ecological challenges. Harnessing migration's dynamism could be a pivotal force in achieving a sustainable and inclusive future.

Note:

I employed AI assistance to refine the grammar, readability, and flow of this article, with the goal of producing clear and polished academic writing

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MMC Research Project 2023 – 2024

1. REACH – Reaching Women Migrant Workers and Their Families in Construction Camps Miss Kanya Apipornchaisakul World Vision Thailand 2.5 months (April 15, 2023 – June 30, 2023)
2. Caring for Work/ Working for Care: Long-term Care Thai and Migrant Workers in Thailand MU's Strategic Research Fund Associate Professor Dr. Sudarat Musikawong 2 years (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2025)
3. WOMEN MIGRANTS' HEALTH AND WORK AFTER COVID-19: AN INTERSECTIONAL AND COMPARATIVE STUDY IN MALAYSIA AND THAILAND PRORIGHTS FOUNDATION Lecturer Dr. Sarunya Sujaritpong, DVM 12 months (September 2023 – August 2024)
4. Data collection for a survey on perceptions of migrants among the Thai population International Organization for Migration E6:E11 Associate Professor Dr. Aree Jampaklay 41 days (October 1 – November 10, 2023)
5. Promoting Evidence-Based Migration Discourse and Media Reporting in Thailand International Organization for Migration Associate Professor Dr. Sudarat Musikawong 400 days (November 27, 2023 – December 30, 2024)
6. Parenting in Displacement Study on Thailand-Myanmar Border McMaster University Associate Professor Dr. Tawanchai Jirapramukpitak, MD 15 months (January 1, 2024 – March 31, 2025)
7. Study of Cross-Border Remittances between Thailand and Myanmar iNternational Organization for Migration (IOM) Associate Professor Dr. Aree Jampaklay 44 days (April 2 – May 15, 2024)
8. Population Atlas of Thailand (Atlas) FOUNDATION FOR OLDER PERSONS' DEVELOPMENT (FOPDEV) (UNFPA) Dr. Sergey Ryazantsev 1 month (December 2 – 31, 2024)
9. Field research study on the iNterrelation between subcontracting and recruitment practices in the Thai construction sector and human rights risks for migrant workers and their children Baan Dek Foundation Associate Professor Dr. Rosalia Maria Emanuele Sciortino 1 Year (May 30, 2024 – May 30, 2025)



Note from the Editor



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It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 8th volume of the Mahidol Migration Center (MMC) newsletter. This issue coincides with the 7th MMC regional conference, which brings together international scholars and practitioners to explore the evolving dynamics of migration in our region and beyond. The conference theme reflects that we live in turbulent times that require our renewed focus on understanding the opportunities and challenges which migration brings about.

This edition features nine timely contributions from IPSR faculty members, foreign experts and researchers. We begin with an article from the MMC director, Sureeporn Punpuing, which reflects on migration as a strategic response to ageing populations, drawing from recent discussions at the APEC 2025 Korea Public-Private Dialogue. A second piece then sheds light on the growing link between online scam operations and human trafficking in the Mekong region, calling for a coordinated regional response. Subsequent articles unpack how media shapes public perceptions of migrant workers in

Thailand, the use of social media by Thai labor migrants in South Korea to show how digital tools support connectivity and adaptation, and challenges in Thailand's construction sector, where poor working conditions and weak protections persist. We also examine how migrants adapt to air pollution, highlighting the need for more effective risk communication and environmental health strategies tailored to their needs. Other articles expand our view further: one analyzes major migration corridors in Central Asia, while another highlights the lack of protection for migrants with disabilities in Thailand. Last but not least, an important article explores how migration can influence pro-environmental behavior and support circular economy goals, while also highlighting the challenges this poses for sustainable development.

We hope this newsletter offers new insights into the complex realities of migration, and inspires further research, dialogue, and action toward more inclusive and sustainable societies.



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