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MIGRATION AND THE CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL INCLUSION AND INTEGRATION

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**Migration and the challenges of social inclusion
and integration**

Institute of Asian Studies
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Introduction: Migration and the challenges of social inclusion and integration

Supaporn Phokaew

International migration is a growing phenomenon, both in scope and in complexity, affecting almost all countries in the world. Changes in the nature of human mobility that occurred principally between the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first have resulted in the numerous characteristics of migration being diverse and not always known, even though they are often linked to the notion of globalization in broad terms. They include factors as diverse as international patterns of demand for and supply of labor, the relative cheapness of international transport, the advent of systems of electronic communication and the emergence of transnational family networks. They are also related to social, economic and demographic inequalities, whether they are experienced in terms of employment opportunities, resources, education or human rights.

In 2016, the head of the 2016 United Nations Summit on Refugees and Migrants, President Enrique Peña Nieto of Mexico, stated his view that “Migrants symbolize the force that moves humanity forward. Their culture, their teaching and their knowledge enrich the cultural heritage of the societies where they decide to settle, contributing to a merging of cultures and to building new vibrant and prosperous nations. Migrants also embody our resilience in overcoming adversity since time immemorial.” This is one piece of evidence confirming that the paradigm and practice concerning human mobility and migration has shifted to become more oriented on social inclusiveness and integration.

This issue of the *Asian Review* takes as its central theme the interaction of migration in enlarging our knowledge about the urgent problems of ensuring social inclusion and integration. In the article “Rohingya in Thailand: Existing social protection in dynamic circumstance,” Angkana Kaewkuekoonkit and Supang Chantavanich show that Rohingya immigrants who have arrived in Thailand with various

motivations are vulnerable and face the indefinite risk of being arrested by Thai immigration. They identify four main groups of Rohingya immigrants: those who arrived earlier than 2006; arrivals during 2015-2016; Rohingya victims of human trafficking; and Rohingya asylum seekers in temporary shelters. The authors examine the preventive, protective, promotive and transformative measures provided to them. As a result of their legal status, each group of Rohingya immigrants has different access to protection. They are, however, protected socially by civil society groups and existing Muslim and Rohingya networks in Thailand.

In spite of West-East cultural differences, Thailand has witnessed an increase in migration of retirees from developed Western countries to Thailand in recent decades. Kanokwan Tangchitnusorn and Patcharawalai Wongboonsin examine the cultural assimilation of Western retirees in Thailand. The majority of research participants were married late in life to local citizens. When compared to continental European participants, those from Anglosphere countries included more unmarried people as well as those who were married or partnered to non-Thai individuals. Generally, the participants had sufficient knowledge about Thai culture although they have poor Thai language skills. Their socializing with Thais was mostly limited within their households. Those living in the Northern provinces were reported to demonstrate a higher participation in Thai social and cultural events. After spending over five years in Thailand, on average, the majority of participants felt positively accepted by Thai society yet still perceived their national identity as non-Thai. However, to a certain extent, some participants viewed themselves as Thai.

Abiola Ruth Adimula examines the challenges associated with the re-integration of internally displaced people in Northeastern Nigeria ravaged by the Boko Haram insurgency. The author traces the root causes of socio-political and ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. She investigates all the critical events and perspectives including the conflicts that culminated in the emergence of the Boko Haram sect in Nigeria, the activities of the Boko Haram insurgency that resulted in the killing of many and the displacement of about two million people, and the socio-economic challenges associated with the re-integration of internally displaced persons after the dislodgement of Boko Haram from its last stronghold. The author argues that in spite of the supposed

defeat of Boko Haram, the peace witnessed in Northeastern Nigeria is, in abstract, not real and does not exist. It is urgently needed that internally displaced persons, especially women and the young, be economically equipped in trade and vocations, while in camps the aim should be smooth reintegration that can sustain economic independence for themselves and their families.

In the article “Prevention of Trafficking in Persons for Forced Sea Fishery Work in Thailand,” Wicha Jampawan analyses the how and why of the human trafficking in Thailand’s sea fisheries, which has put Thailand under heavy international scrutiny and trade sanctions. The Thai government responded by launching the Five Ps Strategies of Prevention, Prosecution, Protection, Policy and Partnership. In 2015 when the Command Center for Combating Illegal Fishing of Thailand started its operations, the author conducted research in Samut Sakhon, Rayong and Songkhla on the public and private measures to prevent trafficking in persons for forced sea fishery work. His study reveals that the results of the Five Ps Strategies have not been optimum as a result of weak law enforcement, the small number and frequent changes of responsible actors, and a narrow interpretation of the term “trafficking in persons” in Thai law.

Because migration is expanding, we need open minds and sufficient knowledge to ensure social inclusion and integration for all.

Rohingya in Thailand: Existing social protection in dynamic circumstances

Angkana Kaewkuekoonkit and Supang Chantavanich

ABSTRACT—Rohingyas who have arrived Thailand with various motivations are vulnerable. They need legal and social protection and face the risk of being indefinitely arrested by Thai immigration. The purpose of this article is to identify existing protection mechanisms for the Rohingyas in Thailand by examining preventive, protective, promotive and transformative measures provided to them. Field research conducted in 2016 reveals that there are four main groups of Rohingya immigrants: those who arrived earlier than 2006; the arrivals during 2015-2016; Rohingya victims of human trafficking; and Rohingya asylum seekers in temporary shelters. Each group has different access to protection based on its legal status. They are also socially protected by civil society groups and existing Muslim and Rohingya networks in Thailand.

Keywords: Rohingya, social protection, displacement, Thailand policy

Introduction

The violence against the Rohingya people in Rakhine State (also known as Arakan State) in Western Myanmar since 2012 has gradually worsened. Several hundred thousand Rohingyas have fled Rakhine State and entered Bangladesh as asylum seekers.

In August 2017, there was an exodus of 507,000 Rohingyas fleeing from Myanmar across the border into Bangladesh after skirmishes between the Myanmar military and Rohingya groups. This event has been called “the world’s fastest-developing refugee emergency” by the United Nations (France-Pressé 2017). The form of violence seems to be no different from the previous ones but what makes this current incident different is the huge number of people who fled and were lost

during the attack (Jerryson, Kulisz, and Seniuk 2017). Additionally, this time the incident was attributed to “Rohingya insurgents” by the Myanmar military and by the even more intense phrase “Rohingya Extremists” to identify the alleged perpetrators. On the other side, the phrase “ethnic cleansing” or “clearance operations” has been ascribed to what the Myanmar military did to the Rohingya. These extreme words were used to reflect the degree of violence which rapidly worsened. There was a proposal from the Myanmar government to repatriate the Rohingya but no final decision has been made. The attention of the international community mostly focused on the response of the de facto civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who has ended up in a fragile position (Jerryson, Kulisz, and Seniuk 2017).

Previously, the violence between the Rohingyas and the Arakanese in Rakhine State of Myanmar at the end of 2016 indicated there was a situation of protracted conflict between the two groups. In 2015 and early 2016, the plight of the Rohingya boat people who arrived on Thailand’s shores and the discovery of mass graves in border areas between Thailand and Malaysia attracted great attention from the world. The Rohingyas have become considered to be the most vulnerable group of people in Southeast Asia due to the fact that they have been subjected to racial and religious discrimination which has escalated into violence and ethnic conflict in the Rakhine State of Myanmar.

The flow of Rohingya from Rakhine and the southwestern part of Bangladesh has been known in Southeast Asia for more than a decade. The irregular maritime movements comprise a mixed population (UNHCR 2014, 1). The flow includes both economic migrants who are looking for better employment opportunities and political asylum seekers who are escaping from violence and discrimination. The Myanmar policy of the “Arakanisation of Arakan” or Rakhine State has excluded the Rohingyas from economic and social development opportunities (Boutry 2014). In 2012, many Rohingyas fled from the hardships resulting from the cancellation of their citizenship and severe ethnic discrimination as a result of radical Buddhist nationalism especially after the “2012 Rakhine State Riot.” The riot prompted them to migrate to other countries to seek for protection. More than 6,000 Rohingyas became “boat people” who were brutally abused by the traffickers (Letchamanan 2013, 89). In reality, the Rohingyas have migrated from Myanmar since before 2012 in the same pattern as

other Myanmar migrants who desire to seek prosperity and a better life in the country of their destination. Due to a common religious background, many Rohingya have aimed to reach Malaysia by passing through Thailand.

Thailand is adjacent to Myanmar and has become the strategic country for the Rohingya in transit to Malaysia to seek asylum (Azis 2014, 841). As a consequence of systematic isolation in Myanmar, Rohingya who faced limitations to their political, economic and even social life have sought outside the country. Some networks of human smugglers and traffickers have taken advantage of them (Ullah 2016, 292). In the past, Thailand played the role of transit country for the boat people. Later, the pattern of migration changed and some Rohingya migrants landed on Thai shores. Some continued to Malaysia and others settled in Thailand temporarily or permanently.

There is no known record of arrivals between 2013 and 2015 but the UNHCR has estimated that approximately 53,000 departed from Bangladesh and Myanmar bound for Thailand and Malaysia (UNHCR 2014). In 2016, the recorded number of arrivals who had been assisted and processed by the Thai authorities in cooperation with the IOM and UNHCR was only 329. As of September 2016, an IOM report showed that there were 329 Rohingya in six Immigration Detention Centers, five shelters for children and families and five Welfare Protection Centers for victims of trafficking in Thailand. The group consisted of 68 women, 117 men and 144 children (IOM 2016, 1). As Thailand is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, Rohingya immigrants in Thailand are recognized primarily as “illegal immigrants” but they are also considered to be vulnerable asylum seekers and stateless persons (Slezak, Singer, and Ramadurai 2015, 59). National and regional policies responding to the crisis have led to humanitarian assistance and the provision of protection mechanisms for this mobile group. The UNHCR, as the main international organization providing protection for those persons of concern, has provided humanitarian intervention in irregular maritime movements, including Rohingya boat people, by cooperating with local authorities to reunite the families, submitting vulnerable case to the resettlement process, and ensuring that people with serious medical concerns access proper care (UNHCR 2014, 6). Special Meetings on Irregular Migration in the Indian Ocean were held in 2015 and 2016