



International  
Migrants Day 2024  
Symposium

# IMD 2024



Connectivity:

## **Conflict, Crime, Care, and Climate**

Navigating Shared Responsibilities Under  
Growing Complexities

**Symposium Proceedings**  
17–19 December 2024

📍 Asian Research Center for Migration (ARCM)  
Center of Excellence on Migration and Development,  
the Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University

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Pimvadee Keaokiriya



## Preface

Migration continues to shape the development of human societies and influence global demographics, economies and cultures. While many migrants utilise formal migration channels, others rely on informal routes, often exposing themselves to increased risks and vulnerabilities. The complexity of migration is exacerbated by conflict, environmental change and sudden disasters. Record levels of displacement due to conflict have placed a disproportionate burden on neighbouring low- and middle-income countries, which host the majority of asylum seekers and refugees. Climate-induced migration, most of which takes place within national borders, reflects the urgent need to address the interplay between environmental problems and human mobility.

IMD Symposium 2024 revisits the visions outlined in the 2018 Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees, with a focus on addressing persistent, emerging, and future challenges in international migration. The discussion explores critical issues such as conflict, organized crime, caregiving, climate variability, ageing populations, and the accelerating influence of digital technologies; prioritizing the importance of people-centered, gender-responsive, and rights-based approaches to migration that align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

By synthesising local knowledge and aligning it with global priorities, the IMD Symposium 2024 aims to deepen understanding of the complex relationships between migration, family dynamics and intergenerational solidarity. IMD 2024 aims to develop innovative approaches for sustainable and equitable migration outcomes and provide actionable, evidence-based strategies for dealing with ageing populations and migration. Facilitated dialogue and collaboration between stakeholders will be used to develop joined-up migration governance strategies that address the intersections of conflict, crime, care work and climate change. IMD 2024 is working to create an international platform for research and development to effectively address the challenges of our time. This conference should lead to meaningful solutions that reduce vulnerabilities, increase resilience and promote inclusive and rights-based migration governance for a sustainable future.



Assistant Professor Dr. Ratchada Jayagupta.

Director of Asian Research Center for Migration, Center of Excellence on Migration and Development,  
Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand.

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## Introduction

The theme of the 2024 International Migrants Day (IMD) Symposium, "Connectivity: Conflict, Crime, Care and Climate: Navigating Shared Responsibilities Under Growing Complexities," emphasizes the intricate intersections of today's global migration challenges. It highlights how conflict-induced displacement, cross-border organized crime, care work and climate-induced mobility come together to shape the migration dynamics. This year's theme reflects the urgent need for a unified response to these interlinked issues, emphasizing the shared responsibility of states, institutions and societies. The symposium seeks to explore innovative, rights-based solutions to migration governance that prioritize resilience and inclusivity in an era of heightened global uncertainty. By fostering collaboration between policy makers, researchers and practitioners, the IMD 2024 Symposium aims to develop actionable strategies that address vulnerabilities while promoting sustainable development and equitable migration outcomes in all regions, particularly in ASEAN and the broader Asia-Pacific region.

The 2024 International Migrants Day Symposium seeks to promote comprehensive understanding of the interlinked challenges and opportunities posed by migration in the context of global complexity. Focusing on the thematic dimensions of conflict, crime, care and climate, the symposium critically examines evolving migration governance and its intersections with broader societal and environmental shifts. It provides a platform for academics, policymakers, practitioners and stakeholders to share empirical evidence and innovative practices that address migration-related vulnerabilities while promoting resilience and inclusivity. By engaging with case studies, policy frameworks and region-specific approaches, particularly within ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific region, the symposium aims to jointly develop actionable strategies that reconcile human rights, social justice and sustainable development. This joint effort underscores the importance of multi-stakeholder dialogue in shaping migration policies that are people-centred, responsive to gender equality and consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals, and ultimately promote the role of connectivity in regional and global migration governance.

Significance: Migration studies are critical to addressing global challenges, as migration is increasingly linked to multifaceted problems such as climate change, conflict, crime and socio-economic inequalities. With over 281 million international migrants worldwide, migration is a crucial factor in shaping economic, political and social systems. Migration fosters connectivity by linking people, cultures and economies across borders, creating opportunities for growth, resilience and innovation. However, it also draws attention to vulnerabilities, such as labour exploitation, forced displacement and insufficient integration of migrants into host societies. Regional and global frameworks, such as the ASEAN mechanisms and the Global Compact for Migration, emphasise the need for coordinated responses to the complexity of migration. By viewing migration through an interdisciplinary lens, migration studies offer critical insights into addressing the root causes of displacement, improving climate adaptation strategies, and ensuring the rights and dignity of migrants. Migration's role in promoting global solidarity, as expressed through remittances and transnational care networks, further emphasises its transformative potential. As migration intersects with global priorities such as the Sustainable Development Goals, migration studies are essential for shaping inclusive, equitable policies that address shared responsibility and enhance resilience in an interconnected world.

# Day 1:

# Welcoming and Opening Remarks

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December 17, 2024

## Highlights from Welcome and Opening Remarks:

- *Professor Dr. Wilert Puriwat, President, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand*
- *Assoc. Prof. Dr. Pavika Srirattanaban, Executive Director, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand*
- *Assoc. Prof. Dr. Prakorn Siriprakob, Dean of the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand*

The opening and welcome remarks highlighted the long-standing commitment of Chulalongkorn University's Asian Research Center for Migration's enduring commitment—spanning over two decades—to advancing dialogue and understanding on migration issues in commemoration of International Migrants Day. Under the theme “CONNECTIVITY: Conflict, Crime, Care, and Climate: Navigating Shared Responsibilities Under Growing Complexities,” this year's symposium highlights the interconnected challenges of displacement, trafficking, ageing, and climate-induced migration. Bringing together academics, policymakers, practitioners, and civil society, the event serves as a platform for inclusive dialogue, knowledge exchange, and collaboration to address gaps in understanding, promote migrants' rights and dignity, and foster innovative, evidence-based, and sustainable solutions for the well-being and integration of migrant communities.

## Highlights from Keynote Speech:

- *Mrs. Michiko Ito, Deputy Head of Operations, IOM Thailand*

Ms. Ito underscored the growing impact of climate change on patterns of human mobility, particularly migration and urged policymakers to prioritize migrant's rights and well-being of migrants in all climate-related policy dialogues. She emphasized the transformative potential of migration, describing it as an opportunity rather than a challenge; when governed through inclusive and rights-based approaches - can enhance resilience and sustainable development. Mrs. Ito called for forward-looking migration policies that recognize migrants as key agents of development in both origin and destination countries.

# Session1: Mobilities in the Context of Climate and Environmental Changes

The first session examines how climate and environmental changes are reshaping human mobility, forcing communities to adapt, migrate, or face displacement. It explores policy frameworks, resilience strategies, and the role of global cooperation in addressing climate-induced migration and its socio-economic impacts.

## 1.1 Hydropower and Climate Impacts on Human (Im) Mobility in Northeastern Thailand: Advancing a Framework for Mobility Justice

**Speaker:** *Clare Steiner, Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)*

### Summary

The speech focused on the intersection of hydropower development, climate impacts, and human mobility in northeastern Thailand, highlighting how these dynamics lead to unjust mobility outcomes. Drawing from feminist climate mobility justice, it integrates Nancy Fraser's (2009) three-dimensional justice framework to explore how these systemic challenges lead to inequitable human mobility outcomes, supported by grounded evidence from the Mekong River region.

### Core Concepts and Frameworks

Climate and environmental changes influence human mobility in direct and indirect ways. Direct impacts include displacement due to extreme weather events such as hurricanes, floods and rising sea levels forcing people to leave their homes (IPCC, 2022). Indirectly, climate change contributes to environmental degradation and affects agricultural productivity, water availability and local economies, which in turn drives labour migration as people seek better living conditions elsewhere (Black et al., 2011).

However, climate change mitigation projects such as hydropower plants, reforestation programmes and renewable energy installations can paradoxically increase vulnerability. These projects often lead to land dispossession, forced displacement and the loss of traditional livelihoods, particularly among indigenous and marginalised communities, resulting in inequitable mobility outcomes despite overall global climate goals (Scheidel & Work, 2018).

### Nancy Fraser's Three-Dimensional Justice Framework

Nancy Fraser (2010) introduced a three-dimensional framework for justice that encompasses economic, cultural and political dimensions: Economic injustice (maldistribution): The unequal distribution of resources prevents marginalised populations from accessing opportunities, deepening socio-economic disparities. Climate change exacerbates these inequalities by disproportionately affecting the resource-poor communities that have contributed the least to environmental degradation (Fraser, 2010). Cultural injustice (misperception): The knowledge, traditions and practises of marginalised groups — such as Indigenous environmental stewardship — are often undervalued or ignored in climate policy.

This cultural marginalisation limits meaningful participation in climate adaptation strategies (Whyte, 2017). Political Injustice (Exclusion from Governance and Legal Remedies): Marginalized groups frequently lack representation in decision-making spaces, making it difficult for them to influence policies that directly impact their lives (Fraser, 2010).

Fraser's framework has been expanded to include the aspect of environmental injustice, which emphasises the need for equitable access to environmental resources and protection from climate damage. This approach emphasises four key principles: Redistribution (equitable allocation of resources), Recognition (valuing different knowledge systems), Representation (ensuring political voice) and Reparation (redressing historical and structural injustices) (Schlosberg, 2007).

## **Feminist Climate Mobility Justice**

Building on Fraser's framework, feminist climate mobility justice addresses the intersectional inequalities that characterise climate-induced migration and displacement. Women, low-income workers, indigenous groups and migrants are often disproportionately affected by climate risks due to structural inequalities in access to resources, legal protection and mobility rights (Djoudi et al., 2016).

This perspective calls for transformative change by: Challenging prevailing economic and political structures that perpetuate climate injustice; Promoting cross-border solidarity among affected communities; Ensuring that marginalised voices— - particularly those of women, indigenous peoples and displaced peoples — are integrated into global climate and migration governance frameworks (Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014). Feminist climate mobility justice ultimately aims not only to mitigate harm, but also to restructure power dynamics to ensure that climate adaptation and migration policies are inclusive, participatory and equitable.

## **Research Context and Methods**

The study was conducted as part of the Habitable Project, the largest research initiative on climate change and migration funded by the European Union. The research focussed on two locations along the Mekong River in north-eastern Thailand, where communities face significant environmental problems.

One of the main environmental problems in these areas is the impact of hydropower projects. The construction of dams has led to a decline in fish stocks, changes in sediment flow and a general deterioration of local livelihoods that depend on fishing and agriculture. In addition, communities also face slow onset environmental changes such as extreme heat and erratic rainfall, which make it difficult to adapt and maintain agricultural activities. To understand these challenges, the study utilised a combination of qualitative research methods. The researchers conducted 45 semi-structured interviews with members of local communities to gain insights into their experiences and coping strategies. In addition, five interviews were conducted with Thai civil society leaders who are actively addressing the impacts of environmental change. The study also incorporated observations from transnational conferences focussing on cross-border solidarity, allowing for a broader understanding of regional and global responses to these climate-related challenges.

## Key Findings

### Hydropower and Environmental Impacts

The livelihoods of communities that depend on agriculture and fishing are increasingly threatened by the construction of dams upstream and environmental degradation. These dams interrupt the natural flow of water, reduce fish stocks and degrade soil fertility, making it more difficult for people to maintain their traditional way of life. While some farmers are trying to develop adaptation strategies, such as crop diversification, these efforts are often hampered by extreme weather events such as prolonged droughts and erratic rainfall.

### Gender-Specific and Marginalised Impacts

Environmental changes along the Mekong River have gender and socio-economic impacts that disproportionately affect certain groups. As fishing livelihoods decline, men often bear the financial burden of lost income and must look for alternative employment opportunities. In response to these challenges, women are increasingly taking on the role of decision-makers, particularly in finding adaptation strategies for their households and communities. In addition, landless and marginalised people who are heavily dependent on fishing and other informal economies are among the most affected. Their dependence on dwindling natural resources and their limited access to alternative livelihoods make them highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks.

### Migration Outcomes

Changes in the local environment have led to different patterns of migration, with different outcomes depending on socio-economic status: Increased mobility: people with access to financial resources, education or social net by works are able to migrate to urban areas or neighbouring countries to secure better paid employment. Restricted mobility: Marginalised people, especially those without land, education or legal protection, often end up in exploitative work sectors, including undocumented work, hazardous industries or illegal migration routes.

### Cultural and Political Injustice

The disruption caused by hydropower projects and environmental degradation has also led to significant cultural and political injustices: The decline of traditional fisheries has led to the loss of intergenerational knowledge and cultural practices that have been closely associated with the Mekong for centuries. Local communities are excluded from decision-making processes on hydropower projects. Important infrastructure decisions are made by government agencies and companies without meaningful consultation with affected communities. Despite efforts to challenge these injustices, communities have had limited success in filing lawsuits or influencing policy changes that could protect their rights and livelihoods. These challenges highlight the need for more inclusive, equitable and sustainable approaches to environmental and migration policies in the region.

## Proposed Pathways for Justice

**Redistribution:** To achieve equity, communities must be given control over material resources so that they can determine for themselves how best to adapt to environmental change. It is important to address the unequal distribution of resources caused by climate change projects and ensure that affected populations receive fair compensation and sustainable alternatives.

**Recognise:** Different knowledge systems, including those of women, the rural poor and landless people, should be integrated into global adaptation frameworks. These frameworks must reflect the aspirations and lived experiences of local communities and ensure that solutions are not imposed but developed in collaboration with those most affected.

**Representation:** Local communities need to be more involved in the governance of climate mobility to ensure that decision-making processes extend from the local to the global level. This approach strengthens grassroots leadership and ensures that policies reflect the realities of those affected by climate-induced displacement.

**Reparation:** Justice must include transnational accountability to redress historical and current environmental damage. This includes advocating for the right to mobility for displaced populations while ensuring that communities have the sovereignty to remain in place and retain full control over their natural resources and livelihoods.

## Conclusion

A crucial step in strengthening global adaptation frameworks is to ensure that different knowledge systems, especially those of marginalised communities, are meaningfully integrated. Recognising and valuing the cultural practises and aspirations of these communities in policy-making can lead to more inclusive and contextualised solutions. Without this recognition, adaptation strategies run the risk of reinforcing existing inequalities rather than addressing them.

To achieve this, participatory and community-based research must be prioritised. Promoting community-led research enables affected communities to document the impacts of climate change and actively shape solutions that reflect their experiences. This approach ensures that adaptation measures are not imposed from above, but result from the needs and knowledge of those most affected.

Furthermore, interdisciplinary collaboration is crucial for bridging the gap between feminist, environmental and mobility justice movements. By linking local knowledge with transnational frameworks, these alliances can help address the structural inequalities that underlie environmental problems. Interdisciplinary and cross-movement collaboration strengthens advocacy efforts and promotes more comprehensive, justice-oriented approaches to adaptation.

Beyond integrating knowledge, ensuring accountability is critical to addressing historical and current environmental injustices. Advocating for the redistribution of resources and reparations can help mitigate the long-term consequences of environmental damage. In addition, it is important to support the right of marginalised communities to either migrate or remain local and gain more sovereignty over their resources. Without such measures, adaptation efforts run the risk of perpetuating cycles of displacement and disenfranchisement rather than promoting sustainable resilience.

## 1.2 Contention, Cooperation, and Context: A Systematic Review of Research on Disasters and Political Conflict

*Speaker: Chloe Canavan, Murdoch University*

### Background

The speaker presents a systematic overview of the research on disasters and conflicts, identifies the main causal mechanisms and distinguishes between different types of disasters (fast vs. slow onset). He addresses gaps in the field, such as the over-representation of droughts and the limited focus on governance and regional factors. The study emphasises the need for greater involvement of scholars from the global South, research into non-English language literature and a broader analysis of disaster types. Recommendations include addressing regional gaps, analysing under-researched disasters and comparing different causal pathways to better understand the dynamics of disasters and conflicts.

### Systematic Review and Key Findings

This study conducts a systematic review of 55 peer-reviewed articles published in 2022, using the Scopus database as the main source. This analysis identifies the main causal mechanisms linking disasters to conflict risks and provides a structured understanding of how different types of disasters influence social and political instability. It also distinguishes between fast-onset disasters such as floods and slow-onset disasters such as droughts in order to assess their different impacts on conflict dynamics.

### Research Gap and Contribution

Despite the growing body of research on the links between disasters and conflict, there are still some critical gaps. There is a lack of systematic reviews that comprehensively summarise findings in this emerging field, which limits the ability to identify broader patterns. Moreover, existing studies tend to overemphasise the role of droughts, while focusing on other types of disasters such as floods, storms and earthquakes only to a limited extent. Furthermore, many analyses generalise the types of conflict without sufficiently examining the role of governance structures and socio-economic inequalities, which are crucial for understanding the impact of disasters on conflict risks.

To address these gaps, this study offers new insights into the dynamics between disasters and conflict, in particular by filling gaps in the literature on conflict, drought and protest. Beyond simply identifying correlations, it emphasises the importance of contextual factors such as governance, social vulnerability and historical patterns of cooperation. In this way, it improves understanding of how disasters can escalate tensions or, in some cases, create opportunities for peacebuilding.

An important finding of the review is that 78% of the studies analysed indicate that disasters influence conflict risk. To systematically categorise these patterns, the study applies a coding framework that examines five critical factors: disaster types, shared vulnerability, external support, history of cooperation and effective governance. This structured approach allows for a clearer analysis of the multiple impacts of disasters on social and political stability.

## Conclusion

A closer examination of causal pathways shows that disasters can either increase or decrease conflict risk depending on specific conditions. Conflict risks tend to increase due to resource competition, forced migration and weak governance, all of which create fertile ground for tension and instability. Conversely, certain mechanisms — such as disaster diplomacy and resource scarcity — can reduce conflict risks by fostering cooperation between affected communities. Larger studies tend to focus on rapid-onset disasters such as floods and earthquakes, which often trigger immediate crises and response measures.

To strengthen research in this area, there are several important recommendations. First, scientists from the global South need to be more widely represented, as their perspectives offer important insights into the dynamics of disasters and conflicts in underrepresented regions. In addition, expanding research to include non-English language literature can help uncover insights that are currently overlooked. Addressing regional gaps, particularly in Latin America and Oceania, will further diversify the understanding of the links between disasters and conflict. In addition, future studies should examine a broader range of disasters such as heat waves and forest fires to gain a more comprehensive overview of disaster-related conflict risks.

## 1.3 Climate change, Vulnerability and Migration: Impacts on Children and Youth in Southeast Asia

**Speaker:** *Dayoon Kim, Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)*

### Overview

The study examines how climate change is exacerbating poverty and forcing vulnerable communities in Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Vietnam into emergency migration. Using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the study reveals the complex drivers of migration, including economic hardship, agricultural failures and social norms, as well as the risks and exploitation faced by migrants, particularly children. Children who stay behind often suffer emotional stress, interrupted education and increased care responsibilities, while those who migrate face exploitation and unsafe conditions. The study emphasises the need for targeted interventions, including climate-resilient infrastructure, sustainable livelihoods, safe migration pathways and empowerment initiatives, to address systemic inequalities and ensure the well-being of children and youth in the context of migration.

This study explores the complex relationships between climate change, migration and children's rights, focussing on the experiences of affected families. The study seeks to directly interview children, parents and guardians to understand the real-life consequences of migration. The study, conducted in six villages in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, uses in-depth interviews and focus group discussions and gathers insights from 92 interviews with children, parents and caregivers, as well as 25 additional interviews with stakeholders, to provide a comprehensive perspective.

## Research Questions

To explore these issues, the study addresses several key questions. It examines how climate change affects the livelihoods and migration choices of vulnerable communities and the impact of migration on the children left behind. It also seeks to understand the factors that shape migration experiences and outcomes for families and children, while examining whether these insights can inform policy and humanitarian action. A key element of the research is to assess the extent to which climate change influences migration decisions and shapes both voluntary and forced migration patterns.

## Findings

The study shows that climate change is exacerbating poverty and forcing families to migrate as they struggle to maintain their livelihoods. This problem is exacerbated by socio-economic inequalities, which increase the vulnerability of marginalised groups in particular. In Cambodia and Vietnam, climate-related declines in agriculture have led to a massive rural exodus, while in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, many families are choosing to migrate across borders to Thailand in search of better economic opportunities.

Economic hardship remains the main reason for migration, as families seek higher wages in Thailand and urban centres. However, in addition to economic factors, poverty, family responsibilities and gender expectations also play an important role in the decision to migrate. Many people, especially young men and women, feel a cultural obligation to support their families by migrating, even if this involves considerable risks. The increase in irregular migration, particularly in border regions, has increased the risk of exploitation, while mechanisation in agriculture has further reduced employment opportunities in rural areas, prompting more people to migrate.

Migration patterns differ in the three countries. In Cambodia and Lao PDR, irregular migration is particularly prevalent in the border regions, with people often travelling to Thailand without documentation to work in low-wage sectors. In contrast, migration in Vietnam is predominantly internal, with one parent— usually the father — leaving home to work in urban areas. In all three countries, migrants are often concentrated in sectors with low levels of protection, such as agriculture, construction and domestic work, where they are vulnerable to exploitation and unsafe working conditions.

The absence of parents due to migration poses numerous challenges for the children who stay at home. Irregular remittances are often not enough to meet the children's basic needs, leaving families in financial difficulty. Many children are left in the care of older carers who have difficulties due to work demands, disabilities and health problems. In addition, caring responsibilities are often divided along gender lines, with girls disproportionately taking on household duties. As a result, many children are forced to drop out of school to help with household chores or farming, limiting their future opportunities. This interruption, combined with prolonged parental absence, leads to emotional distress and anxiety and affects children's overall well-being.

For children who migrate, poverty, climate shocks and family expectations are the main driving forces. However, migration also harbours significant risks, including exploitation, educational dropouts and unsafe working conditions. Many young migrants face harsh working conditions and little protection, while others are forced to take on adult responsibilities too soon. In most cases, migration is not seen as a choice, but as a necessity for survival, exacerbating the cycle of vulnerability.

### Common Challenges in Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Vietnam

Although migration patterns vary from country to country, there are some common challenges. Across the region, the decline in agricultural production due to climate change remains a major factor in migration, driving families to urban centres or across borders into Thailand. Economic hardship, social norms and gender expectations characterise the decision-making processes that often disproportionately affect children and young people.

### Recommendations

Targeted action is needed to address these challenges. Investing in climate-resilient infrastructure can help reduce the pressure that forces families to migrate. In addition, improving income opportunities in rural areas through sustainable livelihoods can mitigate the economic drivers of migration. For families and children who stay behind, support systems need to be strengthened to ensure that carers receive support and children have access to key resources. Legal frameworks should also be improved to create safe migration routes and reduce the risk of exploitation. Finally, education and capacity building initiatives for children and youth can provide them with better opportunities and break the cycle of poverty-induced migration.

## 1.4 Climate, Migration, Conflict nexus and impacts on Bangladesh's Urban Ecology

**Speaker:** *Professor Hare Krisna Kundo, Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh*

### Overview

The speaker will present the research project "Climate Migration, Conflict Nexus, and Impacts on Urban Ecology," which explores the complex relationship between climate-induced migration and urban conflict, particularly in Bangladesh. The project, funded by the Association of Asian Social Science Research Council and running from October 2024 to September 2025, investigates how climate-induced migration triggered by hazards such as floods, droughts and storms can lead to resource competition and conflict in cities. Based on literature reviews, surveys, in-depth interviews and workshops with experts, the research will focus on Dhaka and Chittagong, two important urban centres for rural-urban migration. The findings will inform urban planning policy to address the challenges of climate migration and develop a funding proposal for further research on climate migration and conflict.

This research is part of a broader initiative entitled Climate Migration Conflict Nexus: Implications for Livable Cities and Urban Ecology, funded by the Association of Asian Social Science Research Council. The project is being carried out in collaboration with a lecturer at Murdoch University and is scheduled to run from October 2024 to September 2025. The researcher is currently in the initial stages of working on the project and plans to conduct research activities over the next year.

Migration patterns are increasingly being shaped by climate change, forcing millions of people to move from rural to urban areas within their own countries and across national borders. The Global South has a significant share of this migration, as regions such as South and Southeast Asia often face climate risks such as floods, storms and droughts. In 2020 alone, 40.5 million people were displaced due to climate risks, with 30.7 million specifically affected by natural disasters. According to forecasts, up to 143 million people could be displaced worldwide by 2050 as a result of climate change.

However, climate-induced migration does not occur in isolation — it often becomes a trigger for conflict, particularly in urban areas where resources and services are already overstretched. While migration can lead to tensions over land, housing and jobs, the relationship between climate change, migration and conflict is complex and non-linear. Many underlying factors, such as loss of livelihood and socio-economic marginalisation, influence migration decisions. Despite these challenges, migration is often used as an adaptation strategy by people facing severe environmental threats, emphasising the need for a nuanced understanding of its impacts.

## Research Aims

This study examines the relationship between climate, migration and conflict, focussing on Bangladesh and its wider impact on Indo-Pacific countries. By examining how climate change-induced migration contributes to urban conflict, the study aims to provide valuable insights for policy interventions and conflict resolution strategies.

## Concepts

In order to structure this analysis, key concepts need to be clearly defined. In this study, migrants refer to people who move temporarily or permanently due to climate-related disasters such as floods, storms and droughts. On the other hand, conflicts can arise when large numbers of migrants enter urban areas and compete for scarce resources and public services. These tensions can escalate into violence if left unaddressed, making conflict mitigation a crucial aspect of urban planning.

## Methodology

The study takes a mixed-methods approach, combining a systematic literature review and primary data collection to develop a comprehensive understanding of climate-induced migration and its consequences. The systematic literature review will analyse existing research using the Scopus and Web of Science databases to assess the current state of knowledge on this topic. In parallel, a primary data collection will be conducted in two major cities in Bangladesh — Dhaka and Chittagong — both of which host large numbers of climate-induced rural migrants.

The data collection will take place in three phases: Surveys using snowballing systems to identify climate-induced migrants. In-depth life history interviews to capture individual experiences and migration trajectories. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to gain deeper insights into the collective challenges and coping mechanisms of migrant communities. Workshops were organised with civil society organisations (CSOs) and migration experts to facilitate discussions on the intersections of climate change, migration and conflict. These workshops serve as a platform for sharing knowledge, refining research findings and developing actionable recommendations.

## Expected Outcomes

The results of this study will contribute to both policy development and future research initiatives. At a policy level, the results will help urban planners to develop effective strategies to accommodate climate migrants while avoiding conflicts in rapidly growing urban centres. By integrating climate migration considerations into urban policy and conflict prevention, city governments can create a more resilient and inclusive urban environment.

For the researcher, this study will serve as a basis for a future funding proposal focussing on conflict-related issues related to climate migration. Based on the findings, the project aims to broaden the discourse on climate change, migration management and conflict mitigation in the global South. Through this multi-layered approach, the study will provide valuable empirical insights and policy recommendations that can lead to more sustainable and conflict-sensitive migration responses in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

## 1.5 From Vulnerable Group to Volunteer Team: Migrant Workers in Vulnerable City under the situation of Flooding in Chiang Rai, Thailand

*Speaker: Dr. Suebsakun Kidnukorn, Mae Fah Luang University*

### Migrant Workers' Vulnerability

Migrant workers are among the most vulnerable population groups in the event of natural disasters, especially floods, as they are marginalised even before a disaster strikes. They often live in precarious conditions and have limited access to resources, legal protection and emergency assistance. Despite their vulnerability, migrant workers in Chiang Rai have shown remarkable resilience and solidarity and have become one of the most active groups in volunteering during the floods. Their response emphasises the duality of their experience—both being victims of the disaster and making an important contribution to the relief efforts.

### Floods in Chiang Rai: Causes and Vulnerability

The floods in Chiang Rai were triggered by overflow from an unidentified catchment area, compounded by the absence of an early warning system. The lack of timely information and preparedness measures left the city highly vulnerable to the disaster. Without adequate infrastructure and planning, floodwaters inundated communities, disproportionately affecting marginalised populations, including migrant workers. The unpredictability of such disasters emphasises the need for effective flood mitigation strategies and disaster preparedness measures in Chiang Rai and other vulnerable areas.

### Impact of the Flooding

The flooding directly affected around 600 households, displacing families and destroying their livelihoods. Despite the severity of the disaster, the crisis was barely reported by both the media and the government, meaning that the affected communities did not receive adequate attention and assistance. Among the most overlooked groups were migrant workers, whose struggles were invisible in the official disaster response. As the authorities did not recognise their plight, these workers had to cope with the crisis largely on their own, relying on community solidarity rather than institutional support.

### Voluntary Efforts of Migrant Workers

In the absence of formal relief efforts, migrant workers played a crucial role in protecting their communities during and after the floods. Their efforts were instrumental in rescuing 300 other migrant workers from the floods and preventing further fatalities. Beyond the immediate rescue efforts, they organised important relief services, including providing water, food and shelter at a local temple where the displaced workers stayed for a fortnight. Their ability to self-organise and provide relief demonstrates both the strength of migrant worker networks and the critical role they play in community resilience to disasters.

## Help and Support for Migrant Workers

Despite the lack of recognition from local authorities, international organisations such as the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and Save the Children have helped migrant workers who participated in the relief efforts. Their help facilitated the distribution of important relief supplies and the reconstruction work. In addition, around 100 migrant workers volunteered to participate in the clean-up and recovery efforts, working alongside locals to rebuild both the migrant workers and Thai communities. Their participation in the post-disaster recovery efforts underlines the need to recognise and integrate migrant workers into official disaster response plans, rather than treating them as passive victims.

## Conclusion

The case of the migrant workers in Chiang Rai emphasises the urgent need for long-term, comprehensive solutions to both respond to disasters and adapt to climate change. Several strategies need to be considered to prevent future crises and strengthen community resilience.

One important approach is technology- and infrastructure-based solutions, including the development of early warning systems and improved flood defence infrastructure. These measures can help to provide early warning and reduce the risks of sudden flooding.

In addition to infrastructure, ecosystem-based solutions are also important. Sustainable management of water catchment areas and better land use planning can play an important role in reducing flood risks by preserving natural flood buffers such as wetlands and forests. Given Chiang Rai's proximity to international borders, cross-border solutions should also be prioritised. Joint disaster management strategies with neighbouring countries can improve early warning systems, coordinated responses and the sharing of resources to minimise cross-border disaster risks. At the municipal level, local disaster preparedness and response mechanisms need to be strengthened. Empowering local communities with training, resources and structured response plans can ensure a more effective and organised disaster response.

Finally, migration-based solutions should be integrated into disaster management and climate adaptation strategies. Recognising migrant workers as active actors in disaster response, rather than peripheral or invisible populations, will help create more inclusive policies that protect their rights and well-being in times of crisis. By recognising and building on the resilience and contributions of migrant workers, policy makers can create a more sustainable, equitable and community-oriented disaster response framework that addresses both the challenges of climate change and migration.

## Session 2: Ageing and Migration

This session explores the intersections of ageing and migration, examining how older migrants navigate social, economic, and healthcare challenges in host and home countries. It highlights policy responses, support systems, and the contributions of ageing migrant populations to societies.

### 2.1 Ageing and Enhancing Well-Being by Realizing Family Dynamics and Promoting Intergenerational Solidarity for an Inclusive Society and the Implication on Migration

**Speaker:** Ms. Pornnipa Masileerungsie, Deputy Director-General, Department of Older Persons

#### Background

The speaker provided a comprehensive analysis of global demographic trends related to ageing populations and their wider implications for migration, care and social welfare. She emphasised how declining birth rates and increasing life expectancy have accelerated the ageing process in many countries, with Least Developed Countries (LDCs) being particularly unprepared for the increasing demand for age-related services and infrastructure. This demographic change poses profound challenges for labour markets, social security systems and family structures.

One of the main topics of discussion was the overlap between ageing and migration. Although older people are generally less mobile than younger people, migration patterns play a crucial role in shaping family dynamics and care arrangements. Migrant carers have become essential to meet the increasing demand for elderly care, especially in societies with a shrinking working-age population. At the same time, some older people are migrating — either to access better care services or to meet family members — demonstrating how migration serves as a household strategy to manage care needs.

The speaker also pointed to the shrinking working-age population as a major problem for ageing societies. In Thailand, for example, forecasts point to a decline in the working population, leading to labour shortages in key sectors, particularly in care and industry. Reliance on informal care, combined with economic pressures, places an increasing burden on the "sandwich generation" — those who are responsible for both their children and their elderly parents. In countries with a large informal economy, such as Thailand, carers often struggle to earn a living and provide care at the same time, leading to increased stress and financial insecurity.

Ms. Masileerungsie emphasised the importance of intergenerational relationships and social support systems to alleviate this pressure. In Thailand, almost 60% of carers of older people are their children, while 32.2% of older people rely on financial support from their families. These statistics emphasise the crucial role of family care, but also point to the need for stronger community-based care models that can promote social integration and reduce isolation among the elderly. Such models can complement family care and relieve the burden on younger generations, while ensuring that older people remain active and engaged members of society.

## Recommendations

To address these challenges, the speaker made three key policy recommendations aimed at improving support for older people while promoting intergenerational solidarity.

### Older People and Development

Ageing societies need stronger intergenerational care and social protection systems to support both carers and older people. Policies need to be inclusive, flexible and gender-sensitive, recognising the different family structures and caring responsibilities in different communities. By strengthening social safety nets and developing policies that meet the different needs of carers, governments can help alleviate the financial and emotional burden on families.

### Promoting Health and Well-Being into Old Age

Promoting intergenerational interaction and health literacy is critical to building healthier and more resilient communities. Promoting a culture of active ageing, where older people engage in physical, mental and social activities, can help to increase their wellbeing while reducing the burden on carers. In addition, there is a need to move towards home and community-based models of care that enable older people to receive support in their familiar surroundings while maintaining strong family ties. Such an approach can lead to better physical and mental health outcomes while strengthening family ties and preventing social isolation.

### Creating Enabling and Supportive Environments

Ensuring that the ageing population can live with dignity and independence requires investment in health and social care reforms. Extending healthy life expectancy through accessible healthcare, preventative measures and age-friendly infrastructure will help older people to remain active participants in society. The speaker also emphasised the 3G framework (gender, generation and geography) as a tool for developing culturally relevant intergenerational policies. By taking into account gender roles, generational needs and geographical differences, policies can be tailored to the particular challenges faced by older people in different social and economic contexts.

## Conclusion

Ms. Masileerungsie, finally, emphasised the urgent need for collaboration between governments, communities and families to address the challenges of an ageing society. She called for innovative policies that incorporate intergenerational care and solidarity to ensure that the ageing population receives the support it needs, while promoting a more inclusive society with greater social cohesion. By capitalising on migration, strengthening community networks and improving policy frameworks, societies can create an environment in which older people are not only cared for but also valued and actively participate in social and economic life.

## 2.2 Care at Home: Projecting Thailand's National and Migrant Labour Demand for Home-Based Eldercare

**Speaker:** Ms. Rebecca Napier-Moore Technical Officer, ILO TRIANGLE in ASEAN Programme

### Background

The speaker provided an in-depth analysis of Thailand's rapidly ageing society and its impact on the care industry. According to forecasts, 32.4% of Thailand's population will be aged 60 and over by 2037. This puts the country on track to become one of the fastest ageing societies in the world. This demographic shift will lead to an increasing demand for home care for the elderly, a need that is currently being met by a combination of unpaid family carers and migrant domestic workers.

To address these challenges, Thailand has introduced various policies and frameworks, including the Elderly Act (2003) and the Action Plan for the Elderly (2023-2037). These policies aim to strengthen home care and community support initiatives for the elderly. However, despite this framework, there are still considerable challenges. The number of care workers is insufficient and many care workers lack adequate training to provide specialised support. In addition, formal migration programmes for the recruitment of care workers remain underdeveloped, leaving gaps in the elderly care workforce.

### Results

The speaker presented data showing that Thailand relies heavily on foreign domestic workers from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam to meet the increasing demand for elderly care. Migrant workers are often favoured for care duties due to their availability and willingness to provide round-the-clock care. However, despite their important contribution, migrant workers in the care sector face numerous obstacles.

Firstly, many of them lack basic labour protection, making them vulnerable to exploitation, job insecurity and low wages. Secondly, the majority of carers have no formal training, although they are often responsible for the care of elderly people in need of heavy care. Thirdly, the cost of care services is a significant burden for many families, especially those on low incomes, further limiting access to quality elderly care.

Using a methodology that combines secondary research, quantitative projections and consultations with stakeholders, the speaker estimated that Thailand will need 70% more caregivers by 2037 under current care models. If the unmet need for caregivers and labour rights issues are properly addressed, this need could increase to four times the current level, indicating an urgent need for policy reform and workforce expansion.

### Recommendations

The speaker emphasised the need for a comprehensive strategy that balances labour rights, workforce development and sustainable elder care solutions to effectively meet the growing demand for care services. She proposed three key recommendations to address these challenges. Firstly, the expansion of formal migration pathways is crucial to ensure a steady and legal supply of trained carers. By establishing structured recruitment programmes, Thailand can better regulate the entry of migrant workers into the care sector, thereby improving both workforce stability and occupational health and

safety. Secondly, improving training programmes for care workers will help to professionalise the sector and ensure that the workforce has the necessary skills to deal with the complex needs of older people. Standardised training and certification programmes can improve the quality of care while enhancing the status of care as a skilled profession. Thirdly, promoting policies that strengthen labour rights and improve working conditions is crucial to ensure fair wages, job security and social protection for care workers. By recognising care as essential work and providing adequate protection, Thailand can build a fairer and more sustainable care economy that benefits both caregivers and those in need of care.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the speaker emphasised the urgency of strengthening Thailand's care economy in response to the ageing population and increasing demand for elderly care. She emphasised the need for a balanced approach that takes into account both the rights of caregivers and the wellbeing of the elderly, ensuring that home care for the elderly remains accessible, high quality and sustainable for years to come. Without immediate policy action, Thailand faces a serious labour shortage in elderly care, which will put further strain on families and social systems. By expanding migration pathways, professionalising care and improving occupational health and safety, Thailand can develop a robust, future-proof elderly care system that meets the needs of the ageing population while ensuring the dignity and rights of those who provide the necessary care.

## 2.3 Does Social Cohesion Associate with the Well-being of Left-behind Older Persons in Vietnam?

**Speaker:** *Prof. Giang Thanh Long, National Economics University, Hanoi*

### Background

The speaker provided a compelling analysis of how social cohesion affects the well-being of older people left behind by migrating family members in Vietnam. As Vietnam experiences both rapid ageing and a strong rural exodus, a growing number of older people are being left behind in rural areas without immediate family support. This demographic shift raises concerns for their physical and mental wellbeing and highlights the importance of strong community networks and social ties to cope with the challenges of old age.

Vietnam's elderly population lives predominantly in rural areas, where access to healthcare and social services remains limited. As younger generations migrate to urban centres in search of better economic opportunities, older people often face social isolation, economic insecurity and health problems. In this context, social cohesion — the strength of social networks, supportive community relationships and active participation in community activities — has been shown to be a key factor in promoting resilience. Despite its recognised importance, the extent to which social cohesion directly influences the wellbeing of older people left behind in Vietnam has not yet been adequately researched, prompting the need for this empirical study.

## Results

Data from the 2019 Survey on the Elderly and Social Health Insurance in Vietnam were used to examine the well-being of 179 retarded elderly people, assessing their physical and mental health using indicators such as the ability to perform activities of daily living (ADLs) and the presence of depression symptoms. The study provided valuable insights into the role of social engagement and interpersonal relationships in shaping wellbeing.

The results showed that social participation significantly improved both physical and mental well-being. Older people who engaged in community, religious or social groups showed better overall health and greater emotional resilience than those who remained socially isolated. In addition, strong family relationships and high levels of life satisfaction were directly correlated with improved mental health, emphasising the continued importance of family support even in the absence of direct care.

Community relationships also played a gender-specific role in influencing well-being. For women, strong community relationships had a greater impact on mental health as they provided emotional support and a sense of belonging. For men, community engagement had a stronger association with physical health, likely due to increased participation in social and recreational activities that promote physical well-being. The study also found partial associations between demographic factors — such as age, marital status and education level — and mental wellbeing, although their influence on physical health was less pronounced.

## Policy Implications

In light of the findings, the study emphasised the urgent need for policies and interventions that promote social cohesion and community engagement among older people who have fallen behind. He proposed three key policy recommendations to strengthen the social fabric and improve the quality of life of the ageing population in Vietnam.

First, the establishment of community centres specifically designed for older adults can provide structured opportunities for social participation, physical activity and intergenerational interaction. These centres would help to reduce social isolation while promoting healthy ageing through participation in community life. Secondly, strengthening the role of health and social workers in communities is crucial to recognise and address the mental health problems of older people. Training programmes should be implemented to enable health professionals to recognise early signs of depression and loneliness and ensure that older people are supported in a timely and appropriate manner. Expanding access to mental health services through social centres would provide comprehensive care tailored to the needs of the ageing population. Thirdly, the promotion of lifelong learning and engagement initiatives can play a crucial role in strengthening older people's sense of belonging. Encouraging further education, vocational training and volunteering among older people can promote a sense of purpose and active participation in community life and reduce the psychological burden of being left behind.

## Conclusion

The study emphasises the critical role of social cohesion in addressing the challenges faced by older people in Vietnam who are left behind. Prof Long emphasised the need for a holistic approach that incorporates community engagement, mental health support and intergenerational solidarity to ensure the wellbeing of the ageing population. As Vietnam continues to experience both demographic and

migratory changes, promoting inclusive social networks and policies that prioritise the needs of older people is critical to building resilient and age-friendly communities.

## 2.4 Thai Migrant Workers in Korea: Living Conditions in Korea, and Their Ties with Family Left Behind in Thailand

**Speaker:** *Prof. Ki Soo Eun*

*Director, Center for Transnational Migration and Social Inclusion, Seoul National University*

### Background

The analysis examined the experiences of Thai migrant workers in Korea, highlighting their living conditions, economic contribution and transnational family ties. The study explored the challenges of irregular migration and highlighted the precarious circumstances faced by Thai labourers and their role in supporting families back home through remittances. In addition, the study explored the emotional and financial dynamics within transnational families and highlighted the complexity of maintaining family ties across borders.

As South Korea faces a rapidly ageing population and a growing labour shortage, the country is increasingly reliant on foreign workers to maintain key economic sectors. Thai migrant workers make up a significant part of this labour force, but many of them come to Korea through irregular channels and often keep their visas longer than allowed in search of better economic opportunities. In the absence of legal work permits, many Thai migrants find themselves in precarious employment, working in low-skilled sectors with limited labour protection and benefits. Prof Eun's study explored how these migrants maintain ties with their families in Thailand despite the instability of their migration status and the challenges of living as undocumented workers.

### Findings

The study, which was based on telephone interviews with 13 irregular Thai migrant workers, provided valuable insights into their living conditions and transnational family relationships. Most of the interviewees worked in low-skilled and part-time jobs and often faced difficult working conditions with little job security. Despite these hardships, their income in Korea was significantly higher than what they could earn in Thailand, enabling them to send remittances of between 24,000 and 48,000 baht per month to their families.

Maintaining strong emotional ties with families back home was a priority for many migrants, with regular phone and video calls serving as important tools to keep them connected. While financial support through remittances was an important lifeline for families in Thailand, the study found that the emotional well-being of family members left behind remained largely unexplored, raising concerns about the social costs of migration. One of the biggest challenges for Thai migrants in Korea was the instability caused by their irregular status. Without legal documentation, they had limited access to social protection, making them vulnerable to exploitation, abuse in the workplace and exclusion from essential services. The lack of regular migration channels forced many workers into informal employment, increasing the risk of labour violations and financial insecurity.

## Political Implications

In light of these challenges, the analysis emphasised the urgent need for policy reforms to improve the conditions of Thai migrant workers in Korea and to support their families in Thailand. Three key policy recommendations emerged from the discussion. Firstly, the expansion of legal migration channels is crucial to prevent irregular migration and the associated risks. By creating structured work permit programmes, South Korea can better regulate the influx of workers to ensure that Thai workers can find legal employment and benefit from labour protection. Strengthening bilateral agreements between Thailand and South Korea could help facilitate safer and more transparent recruitment processes, reducing reliance on undocumented migration routes.

Secondly, support for families left behind must be prioritised to address both financial and emotional challenges. Implementing financial literacy programmes can help families to manage remittances more effectively and thus reduce economic dependency. In addition, psychological support and social services for the family members— left behind - especially for children and elderly parents — can help alleviate the emotional strain of prolonged family separation.

Third, ensuring social protection for migrant workers is crucial to safeguarding their rights and well-being. Policies should guarantee fair working conditions, access to health care and legal assistance, regardless of migration status. Addressing labour rights violations and discrimination against migrant workers in Korea is critical to promoting a more inclusive and rights-based migration system.

## Conclusion

The study provided important insights into the dual reality of Thai migrant workers in Korea— - economic mobility and financial stability for their families on the one hand, and precarious living conditions and lack of legal protection on the other. The discussion emphasised the urgent need for policies that can reduce reliance on irregular migration, protect workers' rights and provide support systems for transnational families. By introducing legal migration channels, strengthening social protection and addressing the emotional needs of families left behind, both Thailand and South Korea can create a more sustainable and humane labour migration system that ensures better outcomes for workers, their families and society as a whole.

## Session 3: Dimensions of Protracted Conflict and Displacement

This session examines the long-term impacts of protracted conflict on displacement, highlighting the challenges faced by displaced populations in securing stability, rights, and livelihoods. It explores policy responses, humanitarian interventions, and pathways toward durable solutions in conflict-affected regions.

### 3.1 Conflict-Induced Displacement from Myanmar to Thailand: Strengthening Bordertown Security and Well-Being

#### **Speakers:**

*Emeritus Professor Dr. Supang Chantavanich,*

*Associate Professor Dr. Naruemon Thabchumpon,*

*Dr. Premjai Vungsiriphisal,*

*Asian Research Center for Migration, Center of Excellence on Migration and Development, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University*

#### **Overview**

The research project applies a “whole of society approach” to analyse conflict-induced displacement from Myanmar to Thailand, emphasising the role of different actors, including security personnel, migrants, civil society and local organisations. This approach integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods to comprehensively assess migration trends, border security and the well-being of displaced people. The project aims to identify the drivers of displacement, assess the effectiveness of assistance programmes and develop best practices for supporting displaced populations. It also aims to improve border security and the well-being of people through the involvement of academics, government agencies, private sector actors and international civil society organisations. The aim is to engage national and regional policy makers, with ASEAN serving as a potential platform for regional cooperation. According to Professor Naruemon Thabchumpon, this phase of policy engagement is expected to last at least three months.

The research team conducted field research in Mae Sot and Prachuap Khiri Khan, two critical border provinces where the number of displaced people has risen sharply due to the intensified conflict in Myanmar, particularly following the military junta's conscription law. The data collected reflects an ongoing humanitarian crisis with a complex mix of refugees, labour migrants and asylum seekers arriving in Thailand in search of safety and stability.

#### **Research Methodology**

The study takes a whole-of-society approach, recognising that effective migration management requires the participation of multiple stakeholders, including migrants, diasporas, local communities, civil society, academia, the private sector and security forces. In addition, Thai parliamentarians, labour unions, national human rights institutions and even armed and unarmed groups operating along the Thai-Myanmar border were included in the discussions.

As migration management involves complex security and humanitarian considerations, insights from the Thai Ministry of Home Affairs and national security agencies were also included in the research. The methodology includes opinion surveys, semi-structured interviews, group discussions with various stakeholder groups and participatory action research. The study places particular emphasis on bottom-up approaches to ensure that the findings reflect the experiences of IDPs, migrant workers, civil society organisations (CSOs), local governments, media, academics, businesses and international NGOs (INGOs).

## Results

### Cross-border migration and border security

Professor Naruemon Thabchumpon presented findings on the different profiles of displaced people crossing the border between Thailand and Myanmar. Some seek short-term asylum, especially children, youth, the elderly, the disabled and women, while others migrate in search of economic opportunities. Less skilled labourers often come to Thailand to work in agriculture, construction or as domestic workers, while skilled professionals such as lecturers and medical staff seek opportunities in Thailand or third countries. Since the announcement of compulsory military service in Myanmar, more and more young people and parents are seeking educational opportunities abroad and using education as a route to migrate and escape.

The study estimates that 50,000 displaced people from Myanmar are legally registered in Thailand, but the actual number of unregistered people could exceed 100,000. Despite Thailand's existing migration policies, gaps remain in border management, humanitarian assistance and security co-operation. The research team has been actively working with local and national governments, private sector actors and civil society organisations to identify possible policy solutions. A key recommendation is to strengthen ASEAN engagement, as the challenges of migration cannot be tackled by Thailand alone.

### Displaced Persons' Well-Being and Healthcare

Dr. Premjai Vungsiriphisal presented the results of a mini-survey conducted between October and November 2024, which examined the living conditions, mental health and access to healthcare of displaced people. The study included primary data from 120 respondents as well as secondary data from relevant humanitarian organisations. In terms of legal status, 40% of respondents reported not having legal documentation, making them vulnerable to arrest, exploitation and limited access to healthcare and social services. Of those who are legally recognised, some are in possession of pink cards, passports or 10-year residence permits, which allow them greater mobility and stability.

In terms of living conditions, 82% of respondents reported living in a relatively healthy environment, while 17% described their living conditions as unhealthy. Of those living in poor conditions, 80% cited overcrowding as the main problem, often due to economic constraints forcing multiple families to share accommodation or live in makeshift accommodation on rented land. A further 20% reported inadequate sanitation facilities leading to hygiene-related health risks.

The study also looked at issues of violence and mental health in migrant communities. While 60% of respondents said they had not been exposed to violence, 36% experienced some form of violence in the community and 3% were exposed to extreme violence. Mental health problems were also widespread. Almost 48% of respondents reported mild mental health problems, including sleep disorders, depression and social isolation. Alarming, 6% reported severe mental health problems, highlighting the urgent

need for counselling services. In the area of health, an increase in malaria and tuberculosis cases was noted, due in particular to overcrowded and unhygienic living conditions. In 2024, registered tuberculosis cases were highest in Ta Songyang refugee camp, followed by Unphang and Mae Sot. In addition, high rates of road accidents, drug addiction and water-borne diseases were reported in the border areas, further exacerbating the health crisis among the displaced population.

## **Well-Being at the Border: Learning and Upskilling**

Emeritus Professor Dr. Supang Chantavanich focused on education and skills development in the border regions, particularly in Mae Sot, where displaced youth face challenges due to language barriers and lack of educational opportunities. The region is home to a multi-ethnic, multilingual population, but existing education programmes are inadequate. Many migrants seek vocational training and language programmes, with Myanmarese expressing interest in learning Thai, while Thai speakers prefer English. Local organisations have tried to fill these gaps, but skills standards at the national level remain disconnected from local realities. Institutions such as Kwe Ka Baung Karen Nationals High School, Ti Ming Chinese Language School, Rajabhat Kampaeng Pet Mae Sot University and Tak Vocational University offer some opportunities, but there is a clear need for more inclusion, quality improvement and alignment of qualifications with labour market needs.

The research team proposed a 10-year plan for education and training in Mae Sot that emphasises collaboration between the government, the private sector and migrant learning centres. The plan includes language courses (Thai, English, Myanmar and Chinese), vocational skills development (border trade, online business and service industries) and cross-border co-operation between Thailand and Myanmar.

## **Conclusion and Future Plan**

Professor Naruemon Thabchumpon emphasised the importance of Mae Sot as a modern border town, which requires transparent administration and improved security measures. The economic downturn in border trade triggered by the conflict in Myanmar has affected both Thai businesses and displaced communities and requires a balance between economic development and humanitarian assistance. The findings emphasise the urgent need to improve access to healthcare, increase social protection and invest in education and skills development. In addition, preparation for climatic disruptions must be taken into account, as environmental problems further exacerbate migratory pressures.

The team presented the "4Ps" framework — Partnership, People, Policy and Planet — as a guiding principle for future collaboration with stakeholders. Cooperation with the Thai government at local, regional and national levels and the involvement of ASEAN will be crucial for long-term solutions. In conclusion, Professor Supang Chantavanich emphasised Thailand's role in regional stability and advocated a proactive peacemaking approach to address the crisis in Myanmar and its cross-border implications.

## 3.2 Uncharted Territory: Migration Brokerage Practices in Myanmar Since the Military Takeover

*Speaker: Ben Harkins, ILO Ship to Shore Rights Southeast Asia Programme*

### Context and Background

Labour migration has long been an important survival strategy for the people of Myanmar, enabling them to cope with economic hardship and political instability. However, since the military took power in 2021, conditions have deteriorated dramatically. Armed conflict, human rights violations and economic collapse are forcing many to seek work outside the country. This increase in migration has blurred the lines between labour migration and asylum-seeking, creating a complex and fluid migration landscape.

In response to these rapid changes, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has conducted an applied research study to examine how migration mediation practices in the Myanmar-Thailand corridor have evolved since the coup. The study aims to analyse the changing role of migration brokers and provide recommendations for improving services and protection of migrants, especially as the military junta has used formal migration channels as a weapon to generate revenue and exert control over movement.

### Methodology

The study used qualitative methods and collected data through interviews with migrants, civil society organisations (CSOs), trade unions, recruitment agencies and brokers. The fieldwork was conducted between July and August 2023 in several regions of Myanmar, including Bago, Tachileik, Taunggyi, Hpa-an and Kawthaung, as well as in Thailand, particularly in Mae Sot and Mor Laung. Most of the interviewees were Myanmar migrant workers, but some direct input was also obtained from brokers to gain a comprehensive overview of the migration ecosystem.

### Findings

#### Evolving Practises of Migration Brokers

The study found that demand for migration services has risen sharply with the deterioration of the economic and security situation in Myanmar. Migrants are increasingly relying on unregulated brokers to bypass the slower and more restrictive regular migration channels. Originally, the researchers had planned to create a comprehensive list of broker services, but they found that these services are constantly evolving in response to the changing landscape.

Brokers today offer a diverse and growing range of services, including: Obtaining documents such as passport numbers, request letters from Thai employers and identification cards for foreign workers. Facilitating border crossings at checkpoints controlled by both the military junta and ethnic resistance organisations. Arranging jobs, legal documents, accommodation, setting up Thai bank accounts and other essential services for migrants upon arrival in Thailand.

These findings highlight the growing sophistication and adaptability of migration facilitation networks, which play an essential role in facilitating migration in a highly volatile political environment.

## Current Migration Channels and the Role of Brokers

A key finding of the study is that regular migration channels in Myanmar are increasingly hampered by a combination of state exploitation, corruption and inefficiency. The traditional advice for migrants to use regular migration channels to secure legal status, access to services and protection from abuse no longer applies under current conditions in Myanmar.

The study identified several structural barriers that prevent migrants from using formal migration channels, including: State exploitation, such as double taxation, extortionate exchange rates and forced conscription. Corruption in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) process, which has become even more inefficient and expensive since the coup.

Given these challenges, many migrants see unregulated brokers as a safer alternative, as working with official authorities now carries greater risks. The collapse of trust in government migration channels has led to an increasing reliance on broker networks, which are informal but offer migrants faster and more predictable routes to employment abroad. Even before the coup, the MOU process for legal migration to Thailand in Myanmar was slow, costly and bureaucratic. Now, amid the post-coup economic collapse and increasing repression, migrants face even greater obstacles that push them further towards irregular migration.

## The Role of Brokers: Between Protection and Exploitation

While migration brokers are often associated with exploitation and deception, the study found that not all brokers take advantage of migrants. In fact, many of them are trusted members of the community who offer important services to those seeking to migrate. In Shan State, for example, one reputable broker is known for helping migrants navigate safely through the unsafe routes between Myanmar and Thailand, showing that some brokers play a protective and facilitative role in the migration process. However, while some brokers genuinely help migrants, the broker system remains largely unregulated, leaving migrants vulnerable to debt bondage, fraud and labour exploitation. As migration dynamics continue to evolve, a more nuanced understanding of brokering practices is needed that recognises both their protective functions and their potential risks.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, several key recommendations have been made to improve the protection of migrants and optimise the management of migration:

Improve access to accurate information – Trusted partners such as civil society organisations and trade unions should be mobilised to disseminate up-to-date and reliable information on migration processes to reduce reliance on exploitative intermediaries.

Strengthening peer-to-peer networks – Building sustainable community-based networks in areas of origin can create safe spaces for migrants to share information to ensure that people make informed migration decisions.

Adapt pre-migration information – Current pre-migration training and awareness campaigns need to take into account the increasing complexity of migration from Myanmar, rather than propagating outdated notions of safe and orderly migration. Expand legal assistance for migrants – Continued access to legal support is crucial, especially in cases where migrants are exploited, detained or abused. Alternative dispute resolution mechanisms should also be explored. Policy reform in Thailand – The Thai

government should abolish citizenship verification requirements and end cooperation with the military junta, as such a policy puts migrants at even greater risk by legitimising a repressive regime.

## Considerations

The study sheds light on a deeply fractured migration landscape in which state institutions in Myanmar no longer provide reliable migration routes, forcing people to seek alternative routes through unregulated intermediary networks. Although the intermediaries fulfil an important function in facilitating migration, their role remains largely uncontrolled and leaves room for protection and exploitation. As the political and economic crisis in Myanmar intensifies, the demand for migration facilitation services will continue to grow. Governments, civil society organisations and international actors must work together to ensure that migrants receive protection, access to legal routes and accurate information. Without urgent action, the migration crisis in Myanmar threatens to become even more exploitative and dangerous for those seeking safety and opportunity abroad.

## 3.3 Environmental Fallout: Assessing the Ecological Impact of Rohingya Settlements in Bangladesh

**Speaker:** Associate Professor Dr. Jannatul Ferdous, Comilla University

### Overview

Since August 2017, more than 720,000 Rohingya refugees have fled Myanmar and sought refuge in the overcrowded settlement camps of Ukhiya sub-district in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. The sudden and large-scale migration has put significant pressure on the natural and social ecosystems of the region. The influx of refugees into forested areas has led to significant environmental degradation, affecting both natural and planted forests and social forestry initiatives. This environmental pressure has increased concerns among both the host community and the displaced Rohingya population.

Conditions in the refugee camps are dire and exacerbated by climatic factors that exacerbate vulnerability. The region is prone to extreme weather events such as cyclones, floods and landslides, which further jeopardise the already precarious living conditions of the refugees. As a result, the deteriorating environmental and humanitarian situation could lead to Rohingya refugees moving on to neighbouring countries such as India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. In addition, the inadequate infrastructure and insufficient emergency preparedness in the camps increase the risk of internal displacement among the refugees.

### Research Methodology

To assess the environmental impact of Rohingya settlements, this study is based on a comprehensive secondary literature review. The research involves systematically collecting and analysing academic papers, policy reports, government and non-government documents and media articles. The selection criteria for the sources include relevance, reliability and timeliness to ensure accuracy and contextual validity. The study employs a variety of search methods utilising academic databases, institutional repositories and online archives. Through this rigorous data collection and synthesis, Professor Jannatul Ferdous formulates sound recommendations to mitigate the environmental consequences of the refugee influx.

## Results

The Rohingya community has been persecuted in Myanmar's northern Rakhine state since 1948, leading to several waves of forced migration to Bangladesh. The largest exodus took place in August 2017, bringing the number of Rohingya to around 300,000. Historical waves of migration from Myanmar to Bangladesh took place in 1978, 1991–92, 2012, 2016 and 2017 and were largely due to state repression.

In October 2022, the number of Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar exceeded 943,000, making it the largest refugee camp in the world. These camps are located in disaster-prone areas, which further increases the risks associated with extreme weather conditions. Cyclone Mocha, which hit both Myanmar and Bangladesh in May 2023, had a devastating impact on the Rohingya population. The majority of Rohingya refugees currently live in 34 severely overcrowded camps in the Teknaf and Ukhiya regions of Cox's Bazar district and have limited resources and access to essential services.

## Environmental Factors Impacting Host Communities

The arrival of Rohingya refugees has led to widespread environmental destruction in Bangladesh. The destruction of approximately 4,300 hectares of forest has negatively impacted local ecosystems, contributing to deforestation, habitat destruction and increased ecological instability.

The ecological consequences include: Deforestation for temporary shelters and the collection of firewood for daily cooking have caused serious disruption to the ecosystem, affecting both wildlife and the human population. According to the Cox's Bazar Forest Department, nearly 4,818 hectares of protected forests have been affected since the Rohingya migration in 2017. The destruction of protected forests has jeopardised wildlife species and reduced biodiversity in the region. Deforestation has led to soil erosion, water scarcity and an increased likelihood of landslides, further threatening the safety of both refugees and host communities.

## Internal Displacement, Evacuation and Resettlement in Bangladesh

Both Rohingya refugees and host communities are facing significant hardships due to the crisis. Refugees, especially children, are suffering from malnutrition, disease, violence and the trauma of losing family members. To alleviate the overpopulation in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh has initiated the relocation of Rohingya refugees to the remote island of Bhasan Char in the Bay of Bengal from December 2020. However, concerns remain about the safety and suitability of the island, particularly given Bangladesh's high population density and vulnerability to climate change-related disasters.

## Recommendations and Conclusion

To mitigate environmental impacts and promote sustainability, the study proposes several important measures: Adopt sustainable land management practices, including reforestation and the use of alternative fuels to reduce dependence on firewood. Develop and implement ecosystem restoration plans to rehabilitate degraded forests and conserve biodiversity. Support humanitarian actors in Bangladesh in their efforts to integrate climate change mitigation strategies and environmental sustainability into their refugee assistance programmes by implementing greening initiatives. Empower Rohingya refugees through training in climate adaptation, disaster preparedness and sustainable livelihood initiatives to equip them with skills that promote self-sufficiency and resilience.

Bangladesh continues to host over 1 million Rohingya refugees and plays a critical role in maintaining regional stability and contributing to global humanitarian efforts. However, the prospect of repatriation remains uncertain as Myanmar has yet to take concrete steps to ensure the safe and dignified return of the displaced population. The ongoing displacement of Rohingya refugees requires a medium to long-term international strategy that involves sustained diplomatic pressure on Myanmar to be held accountable. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation between Bangladesh, Myanmar and the UNHCR is critical to resolving this protracted crisis while addressing the environmental degradation associated with the refugee settlements. Without coordinated efforts, both the humanitarian and environmental challenges posed by the Rohingya crisis will continue to escalate, further straining regional stability and environmental sustainability.

# Session 4: Creating Migrant-Inclusive Digital Futures

Session 4 explores how digital innovation can create more inclusive futures for migrants, ensuring equitable access to information, services, and rights. It examines the role of technology in improving migrant integration, safeguarding digital rights, and addressing barriers to connectivity in an increasingly digital world.

## 4.1 Digitizing Access to Justice Across Borders (Asia Regional Focus)

*Speaker: Andreas Schmidt*

### International Labour Organization (ILO)

Andreas Schmidt began by emphasising the importance of international labour standards that give migrant workers access to justice. He referred to the most important conventions, including the Labour Migration Convention (Revised) of 1949, the Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention of 1975, the Migrant Workers Recommendation of 1975 and the General Principles and Operational Guidelines on Fair Recruitment. These frameworks emphasise that migrant workers should receive fair treatment equivalent to that of national workers and that they should have access to justice in the country of employment rather than waiting until they return home.

### Frequent Complaints from Migrant Workers

Based on research and findings from Migrant Worker Resource Centres supported by various ILO projects, Schmidt has outlined the most common complaints of migrant workers at different stages of their employment journey. Prior to departure, in their countries of origin, workers often face delays in recruitment, excessive recruitment fees and the withholding of deposits. He emphasised that, according to ILO guidelines, recruitment costs should be borne by employers and not by workers. After arrival in the destination countries, there are often complaints about unpaid or underpaid wages, lack of social benefits, health and safety violations in the workplace and the withholding of important documents such as passports.

Schmidt also noted the significant barriers migrant workers encounter when seeking justice, including legal, practical, procedural, and accessibility challenges, which make enforcing labour rights difficult.

### Legal Challenges

Legal hurdles continue to be a major hurdle as many migrant workers are excluded from labour protection due to discrepancies between labour and immigration laws. The lack of access to legal assistance and representation further exacerbates their struggle. Furthermore, court proceedings are often lengthy and costly, which discourages workers from taking legal action. Even when cases do end up in court, weak enforcement mechanisms, including inadequate labour inspection systems, make it difficult to enforce the law.

## Practical Challenges

In addition to legal hurdles, practical difficulties such as a lack of knowledge about labour rights prevent many migrant workers from asserting their claims. Language barriers and irregular migration status also prevent them from filing complaints. Furthermore, migration regulations such as employer-sponsored visa systems and temporary labour contracts, such as those found in South Korea and Thailand, often limit workers' ability to take action against exploitation. Gender discrimination and the fear of retaliation — both in the country of employment and when returning home— - make them even more vulnerable.

## Challenges in Procedures and Accessibility

The burden of proof required to prove labour rights violations is often insurmountable, especially when a migrant worker has already left the country of employment. Issues such as proving underpayment of wages, proving non-compliance with working hours or gathering evidence of denial of benefits present a major challenge. In many cases, legal and logistical obstacles make it difficult for workers to participate remotely in court or tribunal proceedings, further complicating their efforts to obtain justice.

## Promising Practices in Accessing Labor Justice for Migrant Workers

Despite these challenges, Schmidt highlighted innovative digital solutions that are helping to tackle the problems of labour justice. He categorised these into five main areas:

### Recruitment Platforms

Digital recruitment platforms have become an important tool to ensure fair hiring practices. For example, MUSANED, an online recruitment platform in Saudi Arabia, has an inbuilt grievance mechanism. Similarly, FEIMS in Nepal manages all stages of recruitment, employment and return and allows workers to lodge complaints against recruitment agencies and track the resolution process.

### Providing Information on Legal Rights

Many migrant workers are unaware of their rights, so disseminating information is a crucial aspect of access to justice. Schmidt referred to service providers such as the Migrant Worker Resource Centres run by governments, trade unions and civil society organisations. In addition, the International Trade Union Confederation's (ITUC) Recruitment Advisor platform, an internet-based rating system for labour recruitment agencies, has been tested in Indonesia, Kenya, Nepal and the Philippines to ensure transparency in recruitment practices .

### Fulfilling the Burden of Proof

To address the challenge of collecting evidence, digital tools such as SUNAFILS in Peru allow workers to verify their labour registration and track social security contributions. In Australia, the RecordMyHours app helps workers document their wages and working hours so that they have verifiable proof in the event of a dispute.

### Remote Hearings

Remote hearings and the submission of digital evidence have also been trialled to improve access to justice. Schmidt cited examples from the Supreme Court in Hong Kong and Thailand, where remote

hearings were held during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, he pointed out that remote dispute resolution is still uncommon and needs to be further institutionalised.

## Redress Processes

Some governments have set up digital grievance mechanisms to facilitate labour justice. India's Consular Grievances Management System/eMigrate initiative, overseen by the Ministry of External Affairs, allows migrant workers in distress to file complaints online and is a model that could be extended to other countries.

## Conclusion

Schmidt concluded his presentation by highlighting some important considerations for the use of digital technologies in cross-border labour justice. He reiterated the importance of migrant workers having access to grievance mechanisms and redress in the country of employment. Awareness-raising, both before and after migration, is crucial to provide workers with knowledge about their rights. In addition, the legal framework should provide for technological solutions to help workers fulfil evidence requirements. Another important aspect is ensuring the data protection of migrant workers to avoid further vulnerabilities. Digital systems must be accessible, affordable and user-friendly to effectively facilitate cross-border grievance mechanisms. Schmidt emphasised that cooperation between governments and trade unions is essential to strengthen these digital initiatives. Trade unions play a crucial role in organising workers to access justice and ensuring that digital grievance mechanisms function effectively. The success of the ILO-supported Migrant Workers Resource Centres in the region illustrates the potential of a collective approach to improving migrant workers' access to labour justice.

## 4.2 Bridging Digital Divide to Foster Financial Inclusion

*Speaker: Khai Yau Chua, IOM Thailand*

### Overview of the PROMISE Programme

Khai Yau Chua introduced the PROMISE programme, an IOM Thailand initiative that aims to improve the skills of migrant workers, including digital skills. He emphasised that while migrant workers make an important contribution to Thailand's economic growth and business development, only a small proportion of them receive formal training or recognition of their skills.

Migrant workers are often subjected to abuse and discrimination during their journey, making the protection of their human and labour rights a key concern for stakeholders. In response, the IOM has implemented the regional PROMISE programme, which focuses on four key countries — Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Thailand. Launched in September 2017, the programme is currently in its second phase and will continue until August 2025.

The main objective of the PROMISE programme is to create decent employment opportunities and improve livelihoods to ultimately promote economic resilience and poverty reduction. To achieve this, the programme is focused on three main objectives:

1. Ensure that national and regional skills development and labour migration strategies are more migrant-centric and gender-sensitive.
2. Improve the employability of migrant workers throughout the labour migration cycle, making the process more inclusive.
3. Better information and protection of labour migrants at all stages of migration to create a protective environment.

To achieve these goals, the programme offers a range of skills development initiatives covering both technical areas — such as construction, hospitality, manufacturing and digital literacy— - and soft skills, including Thai language training. In addition, the PROMISE programme has conducted two significant research studies to underpin its initiatives: Bridging the Digital Divide: Assessment of Digital Skills of Migrant Workers in Thailand, conducted in collaboration with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). Fostering Financial Empowerment: A Needs Assessment of Financial Inclusion for Migrant Workers in Thailand.

## Methodology

The research used a mixed methods approach to collect comprehensive data on the digital skills and financial inclusion of migrant workers. Quantitative research: A field study was conducted with 465 migrant workers from Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar in Bangkok, Chanthaburi and Tak (Mae Sot). Qualitative research: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 employers in Bangkok to understand their perspectives on the challenges of digital and financial inclusion of migrants.

## Results: Use of Digital Technology Among Migrant Workers

The study found that 95% of migrant workers use smartphones on a daily basis, but 98% do not have access to and cannot operate laptops or tablets. This digital divide significantly hinders their ability to advance professionally and take on higher positions. Social networking apps such as Facebook, Twitter (X) and Instagram are widely used, and around three quarters of respondents use these platforms on a daily basis. However, far fewer migrants use work-related digital tools such as Microsoft Office, which limits their digital competence in the professional environment.

## Financial Inclusion

Financial literacy and inclusion remains a major challenge for migrant workers in Thailand. Many express a strong interest in learning online banking and transaction skills, but face significant barriers in doing so. A major challenge is that many migrants do not know how to use online banking services and have difficulty with the documentation required to open bank accounts. Limited access to affordable credit forces many migrant workers into a cycle of debt, often turning to informal lenders with high interest rates. Only 19% of migrant workers have a bank account in Thailand, and only 11% of them use it for remittances. 71% of migrants send remittances home, but 47% rely on unregistered money transfer services such as brokers, which can be expensive and risky. In contrast, only 9% use formal remittance providers and only 7% use banking services.

## Key Findings

The findings highlight the urgent need for improved digital and financial education among migrant workers. Many migrants have an urgent desire to acquire online banking and transaction skills, which are essential for financial inclusion. In this context, online money transfer providers — such as the Wing Bank application mentioned by Khai Yau Chua — are playing an increasingly important role in facilitating low-cost and formal remittance channels. Furthermore, the study emphasises the link between digital and financial inclusion. While access to digital tools is improving, structural and institutional barriers still prevent migrant workers from achieving full financial inclusion. One of the most worrying findings is that online safety scores lowest among migrant workers in terms of digital literacy, highlighting the need for digital safety education in training programmes for migrant workers.

## Next Steps

As part of its ongoing efforts, the PROMISE programme will take the following steps to improve the financial and digital inclusion of migrant workers in Thailand: Develop guidelines for migrant-inclusive banks to encourage banks to provide accessible financial services tailored to the needs of migrants. Develop guidelines for employers to promote financial inclusion and improve the digital security of migrant workers.

## 4.3 Online Education Intervention for Myanmar Students

**Speaker:** Kyaw Kyaw Min Htut, BEAM Education Foundation

### Key Concepts

Kyaw Kyaw Min Htut began by pointing out the challenges faced by migrants from Myanmar, particularly the lack of social protection systems that make them vulnerable. In response to these challenges, migrants are developing various strategies to survive, with education and resilience among the key issues. The presentation focussed on two key concepts: Learning as a coping strategy and building resilience through the RISE Centre Model.

### Learning as a Coping Strategy

For many migrants, learning is not only about acquiring knowledge, but also a survival mechanism that helps them integrate into their host society. Through education, they improve their skills in terms of employment opportunities, gain an understanding of local customs and regulations and ultimately develop a sense of identity in the new environment. By equipping themselves with knowledge, migrants become more engaged members of society, which increases their chances of economic stability and social integration.

### Building Resilience through the RISE Centre Model

Migrants must not only learn, but also develop resilience to overcome the many challenges related to their identity, legal status, security, income and health. The RISE Centre Model, introduced in this presentation, provides a structured framework for addressing these issues. The model, originally developed by the BEAM Education Foundation as a border mental health facility, was born out of the

realization that many immigrant youth and children experience trauma. This trauma has a significant impact on their development, their ability to learn and their ability to engage with host communities.

The RISE Centre model is based on a three-tiered resilience concept that includes:

1. Mental well-being, which addresses trauma by promoting mindfulness activities and emotional well-being.
2. Capacity building, which focuses on developing skills to improve employability and self-sufficiency.
3. Engaged community development that provides people with the tools and knowledge to overcome challenges in their own community and foster a sense of belonging.

## Findings

To better understand the challenges faced by migrant communities, BEAM conducted initial surveys in Chiang Mai, Mae Sot and Ranong, in which 400 people participated. The results revealed the main barriers and coping strategies faced by migrants. Among the barriers, language proved to be the biggest obstacle, affecting communication, access to work and the ability to navigate daily life. Other barriers included legal status, lack of documents and lack of skills. These limitations significantly hinder migrants' ability to integrate into their new environment.

In response to these obstacles, migrants use various coping strategies. Many rely on the support of friends, family and community networks and emphasise the importance of cultural connections and multilingual communication. Learning also plays a crucial role in overcoming challenges. Most migrants acquire new skills through workplace learning, known as "community of practice", while a smaller percentage receive training through government programmes or NGOs. In addition, digital platforms have increasingly become an important source of education and information, bridging the knowledge gap for migrants.

## Development of Digital Platforms by the BEAM Education Foundation

Recognising the limited access to formal education in border areas, the BEAM Education Foundation launched digital learning platforms in 2018 to provide migrants with alternative educational pathways. The need for such platforms was emphasised by the results of the survey, which showed that 70% of migrants surveyed had never completed their education due to economic hardship, crisis situations and frequent mobility.

The introduction of these digital platforms has enabled over 500 migrants to obtain school-leaving certificates, creating new opportunities for personal and professional advancement. However, education alone does not always guarantee economic advancement. Kyaw Kyaw Min Htut emphasised the importance of cultural knowledge, skills transfer and language learning, as many migrants find that their previous education does not seamlessly connect to the digital learning content they are now engaging with. Despite acquiring education and skills, prospects for migrants remain low, suggesting that additional systemic changes are needed to improve their socio-economic status.

## Impact of Education on Labour Migrants

The impact of education on labour migrants shows both positive and negative results. On the positive side, higher levels of education are associated with better employment opportunities, higher salaries and

access to higher positions. Migrants who receive an education have a greater chance of escaping exploitative labour conditions and finding more stable employment.

However, education does not always match the demands of the labour market. Many skilled migrants find that the skills they have acquired do not match the types of jobs available to them, limiting the usefulness of their education. This mismatch between education and employment opportunities highlights the need for better vocational training and skills recognition systems to ensure that migrants can fully utilise their knowledge and skills.

## Recommendations

To address these challenges, the presentation emphasised the urgent need for vocational training facilities specifically targeting migrants. The establishment of assessment platforms to formally recognise migrants' practical skills— often acquired through informal learning and work experience — would provide them with better credentials and increase their employment prospects. By implementing such initiatives, migrants would not only have better opportunities for training and personal development, but would also be able to contribute more effectively to the host country's economy. Strengthening educational pathways and recognising informal learning would ensure that migrant workers can move from survival strategies to long-term stability, promoting resilience and economic empowerment.

## 4.4 Creating an Inclusive Society for Migrant Workers in Thailand: The Role of Digital Technologies

### **Speakers:**

*Dr. Premjai Vungsiriphal, Asian Research for Migration, Chulalongkorn University*

*Dr. Pyone Myat Thu, Murdoch University*

### Introduction

Migrant workers have long been an integral part of Thailand's labour force and economy, contributing significantly to various industries. In today's era of the Internet of Things, digital devices and online platforms are increasingly connecting people across borders, providing both opportunities and challenges for social inclusion. The aim of this study was to investigate the extent to which migrant workers use digital devices, the extent to which they own and use digital technologies, and whether these technologies contribute to their integration into Thai society.

Dr. Premjai Vungsiriphal explained that in addition to conducting surveys, she also interviewed officials from three government departments responsible for migrant affairs and disaster warning systems. These interviews provided valuable insights into how the necessary information is disseminated to migrant workers, especially in times of crisis. The presentation specifically examined the role of public communication during two major disasters in Thailand: the 2004 tsunami and the COVID-19 pandemic. It highlighted both successes and shortcomings in disseminating information to migrant communities.

## Conceptual Framework

Before presenting the conceptual framework, Dr. Pyone Myat Thu explained the background of the study. She explained that the research emerged from a project commissioned by UNICEF during the COVID-19 pandemic, which she and Dr. Premjai led. One of her key findings was that migrant children are severely excluded from the digital world, making it difficult for them to access online education. This finding prompted them to expand their research to examine the broader digital experiences of migrant workers, including digital device use, device ownership, access to fast and affordable internet, and overall digital literacy.

The study draws on the 'Digital Equity Framework' by Walkie et al. (2022), which emphasises the need to promote the digital inclusion of disadvantaged populations, including migrants. More recent research on the 'digital divide' has evolved to include more nuanced perspectives that go beyond general inequalities in access to digital technologies between different regions, communities and individuals. Researchers now emphasise "digital inequalities," which highlight the different disadvantages people experience in accessing and effectively using digital devices. Despite the growing interest in digital inclusion, there is still no universally recognised definition of what constitutes digital inclusion or how to measure meaningful participation in digital spaces.

## Aims of the Study

The study aimed to explore key aspects of digital access and literacy among migrant workers in Thailand.

1. To examine the extent to which migrant workers own and have access to digital devices.
2. To assess their level of digital literacy, including their ability to navigate online services, use digital platforms, and engage in digital communication.
3. To examine the role of digital technologies in bridging the digital divide and promoting the social inclusion of migrant workers.

By evaluating these dimensions, the study seeks to provide evidence-based recommendations for policies that can help reduce digital inequalities and support the digital inclusion of migrant communities in Thailand.

## Case Studies: Public Communication During the 2004 Tsunami

One of the case studies presented by Dr. Premjai highlighted the 2004 tsunami in southern Thailand, which claimed the lives of over 5,000 people, including a significant number of migrant workers. At the same time, delays in issuing disaster warnings were evident—partly because the media was slow to report on the disaster and communication channels were inefficient.

In response, Thailand established the National Disaster Warning Centre (NDWC) in January 2005, aiming to enhance national preparedness and ensure the rapid dissemination of emergency information. The Centre implemented a range of communication mechanisms, including SMS notification to inform the public of imminent threats. Despite these improvements, serious barriers remained for migrant communities. Most messages were sent only in Thai and English, making them inaccessible to many migrant workers due to language barriers. Moreover, in 2004, most migrant workers did not own mobile phones, further limiting their ability to receive timely warnings. This case clearly shows the need for a more comprehensive public communication system that reaches all segments of the population, regardless of language or digital access.

## COVID-19 Pandemic

Dr. Premjai continued by talking about the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought new challenges in public communication, but also showed improved digital outreach efforts compared to the 2004 tsunami. During the pandemic, the Thai government established the Centre for COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA), which used digital platforms to disseminate up-to-date health information. However, similar to previous disaster responses, most official communications were initially only available in Thai and English.

Recognising this gap, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) worked with various organisations to translate and disseminate COVID-19 information into multiple languages, including Burmese, Cambodian and Lao, through various digital platforms. While these efforts significantly improved access to important health information, the pandemic also highlighted a new challenge: the proliferation of fake news online, which made it difficult for migrant workers to recognise reliable sources. The need for accurate and multilingual digital communication strategies became clear as governments and organisations sought to combat misinformation.

## Preliminary Results of the Survey and Conclusion

Dr. Pyone Myat Thu concluded the presentation by noting that the survey data is still being analysed, but the preliminary results reveal important trends in digital usage by migrant workers. One key finding is that while many migrant workers have mobile banking applications installed on their mobile phones, very few actually use them. Instead, they continue to rely on cash transactions and cite low trust in digital banking services as a major issue. This reluctance to use mobile banking may be due to fear of fraud, lack of familiarity with online transactions and security concerns.

Another important finding is the limited awareness of emergency services. When asked whether they knew how to contact emergency responders using their phones, most migrant workers said they were unaware of the relevant numbers or procedures. This gap in knowledge raises serious concerns about their ability to access timely assistance in crisis situations and highlights the need for digital literacy programmes tailored to migrant communities.

## Final Considerations

The study highlights the increasing role of digital technologies in shaping the daily lives of migrant workers in Thailand. While digital platforms have improved communication and access to information, significant barriers to digital inclusion remain. These include language barriers, low trust in digital financial services, limited knowledge of emergency services and the spread of misinformation online. To create a truly inclusive society for migrant workers, policy must focus on improving digital literacy, promoting trust in digital financial systems and ensuring that key information is available in multiple languages. Strengthening these aspects will not only improve the daily lives of migrant workers, but also increase their resilience in times of crisis and ultimately promote a more inclusive and connected society.

## 4.5 Digital Inclusion and the Ukrainian Diaspora

*Speaker: Dr. Keiu Telve, Edith Cowan University*

## Transnational Civic Engagement

Dr. Keiu Telve introduced the concept of transnational civic engagement, which was the focus of the research study. She defined it as the involvement of individuals in cross-border activities to support or interact with places that are meaningful to them, whether related to heritage, identity or a sense of collective responsibility. The study emphasised the meso-level of engagement, which serves as a bridge between personal, familial interactions and broader national or global activism.

At the meso-level, community engagement goes beyond private and familial interactions and leads to a grassroots response to current crises. This level of engagement is crucial for fostering transnational solidarity as it enables social, economic, cultural and political interactions across different geographical levels — from local communities to provincial, national and even continental spheres. Digital communication plays a key role in enhancing this engagement. It enables individuals to stay connected to events outside their immediate environment and to participate in collective action from a distance.

## Background information on Estonia

To illustrate the far-reaching impact of transnational civic engagement, Dr Telve examined the Estonian diaspora's response to the Ukraine war. Estonia's historical and political relations with Russia, characterised by decades of Soviet rule, have led Estonian leaders to be particularly vocal in warning against Russian aggression. Estonian politicians, including the Prime Minister, have spoken out internationally, calling for vigilance and support for Ukraine in the face of the ongoing war.

In this context, the Estonian diaspora has played a crucial role in shaping narratives about the conflict, contributing to transnational discussions that portray the war as a continuation of historical resistance and suffering. The war has become a collective concern for Estonians around the world, leading to increased engagement through digital platforms, activism and humanitarian initiatives. By actively discussing the war and mobilising resources, the Estonian diaspora is strengthening the sense of shared responsibility and historical continuity in the fight against Russian aggression.

## Methods

To explore these dynamics, Dr. Telve conducted semi-structured interviews with 40 Estonians living in Australia, including 30 women and 10 men, ranging in age from 19 to 91. Participants represented a wide range of migration histories, from newcomers to long-established members of the community. The study combined diaspora studies and transnational studies to show how the digital revolution in media and communication has brought these two areas closer together. The rise of digital platforms has enabled diasporic communities to maintain connections with their countries of origin, engage in real-time political discourse and participate in transnational civil society activities, blurring the boundaries between local and global activism.

## Findings: A Three-Phase Journey of Remote Civic Engagement

The study identifies a three-phase process through which Estonians engage with the war in Ukraine from afar. The first phase is about connecting personal experiences with collective memory narratives. Civic engagement often begins with very personal connections to historical events, which are reinforced by engaging with current crises that evoke similar themes of oppression and resistance. Many Estonians see Ukraine's struggle as a continuation of their own historical experiences with Soviet rule, which reinforces their commitment to supporting Ukrainian resilience.

The second phase is proxy presence, where people maintain a constant connection to their home communities via digital platforms. Even when they are physically far away, they stay engaged by constantly reading and browsing news about Eastern Europe. This digital presence creates a form of continuous engagement that allows people to stay informed and emotionally connected to the unfolding events. This engagement manifests itself in various forms, including attending rallies, creating online content and supporting humanitarian initiatives. One notable example is how Estonians in Australia have organised language programmes to help Ukrainian children learn English. In addition, members of the Estonian diaspora participate in fundraising activities and donate funds to help displaced Ukrainians. These acts of cross-border civic engagement demonstrate how digital inclusion enables individuals to make a meaningful contribution to global events, even if they are geographically distant from the crisis.

## Conclusion

The study highlights the transformative power of digital inclusion in fostering cross-border civic engagement. By utilising digital tools, people in diasporic communities can maintain their political awareness, actively participate in collective memory work and engage in social movements across borders. The war in Ukraine has reinforced historical narratives of resistance and solidarity within the Estonian diaspora and led to an intensification of digital activism and humanitarian support. Dr. Telve's research highlights the importance of understanding digital engagement not only as a means of communication, but also as a vehicle for activism, community building and political influence. As technology continues to shape global interactions, digital inclusion will remain a critical factor in how diasporic communities contribute to social and political change in transnational spaces.

## Session 5: Networking and Reception Dinner

The session provided a dynamic space for attendees to connect, exchange ideas, and build professional collaborations in an informal setting. It fosters meaningful discussions and partnerships among scholars, policymakers, and practitioners engaged in migration, human rights, and interdisciplinary research.

# Day 2:

# Key Remarks

# Marking International

# Migrants Day

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December 18, 2024

**Dr. Audrey-Anne Rochelemagne,**  
**Deputy and Acting Head of Cooperation Section,**  
**Delegation of the European Union in Thailand**

People often leave their home countries for work and education, facing numerous challenges and obstacles along the way. It is essential to empower them to navigate these challenges effectively. The United Nations has established safe pathways for migrants to ensure their safety at their destinations, fostering prosperity and economic growth. Similarly, the European Union has demonstrated strong leadership and commitment to eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls.

Today's event provides an opportunity to highlight the significant contributions of migrant workers, both men and women, to society and development. It also serves as a reminder of the urgent need to address the vulnerabilities women migrant workers face, including exploitation, violence, and trafficking, which are often exacerbated by their gender and migration status.

In the Asia-Pacific region, a high proportion of women migrant workers from certain countries reflects a growing trend of women independently choosing to migrate without reliance on spouses or families. However, women migrant workers frequently lack access to decent work compared to their male counterparts. This disparity is particularly pronounced for rural women, women with disabilities, and women in post-conflict settings.

The ASEAN region has made significant progress, with 8 out of 10 countries enacting dedicated laws to prevent and address violence against women. Guided by the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action to Eliminate Violence Against Women, the recently launched ASEAN Guidelines for Developing National Standard Operating Procedures for a Coordinated Response to Violence Against Women and Girls address the specific needs of women migrant workers who have experienced violence. These advancements were achieved under the leadership of the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) in Thailand, with valuable partnership and support from UN Women.

Looking ahead, we are pleased to collaborate with ASEAN to design the next phase of the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Ending Violence Against Women, informed by the Mid-Term Review of the current plan. This second-generation initiative will build on the lessons and promising practices of its predecessor while prioritizing the prevention of violence. It will adopt evidence-based strategies and a stronger approach to measuring progress and change, addressing the needs of specific populations, including migrant women. Now is the time to translate these policies and commitments into tangible outcomes for all women migrant workers across the region. With the unwavering commitment of the European Union, ASEAN, and UN agencies such as the ILO, UNODC, and UNICEF, the new initiative PROTECT is charting a course toward ensuring that women and children migrant workers are valued, safe, and free from violence and abuse. This initiative is not only a human rights imperative but also a prerequisite for women migrant workers to realize their full potential and contribute meaningfully to the economies of their host countries. We envision an ASEAN community where all women can migrate safely for work under fair conditions, living free from violence and empowered to achieve their dreams.

Ms. Christine Arab,  
Regional Director, UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

This symposium serves as a pivotal platform to reflect on the contributions and challenges associated with migration globally, and specifically within the ASEAN region. Globally, approximately 281 million individuals reside outside their country of origin, engaging in activities such as work, study, and community building. Migration, a phenomenon as old as humanity itself, continues to shape societies and economies worldwide. While it offers significant benefits to migrants and host communities alike, it also presents complex challenges. For instance, children with disabilities often face heightened difficulties in the context of migration.

A pressing global question remains: how can the challenges of human mobility be effectively addressed without compromising human rights or state sovereignty? In response to such questions, the European Union (EU) has developed a comprehensive and balanced policy framework on migration. The most recent legislative effort in this regard is the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, adopted earlier this year. The EU emphasizes the importance of creating safe and legal migration pathways, preventing loss of life, safeguarding the human rights of migrants, and combating migrant smuggling.

The EU recognizes and values the diverse contributions of migrants to society. Migrant workers enrich their host communities through cultural diversity and economic productivity while simultaneously

supporting the economies of their countries of origin. Consequently, the EU remains committed to enhancing the protection of migrants' rights and safety. Constructive and sustainable migration policies are essential for the mutual benefit of countries of origin, host nations, and migrants themselves.

In the ASEAN region, there are approximately 10.6 million migrants, nearly half of whom are women, with 1.3 million being children. This region's rapid economic development has positioned labor migration as a critical driver of prosperity and regional integration. Nevertheless, migrants face significant risks, including labor exploitation, gender-based violence, harassment, human trafficking, and smuggling. These challenges undermine the potential benefits of labor migration, necessitating collective action to address them.

The EU and its Member States are the world's largest donors of development assistance, contributing €95.9 billion in 2023, representing 42% of global aid. A significant portion of this support is directed towards protecting the rights of migrants, particularly women and children, in all regions. The EU is actively leading by example, increasing its funding for migration-related initiatives, particularly in Southeast Asia. These efforts align with the objectives of the United Nations' Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration. In collaboration with UN partners, the EU has established genuine and customized partnerships to strengthen the labor migration capacities of ASEAN member states. Since 2016, the EU has allocated over €55 million to UN partners to implement four key labor migration initiatives in the region:

Ship to Shore Rights, which focuses on the fishing and seafood processing sector;

Safe and Fair: Realizing Women Migrant Workers' Rights in ASEAN, aimed at ensuring gender equity and protection; Migration, Business, and Human Rights, which promotes corporate responsibility and the rights of migrant workers in global supply chains; PROTECT, the initiative supporting this symposium, which is implemented by the ILO, UN Women, UNICEF, and UNODC in specific ASEAN corridors, including Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand.

The PROTECT project aims to strengthen decent work and labor migration governance, particularly for women migrants. It seeks to mitigate vulnerabilities and reduce violence against women and child migrants while addressing human trafficking and migrant smuggling, emerging challenges in the region. The theme of this symposium, "Connectivity: Navigating Shared Responsibilities Under Growing Complexities," underscores the necessity for collective action to create a safer environment for migrants, particularly women and children, amidst the complexities of the migration process. This event provides an invaluable opportunity to reaffirm our shared commitment to addressing these challenges and translating ongoing initiatives into tangible actions.

The European Union and its Member States stand ready to collaborate with government counterparts, academic institutions, civil society organizations, and UN partners to promote the rights and well-being of migrants in ASEAN.

# Session 6: Misuse of Technology and Forced Criminality, Trafficking in Persons, People Smuggling, and Drug Trafficking

This session explores how the misuse of technology fuels forced criminality, human trafficking, people smuggling, and drug trafficking, enabling transnational criminal networks to exploit vulnerable populations. It examines legal, policy, and technological interventions to combat these crimes while protecting victims and upholding human rights.

## 6.1 Misuse of Technology (Forced Criminality): The Case of Thailand as an Origin and Transit Country and Its Neighbors

### **Speaker:**

*Assistant Professor Dr. Ratchada Jayagupta, Director of Asian Research Center for Migration, Center of Excellence on Migration and Development, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University*

### **Overview**

Assistant Professor Dr. Ratchada Jayagupta presented a comprehensive study on the misuse of technology and forced criminality, with a particular focus on Thailand's role as a transit country within a broader regional framework often referred to as the "Platinum Triangle," which includes Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia. The study highlights the increasing interconnectedness of cyber fraud, human and drug trafficking and how these illicit activities are facilitated by digital tools and transnational networks. One of the most pressing challenges in combating these crimes is the incompleteness of available data and the limited capacity for timely responses. Criminal networks operate across borders with remarkable efficiency and are often faster than law enforcement in utilising technology. This creates a significant gap in law enforcement and victim protection, making it difficult to fully dismantle these operations.

Given the complexity of the problem, the project involves collaboration between Thai government agencies, neighbouring countries and academic institutions. This multi-stakeholder approach aims to combat technology-enabled coercive crime through a holistic strategy that targets both victims and perpetrators. By integrating information-sharing mechanisms and coordinated interventions, authorities seek to disrupt the structures that enable these crimes while providing protection and rehabilitation to those affected.

A key aim of the study is to raise awareness at community level and improve response mechanisms at local, national and regional levels. Understanding how technology is used as a weapon in violent crime is critical to developing more effective policy and legal frameworks to combat this growing threat. Ultimately, the study emphasises the urgent need for greater cross-border cooperation and improved technological interventions to mitigate the increasing dangers of digital exploitation in cross-border criminal activity.

## 6.2 Misuse of Technology (Forced Criminality): The Case of Thailand and Neighboring Countries

**Speaker:** *Dr. Theerapat Kaewjunant, Department of Special Investigation, Ministry of Justice, Thailand*

### Overview

Dr. Theerapat Kaewjunant provided an in-depth analysis of the increasing misuse of technology for forced crime, highlighting the scale and financial impact of online fraud in Thailand and neighbouring countries. According to the Online Activity Report, authorities recorded 77,360 illegal online activities between March 2022 and 2024, resulting in financial losses of 73,945 million baht. This staggering figure highlights the increasing sophistication of cybercrime networks and the urgent need for stronger enforcement measures.

To combat these crimes, Dr. Theerapat presented the Human Trafficking Solutions Strategy, which outlines a multi-layered approach to tackling forced crime linked to fraud operations. He then analysed the characteristics of fraudsters and call centres and explained how these criminal networks operate. One of the most critical aspects of their operations is their modus operandi, which typically takes place in three main phases. In the first phase, victims are recruited via social media and deceived with lucrative job offers or false promises of employment abroad. Once the victims are lured, they are illegally transported across the border and often smuggled into neighbouring countries without proper documentation. The final stage takes place in labour centres where victims are forced to work under exploitative conditions, typically in fraudulent call centres or online scams.

The study also examines the various companies and businesses associated with the scam networks and sheds light on how victims are manipulated and imprisoned. Many of these people are held against their will, their passports are confiscated and their freedom of movement is severely restricted. The presentation emphasised the systematic nature of these criminal enterprises and revealed how the perpetrators use digital tools to deceive, transport and exploit their victims while operating across multiple jurisdictions.

Dr. Theerapat's research highlights the urgent need for increased regional cooperation between law enforcement agencies, stricter digital regulations and greater public awareness to combat technology-enabled coercive crime. As fraud networks evolve, so must the strategies to dismantle them to ensure that victims receive adequate support and perpetrators are held accountable under the law.

## 6.3 Applying Non-Punishment Principles to Trafficking Victims in Forced Criminality

**Speaker:** *Nurul Qoiriah (online)*

*Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) and Victim Rights Director, ASEAN Australian Counter Trafficking*

## Overview

Nurul Qoiriah examined the principle of non-punishment in the context of human trafficking, with a particular focus on forced criminality. She emphasised the importance of ensuring that victims of trafficking are not prosecuted for unlawful acts they have been forced to commit. Many victims, especially those involved in criminal operations such as forced cyber-scamming rings, are often arrested and treated as criminals rather than being recognised as victims of trafficking. The speaker stressed that without a clear and consistent application of the principle of non-punishment, victims risk being victimised twice — first by their traffickers and then by the legal system that is supposed to protect them.

Referring to the ASEAN Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, she highlighted real-life cases that illustrate the challenges of effectively implementing this principle. One of the main obstacles is social stigmatisation, which often leads to scepticism about victims' claims, especially if they have been involved in criminal activities. She also pointed to the legal complexities of defining victimhood, noting that male victims in particular have greater difficulty being recognised as victims under the law and policy. Many victims of coerced cyber-scamming — particularly young males — are often misidentified as voluntary participants rather than individuals who have been coerced into illegal activity under threats and deception.

Apart from the gaps in legal interpretation, she criticised the narrow definitions of trafficking and exploitation, which often do not take into account new forms of forced criminality. The current legal frameworks in some countries focus primarily on traditional forms of trafficking such as forced labour or sexual exploitation, while neglecting newer forms of exploitation that rely on digital technologies and transnational networks. She called for an expanded legal recognition of these evolving dynamics of human trafficking to ensure that victims are identified and protected, regardless of gender, societal expectations or the type of exploitation they have been subjected to.

To address these challenges, she called on governments, legal practitioners and law enforcement agencies to adopt a more victim-centred approach and incorporate human rights principles into anti-trafficking measures. This includes specialised training for law enforcement officials, strengthening legal protections and ensuring that non-punishment provisions are effectively implemented. Without these reforms, many victims of trafficking will continue to face criminal charges for acts beyond their control, further exacerbating their trauma and denying them the justice and protection they deserve.

## 6.4 Trafficking in Persons for Forced Criminality in Southeast Asia

**Speaker:** Alexandra Mehaima Cole  
*Programme Officer, IOM Thailand*

### Overview

Alexandra Mehaima Cole provided an in-depth analysis of trends in human trafficking and forced criminality in Southeast Asia, explaining how migration patterns in the Asia-Pacific region have evolved to facilitate this growing form of exploitation. She highlighted that forced criminality is on the rise, with traffickers increasingly targeting migrants through fraudulent schemes that exploit both economic vulnerability and digital connectivity.

Southeast Asia is home to the largest population of migrants in the world, and countries such as Thailand and Malaysia play a crucial role as centres of origin, transit and destination for migrants. While these migration flows are often fuelled by economic opportunities, they also provide opportunities for traffickers to lure people into forced criminality. Victims are usually recruited through fraudulent online job adverts, particularly those promising lucrative positions in the technology or financial sectors. Once deceived, they are forcibly transported across borders and forced to work in fraudulent compounds under conditions of debt bondage, surveillance and extreme abuse. The most notorious locations for these operations are in Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos, where weak legal frameworks and political instability allow criminal syndicates to operate with impunity.

According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), cases of forced criminality have increased dramatically and will account for 70% of all human trafficking cases in 2023. The primary demographic composition of victims has shifted, with young, educated men forming the majority— in contrast to traditional patterns of human trafficking, which mainly victimised women and children. This shift reflects how digitally enabled recruitment tactics have changed trafficking networks, making it easier for traffickers to target individuals seeking legal employment in a post-pandemic labour market.

The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the situation. As the economy recovers, digital recruitment has increased significantly, making it more difficult to distinguish between legitimate job offers and fraudulent human trafficking schemes. The expansion of illegal online markets has enabled traffickers to make unprecedented profits, making forced labour an attractive and growing sector for organised crime gangs. In view of this rapid development, the urgency of targeted prevention and intervention measures cannot be overemphasised. Governments, international organisations and civil society actors must strengthen the legal framework, improve digital literacy and expand mechanisms to support victims in order to combat this increasingly sophisticated form of human trafficking.

## 6.5 Women's Roles and Involvement in Cross-Border International Drug Trafficking

**Speaker:** Chontit Chuenurah

*Director, Office for the Bangkok Rules and Treatment of Offenders, Thailand Institute of Justice (TIJ)*

### Overview

Chontit Chuenurah examined the role and involvement of women in the cross-border international drug trade and highlighted the systemic vulnerabilities and gendered dimensions of this illicit trade. Her presentation was based on a 2017 study by the Thailand Institute of Justice (TIJ), which examined the experiences of Thai women imprisoned in Cambodia for drug offences. This study provided valuable insights into how and why women become entangled in drug trafficking networks and challenged the common perception that they are solely perpetrators rather than victims of broader socio-economic and structural inequalities.

The research identified four main pathways that lead women into the drug trade: romantic relationships, domestic violence, criminogenic vulnerabilities and self-indulgence. In many cases, the women were recruited and manipulated by foreign men who used online platforms or personal contacts to recruit them into the drug trade. These women often did not initially recognise the dangers involved and were forced to smuggle drugs under false pretences or emotional dependency.

Aside from direct coercion, many women in drug trafficking networks were systemically vulnerable long before their involvement in criminal activities. The study found that an unstable childhood, financial insecurity and domestic abuse made women more vulnerable to exploitation. For some women, economic desperation left them with few alternatives, while others were pressured by their partners or family members or enticed into trafficking. These structural disadvantages made it difficult for women to resist recruitment or escape once they were caught up in the situation.

A key finding from the research was the intersection of gender inequality and criminal justice measures. Rather than recognising these women as victims of systemic vulnerabilities, the legal system often criminalises and stigmatises them as perpetrators. Limited access to legal aid, social protection and rehabilitation programmes further exacerbates their situation, leaving many of them with little hope of reintegrating into society after serving their sentence.

The presentation emphasised the urgent need for gender-sensitive policies that address the root causes of women's involvement in drug trafficking. By expanding economic opportunities for women, strengthening protection from domestic violence and ensuring fair legal representation, policymakers can reduce the number of women who fall into drug trafficking networks. The findings highlight the importance of changing legal and societal perceptions and ensuring that the justice system recognises the role of coercion and vulnerability in these cases, rather than treating female offenders as equal participants in organised crime.

## 6.6 An Interpretive Phenomenological Study on the Experiences of Victim-Survivors and Their Allies in Convicting Human Traffickers in Region XI, Philippines

**Speaker:** *Diana Carmella T. Labra (online)*

*Director of the Ateneo Migration Center, Ateneo de Davao University*

### Overview

Diana Carmella T. Labra presented a study from the Ateneo de Davao University that explores the experiences of trafficking victims and their allies in the conviction of traffickers in Region XI, Philippines. Using an interpretative phenomenological approach, the study explores the personal struggles and institutional challenges faced by victims and the people who advocate for their justice. By focusing on first-hand narratives, the study uncovers the obstacles that stand in the way of successful prosecution and identifies the critical factors that determine whether traffickers are brought to justice.

One of the key findings of the study highlights the importance of legal knowledge, strong support systems and victim-centred shelters to ensure that survivors can effectively participate in court proceedings. Many victims lack a clear understanding of legal processes, making them vulnerable to intimidation, misinformation and re-traumatisation during court hearings. The presence of dedicated legal advocates, social workers and safe spaces for survivors plays a crucial role in supporting their participation in proceedings against their traffickers. Without these elements, many victims are unable or unwilling to endure the long and often gruelling process.

Despite efforts to ensure justice, systemic obstacles continue to hinder convictions. The study identifies key obstacles such as delays in court proceedings, lack of coordination between law enforcement agencies, intimidation by traffickers and deep-rooted social stigma towards victims. In some cases, fear of retribution, social marginalisation or economic dependence on traffickers prevents survivors from taking legal action. The complexity of the justice system, combined with the inadequate training of some lawyers in trauma-informed approaches, further exacerbates the difficulties faced by victims.

To overcome these challenges, the study makes several important recommendations. Comprehensive support programmes must be developed to provide survivors with legal assistance, psychological support and economic reintegration opportunities. It is equally important to tackle the social push factors that make people vulnerable to trafficking in the first place. Economic hardship, gender-based violence and lack of access to education all contribute to the prevalence of human trafficking and necessitate a more comprehensive socio-economic intervention strategy.

In addition, the study emphasises the importance of improving coordination between actors by promoting capacity-building initiatives, strengthening cooperation between authorities and creating a more robust legal framework. Effective communication and cooperation between government authorities, law enforcement agencies, non-governmental organisations and international bodies is crucial to ensure that legal mechanisms function efficiently and in the best interests of victims.

Ultimately, the study emphasises the need for a holistic, victim-centred approach in order to maintain survivors' participation in legal proceedings and achieve justice. Without the removal of both legal and structural barriers, efforts to convict traffickers will remain inadequate. It is not only a legal imperative, but also a moral responsibility in the fight against human trafficking to ensure that victims are empowered, protected and supported throughout the process.

## Reflections

*Ms. Louise Taylor*  
*Director, Asia and the Pacific & ECO-SOLVE Lead, GI-TOC*

The complexity of cyber fraud as a successful global criminal business model, involving multiple offences, actors and financial flows, with victims often exploited and traded within the fraud links.

Technology is a double-edged sword as it facilitates recruitment and enables victims to be identified and rescued. Corruption, illicit financial flows and private sector involvement help to perpetuate these crimes, with procedures rarely benefiting the victims.

A holistic response that takes into account corruption, the role of the private sector and victim support is crucial to effectively combat this phenomenon.

### **The Chairman's conclusion: Dr. Rosalia Sciortino Sumaryono**

The Chair summarised the entire session, pointing out the complexity and nuances of human trafficking. She highlighted the blurred boundaries between labour exploitation, trafficking and labour migration, each of which requires different responses. New forms of human trafficking, such as forced criminality, raise questions about the victim-perpetrator dynamic. The situation in Myanmar, exacerbated by the civil war and military coup, and the involvement of countries such as China further complicate the problems of regional human trafficking. Cooperation between different actors and a differentiated understanding of human trafficking are essential for effective research and intervention.

# Session 7: Building a safer present and future for women and girls: exploring coordinated responses to Gender based violence and “what works” strategies

Session 7 focuses on coordinated responses to gender-based violence (GBV) and evidence-based strategies that effectively protect and empower women and girls. It explores successful interventions, policy frameworks, and community-driven initiatives that create safer environments and drive long-term social change.

## 7.1 Sharing Lessons Learned on Addressing GBV Coordinated Responses in the Region

**Speaker:** *Manivone Luangsombath*  
*Permanent Secretary Office of NCAWMC, Lao PDR*

### Overview

Manivone Luangsombath presented an in-depth analysis of Lao PDR's progress in the fight against gender-based violence (GBV), emphasising the country's multi-sectoral and coordinated approach. Through a combination of research, policy integration and partnerships with international organisations, Lao PDR has strengthened its efforts to combat GBV at various levels. These strategies reflect the growing realisation that effective GBV prevention and response requires cross-sectoral collaboration, from health care and social services to justice and law enforcement.

The results of surveys conducted in the region emphasise the widespread prevalence of GBV. A 2015 survey found alarming rates of physical, sexual and psychological abuse experienced by women at the hands of their partners. A 2019 survey by Thailand's Ministry of Public Health, based on a sample of 3,000 women, provided disturbing statistics on domestic violence that add to this concern. The data showed that one in seven women had been affected by domestic violence at the hands of their husband. This included sexual violence in 70 per cent of cases, physical violence in 25 per cent and abuse during pregnancy in 2 per cent of cases. These figures highlight the urgent need for stronger mechanisms to combat GBV and comprehensive services to support survivors.

The role of international partnerships in shaping national policies and interventions was another important theme of the presentation. UN agencies, including UNFPA and UN Women, played a crucial role in integrating the Essential Services Package (ESP) into the Lao PDR's second National Action Plan (NAP) on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Children (2021-2025). This collaboration ensured that the national policy was aligned with international best practices, enabling a standardised and effective approach to preventing and combating violence against women and children. By working closely with the Lao PDR government, these organisations helped to implement the ESP at provincial and sectoral levels, ensuring that survivors had access to comprehensive and coordinated services.

To further improve service delivery, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were developed for several sectors, including social services, health, justice and coordination mechanisms. These SOPs focus on survivor care and emphasise informed consent, confidentiality and the provision of services according to need. The introduction of these guidelines represents a significant step forward in creating a structured and rights-based approach to supporting GBV survivors.

The presentation concluded by noting that effective GBV interventions depend on strong coordination between different stakeholders. In Lao PDR, the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children (NCAWMC) plays a critical role in monitoring to ensure that responses to violence against women remain integrated, accessible and consistent with national and international commitments. By promoting cross-sectoral cooperation and accountability, Lao PDR continues to advance its efforts to combat gender-based violence and provides a sustainable model for regional initiatives to combat violence against women.

## 7.2 Knowledge, Attitudes, and Perceptions Toward Migrant Workers in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand

**Speaker:** Ratna Mathai-Luke

*Technical Officer, ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific*

### Overview

Ratna Mathai-Luke presented a comprehensive study examining public attitudes towards migrant workers in Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, three of the major destination countries for labour migration in Southeast Asia. The study examined how knowledge, attitudes and perceptions (KAP) towards migrant workers have evolved over time, highlighting both the progress and ongoing challenges in fostering an inclusive and equitable environment for migrant communities.

A central theme of the study was the intersecting vulnerabilities faced by migrant workers, particularly those belonging to marginalised groups. The study placed a strong emphasis on female migrant workers and focused on combating violence and discrimination against them. Beyond gender-specific challenges, the study also examined public perceptions of migrant workers with disabilities and people with different sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions (SOGIE). This intersectional approach reflects the changing social and political landscape, which increasingly recognises the need to protect the rights of all migrant workers, regardless of gender, disability or identity.

The study draws on previous research, particularly the ILO's 2019 findings, to assess how public opinion has changed over time. By comparing past and current attitudes, the study provides valuable insights into changes in perceptions and highlights areas for improvement, as well as persistent barriers to social and economic inclusion. This comparative analysis is particularly important in understanding how global events — such as the COVID-19 pandemic — have influenced public attitudes towards migrant workers and reshaped debates on labour rights, economic contributions and social inclusion.

The findings of the study cover several key dimensions of public attitudes towards migrant workers. These included the general perception of the economic contribution of migrant workers, the extent to which COVID-19 has influenced knowledge and attitudes towards migration, and the level of public support for migrant workers from marginalised groups, including those with different SOGIE. In addition,

the study examined attitudes towards foreign domestic workers, a labour force historically exposed to precarious working conditions, limited legal protection and social stigma.

Ultimately, the study emphasises the importance of changing public opinion to promote greater acceptance, rights-based policies and protection of migrant workers in Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. As societies and economies continue to evolve, promoting inclusive attitudes and equitable labour frameworks will be critical to ensure that migrant workers are recognised not only as economic performers, but also as individuals deserving of dignity, security and social inclusion.

## 7.3 Exploring and Assessing Key Risks of Violence Against Women, Including Women Migrant Workers in Southeast Asia

**Speaker:** *Pasuta Chuenkhachorn*  
*Lawyer, Shero Thailand*

### Overview

Pasuta Chuenkhachorn presented the important work of Shero Thailand, an organisation that provides legal assistance, training and political advocacy to survivors of sexual violence. The organisation plays a crucial role in training lawyers who can handle the cases of survivors of sexual violence with empathy, expertise and a survivor-centred approach. Beyond legal support, Shero Thailand empowers survivors through workshops where they can improve their skills and ensures that they have access to comprehensive legal information, which strengthens their ability to seek justice.

A significant part of Shero Thailand's work focuses on migrant workers in Thailand, a population of more than three million, 43 per cent of whom are women. Many of these women face immense obstacles in accessing legal services, largely due to language barriers and deep-rooted societal prejudices that view migrants as disenfranchised. The lack of interpreters in government offices further isolates migrant survivors from the justice system and makes it almost impossible for them to navigate legal proceedings. Shero Thailand seeks to bridge this gap not only through direct legal support, but also by advocating for policy reforms that will bring about long-term structural changes to improve access to justice for all survivors of violence.

Recognising the challenges survivors face in seeking justice, Shero Thailand has also integrated digital platforms into its work. These platforms allow survivors to report cases, seek legal counselling and access information in a more accessible and discreet manner. By expanding the use of technology, the organisation ensures that survivors, especially those in vulnerable and marginalised communities, have multiple avenues to seek help.

### Current Challenges

Despite these ongoing efforts, the effectiveness of mechanisms to address violence against women continues to be hampered by severe structural and resource constraints. One-Stop Crisis Centres (OSCCs), which are responsible for supporting survivors of violence, often have only one or two social workers available to deal with an overwhelming number of cases. This leads to delays and inadequate support for survivors, many of whom need immediate intervention and long-term help. Children's homes

and law enforcement agencies also struggle with resource and capacity constraints, making it difficult to respond to cases of gender-based violence in a timely and effective manner.

These challenges are even more pronounced for migrant women. In addition to legal inaccessibility caused by language barriers and cultural biases, migrant women often face prejudices that undermine their credibility and right to protection. The criminalisation and stigmatisation of migrant women in certain legal frameworks further discourages survivors from reporting abuse, leaving many trapped in a cycle of violence without access to justice or protection.

The situation has been exacerbated by the ongoing conflict and political instability in the region, which has led to an increase in sexual violence and exploitation. Human rights defenders and lawyers working on GBV issues face increasing threats both offline and online. Many of them face harassment, intimidation and cyber-attacks as they continue their fight for justice. The increasing hostility towards those working for the rights of survivors not only endangers them, but also weakens the overall capacity of organisations working on gender-based violence.

## The Way Forward

Shero Thailand's work emphasises the urgent need for stronger policies, more resources and better coordination to effectively combat violence against women, especially among migrant populations. The availability of interpreters, the expansion of a survivor-centred legal framework and the elimination of societal prejudices are crucial steps to facilitate access to justice. In addition, protecting human rights defenders and strengthening support networks for those working on the ground are crucial for sustainable progress in gender justice efforts.

Through a combination of legal empowerment, digital tools and policy advocacy, Shero Thailand continues to push for structural reforms that not only address individual cases of violence, but also break down systemic barriers that prevent women — especially migrant women — from accessing justice. However, without stronger government commitment, greater financial investment and regional cooperation, the fight against gender-based violence in Southeast Asia will remain an uphill battle.

## 7.4 The Role of Peer Networks in EAW Service Delivery and Referral Pathways for Women and Girls on the Move

**Speaker:** Ms. M Khunmao

*Representative of Women Migrant Worker Peer Network, MAP Foundation*

### Overview

Ms M. Khunmao introduced the Women Exchange Programme, a peer-led initiative of the MAP Foundation that plays a critical role in empowering migrant women and combating gender-based violence (GBV). This programme is designed to create safe spaces for migrant women to share knowledge, build solidarity and advocate for their rights. Through a network spanning 18 areas in southern, northern and central Thailand, the programme offers regular peer-led exchange meetings where migrant women can share experiences, discuss challenges and jointly develop strategies to empower themselves.

A central component of the programme is empowerment training, which educates women about labour rights, women's rights, sexual and reproductive health rights and gender equality. By equipping participants with this knowledge, the initiative not only improves their understanding of their legal protections, but also strengthens their ability to navigate complex health, legal and labour systems. To reinforce these efforts, each year on International Women's Day, the programme hosts a four-day workshop that brings together migrant women and partner organisations to build stronger networks and promote joint advocacy.

In addition to education and empowerment, the programme is also heavily involved in advocacy campaigns. It actively participates in STOPVAW Day, International Migrants Day and International Domestic Workers Day and uses these platforms to amplify the voices of migrant women, raise awareness of violence against women and push for policy changes that better protect women and girls on the move. Through these initiatives, the Women's Exchange Programme bridges the gap between grassroots activism and broader legal and institutional reform, ensuring that migrant women are not only heard, but also supported in their fight for justice and safety.

## Challenges

Despite the successes of the programme, migrant women continue to face significant challenges, many of which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the coup in Myanmar. The economic and political instability brought about by these crises led to a sharp increase in cases of domestic violence, leaving many survivors in precarious situations without access to immediate support. To make matters worse, many migrant women live in remote areas, making access to medical care, legal aid and emergency shelter incredibly difficult.

Another critical barrier is language, which prevents many migrant women from effectively navigating the healthcare and legal systems. Without interpreters or language services, survivors often have difficulty reporting acts of violence, seeking medical treatment or accessing justice. This isolation not only limits their ability to receive immediate support, but also discourages them from seeking help in the first place, reinforcing the cycle of violence and vulnerability.

## Key Findings

The presentation reiterated the fundamental principle that migrant women's rights are human rights. Every survivor deserves access to support, protection and the right to speak out against injustice. The challenges faced by migrant women, especially those affected by gender-based violence, labour exploitation and legal exclusion, cannot be ignored and solutions must be rooted in collective action.

Ms Khunmao stressed that human rights transcend borders and it is therefore important that governments, civil society organisations and peer networks work together to protect survivors and provide them with the resources they need. The Women's Exchange Programme is a testament to the power of peer-led initiatives. It shows that when women have the space, knowledge and solidarity to support each other, they become agents of change, challenging systems of oppression and advocating for a more just and inclusive society.

## 7.5 Developing and Applying a Coordinated Approach to Responding to Violence Against Women: Tools for Strengthening Coordinated Response – What Works?

**Speaker:** Jiraya Pikulthong  
MAP Foundation

### Overview

Jiraya Pikulthong gave an overview of the MAP Foundation's mission and work, emphasising its commitment to improving health, education and legal protection for ethnic minorities and migrant workers in Thailand. With a multi-faceted approach, the foundation runs initiatives in four key areas: Labour Rights, Health, Education and Media Relations.

In the area of labour rights, the MAP Foundation actively advocates for workers' rights and ensures that migrant workers and ethnic minorities receive legal protection, fair wages and safety in the workplace. The health initiatives focus on tackling HIV problems, improving access to healthcare and promoting reproductive health rights, particularly for women and young people. Education is another important pillar, with efforts aimed at expanding access to schooling for marginalised communities, particularly young migrants and women who face systemic barriers to learning opportunities. The Foundation also uses the media as a tool for empowerment and operates radio stations to disseminate information on labour rights, health awareness and social justice, ensuring that knowledge reaches even the most remote communities.

One of the Foundation's key projects focuses on expanding access to protection services for women workers, particularly those affected by gender-based violence and exploitation in the workplace. This initiative relies on partnerships with hospitals, civil society organisations and law enforcement agencies in Chiang Mai and promotes a coordinated response system that ensures survivors have access to medical care, legal aid and psychosocial support. The collaborative nature of this project demonstrates the importance of multi-stakeholder participation in addressing violence against women, particularly in vulnerable populations.

Despite its influence, the Foundation continues to face major challenges. One of the most pressing issues is the limited access to government services for migrant workers and ethnic minorities, which restricts their ability to obtain legal protection or medical care. Many survivors of violence encounter bureaucratic obstacles, discriminatory measures and language barriers that make it difficult for them to access justice. In addition, the Foundation faces budget constraints that limit its ability to expand support services and extend its reach to more vulnerable communities.

Jiraya Pikulthong's presentation highlighted the urgent need for a well-coordinated response to violence against women, particularly in migrant and marginalised communities. Strengthening partnerships between civil society organisations, health care providers, legal institutions and grassroots networks is essential for creating a sustainable and effective protection system. As the MAP Foundation continues its work, the focus remains on advocating for policy change, securing additional funding, and ensuring that survivors receive the comprehensive support they deserve. By prioritising collaboration and survivor-centred approaches, a more comprehensive and effective framework for responding to gender-based violence can be developed and implemented.

# Special Session: Connectivity 1: Conflict, Crime, Care, and Climate – Exploring Shared Responsibilities for Migration in the Modern Era

**Chair:** Assistant Professor Dr. Ratchada Jayagupta  
Director of Asian Research Center for Migration, Chulalongkorn University

Dr. Ratchada emphasised the complex and interlinked dimensions of migration governance, highlighting how conflict, organised crime, supply economies and climate change influence migration patterns and responses. She emphasised that migration is not only a socio-economic phenomenon, but also a political and security challenge that requires coordinated multi-stakeholder engagement.

Looking at the ASEAN regional context, she examined the need for a co-operative framework and integrated policy solutions to address these overlapping challenges. Given the diverse migration dynamics in the region, she emphasised the importance of strengthening cross-border cooperation, improving frameworks for labour mobility and enhancing protection mechanisms for migrants, especially those at risk of exploitation, human trafficking and climate-induced displacement. She also addressed the role of the care economy in managing migration. She recognised the significant contributions of migrant workers in key sectors such as healthcare and domestic work, while calling for more inclusive policies that ensure their rights, protection and economic empowerment.

Her recommendations focused on strengthening cross-institutional partnerships between governments, international organisations and civil society actors to create a more resilient, rights-based migration system. It argued in favour of aligning migration governance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to ensure that policies not only address the immediate challenges of migration, but also contribute to long-term social and economic sustainability. Strengthening data-sharing mechanisms, investing in capacity-building programmes and promoting regional policy harmonisation were among the key strategies proposed to improve migration policies within and outside ASEAN.

**Speaker/Presenter Name:** Dr. AKM Ahsan Ullah  
Associate Professor, Universiti Brunei Darussalam

The speaker emphasised the need for a holistic approach in migration research that includes both forced and voluntary migration in a comprehensive analytical framework. Migration is a multi-layered and dynamic phenomenon that requires an interdisciplinary perspective in order to fully grasp its complexity. The discussion emphasised the importance of regional and global partnerships, particularly through cooperation between ASEAN and larger international networks, to facilitate policy coherence, information sharing and joint initiatives. These partnerships are essential to address the complex challenges of migration and capitalise on shared opportunities in different regions.

A key theme was the interdisciplinary nature of migration research, which spans different fields such as archaeology, demography, history and development studies. Archaeology, for example, offers valuable insights into historical migration patterns through the analysis of burial sites, artefacts and material culture, helping to place contemporary migration in a broader historical context. Similarly, demography provides a quantitative framework for understanding migration trends, while development studies

examine the socio-economic and political dimensions of migration governance. The integration of these disciplines enriches our understanding of the social impacts and historical continuities of migration.

The discussion also emphasised the importance of mentorship and academic collaboration between experienced scholars and early career researchers, stressing that knowledge transfer and intellectual exchange are crucial to advancing the field. This collaborative environment fosters innovation, methodological advances and nuanced policy recommendations and ensures that migration research can be adapted to the challenges of the present.

Migration has also been analysed as a phenomenon with profound economic and political implications. The global financial landscape is significantly shaped by migration, with remittance flows exceeding \$1 trillion annually and fostering economic stability in many countries of origin. The mobility of labour made possible by migration remains a cornerstone of economic development, with migrant workers playing an indispensable role in various industries around the world. At the same time, migration has become a politically charged issue, particularly in Europe and North America, where it often dominates electoral debates, public discourse and the political agenda. The politicisation of migration underscores its impact on national identity, social cohesion and geopolitical dynamics.

The global scale of migration was further emphasised: Over 300 million international migrants and more than 1 billion internal migrants are changing the demographic landscape. Migration is not only a reality for those who move, but also for those who stay, as family, economic and social ties are inevitably affected by migration flows. The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the role of digital connectivity in migration as virtual platforms such as Zoom and WhatsApp facilitate cross-border communication. In total, people spent 38 million years of their time online on these platforms, highlighting the centrality of technology in maintaining migrant networks, sustaining remittance flows and bridging distances.

Institutional cooperation was another important focus. Organisations such as the UNHCR, the IOM and regional migration authorities play a central role in migration research, refugee protection and policy implementation. However, the discussion highlighted the need for better coordination between these organisations in order to create a more effective, inclusive and sustainable migration policy framework. Strengthening these institutional links can improve humanitarian action, facilitate labour mobility agreements and address displacement crises more effectively.

In conclusion, the discussion emphasised the need for interdisciplinary research in migration studies and called for greater collaboration, sharing of resources and joint research initiatives to fill knowledge gaps and broaden understanding of the economic, social and historical dimensions of migration. Scholars and practitioners were encouraged to engage with diverse perspectives, contribute to evidence-based policy dialogue and develop innovative methods to address the evolving challenges of migration in a rapidly changing global landscape.

**Speaker/Presenter:** *Wanchai Roujanavong*

*Senior Consultant Prosecutor, Office of the Attorney General, Thailand*

## Background

Migration and human trafficking in ASEAN: The Rohingya crisis and regional challenges

Migration in the ASEAN region is characterised by considerable economic differences between the member states, which leads to different migration patterns. ASEAN countries can be categorised into net receiving countries (Brunei, Singapore, Malaysia), net sending countries (Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia) and

mixed status countries (Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia), where both emigration and immigration occur on a significant scale. Within this broader migration framework, the Rohingya community — a stateless Muslim minority from Myanmar— is one of the most vulnerable and persecuted groups. For decades, the Rohingya have faced systematic discrimination, exclusion from citizenship and widespread human rights violations, forcing them to flee in search of safety.

Due to persecution and lack of legal protection, many Rohingyas embark on a dangerous journey to Malaysia and Indonesia, often using Thailand as a transit country. As there are no safe and legal migration routes, they are forced to rely on dangerous sea routes and smuggling networks, putting them at extreme risk of trafficking, exploitation and abuse. The exploitation of Rohingya refugees reached a tragic peak between 2013 and 2015, when a large-scale smuggling operation capitalised on their desperation.

## **Case Overview: The –Human Trafficking Network 2013-2015**

During this time, organised smuggling syndicates preyed on Rohingya refugees who had fled Myanmar and Bangladesh. They offered them passage to Malaysia, paying an average of 2,000 dollars per person. But instead of allowing them safe passage, the smugglers subjected the migrants to cruel abuse. Those who could not pay were imprisoned, tortured or even killed and the ransom demands were sent to their families. The brutal nature of this operation came to international attention in 2015 when authorities discovered a series of secret camps along the southern Thai-Malaysian border. These camps contained malnourished survivors, abandoned detention centres and mass graves and are a harrowing testimony to the inhumane conditions the victims were subjected to.

## **Investigations and legal action**

Following the discovery of the camps, the Thai authorities launched one of the largest anti-trafficking investigations in the country's history. In a single operation, 80 migrants were rescued, while 26 bodies were exhumed from mass graves. Investigators meticulously traced evidence from mobile phones, financial transactions and survivors' testimonies, exposing an extensive transnational human trafficking network spanning Thailand, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Malaysia.

The investigation eventually identified 155 individuals linked to human trafficking, including local politicians, police officers, military personnel and criminal syndicates. Of these, 103 people were arrested, leading to the conviction of 68 traffickers. The sentences ranged from 27 to 50 years, with a lieutenant general in the Thai military receiving the highest sentence. His conviction and subsequent death in prison exposed the deep-rooted corruption and complicity of high-ranking officials in facilitating human trafficking operations.

## **Outcomes and Broader Implications**

The dismantling of this trafficking network was widely regarded as a milestone in the fight against organised human trafficking in the region. The authorities traced some \$6.65 million in illicit funds, of which \$3.4 million was confiscated by the courts. While the case represented significant progress, it also showed that structural problems remain, including widespread corruption and gaps in enforcement mechanisms.

Beyond the immediate legal and financial implications, this case highlights wider failures in ASEAN's migration policy. The lack of safe migration routes continues to drive vulnerable groups — particularly

the Rohingya and other stateless populations — into the hands of human traffickers. Without systemic policy changes, increased regional cooperation and the strengthening of human rights protections, such tragedies are bound to recur. A regional migration framework that prioritises humanitarian protection, legal pathways for displaced people and stronger enforcement against human trafficking networks is essential to prevent further exploitation and protect the dignity and safety of all migrants in Southeast Asia.

**2nd Speaker/Presenter:** *Dr. Hj Omar Khalid*

*Brunei Representative for Children on promotion and protection of Women and Children in the ASEAN Commission for Women and Children (ACWC)*

Dr. Omar began by emphasising that migration is an integral part of human history, shaped by a complex interplay of conflict, economic necessity, crime and climate change. Throughout history, migration patterns have evolved in response to these pressures, with current research focussing on the mechanisms, risks and consequences of migration. Among the most vulnerable people in migration processes are women, children and people with disabilities, who are at increased risk of exploitation, trafficking and marginalisation.

One of the main causes of migration was systemic instability, particularly armed conflict and environmental change. Climate change in particular was highlighted as a significant and growing factor in displacement. Rising global temperatures, increasing weather events and environmental degradation are forcing millions of people to leave their homes. These conditions exacerbate resource scarcity and lead to disputes over land, water and food, which in turn fuel local and regional conflicts. The correlation between climate change and conflict creates a vicious cycle of instability that increases population displacement and undermines the long-term resilience of affected regions.

The discussion also explored the role of crime in migration, highlighting that migrants— - especially those with limited social support and legal protection — are highly vulnerable to forced labour, human trafficking and other forms of exploitation. Poverty, lack of education and social exclusion increase the vulnerability of individuals to criminal networks that often exploit migrants in search of better opportunities. At the same time, organised crime weakens institutional governance, diverting resources away from essential services and perpetuating a cycle of vulnerability and insecurity.

Migration was seen as both a consequence and a contributor to the systemic challenges. Governments and international organisations face significant policy dilemmas in managing migration, from ensuring adequate supplies to protecting the rights of displaced populations. Addressing these challenges requires a shared responsibility with coordinated efforts in the areas of policy, law enforcement, diplomacy and humanitarian assistance. The presentation underlined that effective migration management depends on multilateral cooperation and the harmonisation of national and regional policies.

The role of civil society organisations and the media was also highlighted. Non-governmental and community-based organisations play a crucial role in advocacy, service delivery and support for migrants, often acting as a bridge between the displaced and state institutions. Media organisations, in turn, shape public perceptions and have a responsibility to counter xenophobia, misinformation and negative stereotypes about migrants through accurate and responsible reporting. A well-informed public discourse is essential for the promotion of inclusive policies and social cohesion.

The ASEAN Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) was highlighted as an example of a regional body working to protect the rights of vulnerable populations. The ACWC focuses on advocacy, policy development, awareness-raising campaigns and multi-stakeholder collaboration to ensure that women and children affected by migration receive the protection and support they need. The Commission's efforts illustrate how regional frameworks can be used to strengthen the protection of human rights and improve the integration of migrants into ASEAN societies.

In conclusion, the presentation emphasised the need for a multi-layered and collaborative approach to migration management that ensures that human rights, security and development priorities are balanced. The drivers of migration — climate change, conflict and crime — must be tackled through international cooperation, evidence-based policy making and grassroots engagement. Only through coordinated global, regional and local action can the impact of migration be effectively managed to ensure the dignity, safety and well-being of displaced populations worldwide.

# Session 8: Environmental, Climate Change, Gender Equality, and Social Inclusion

This session examines the intersection of environmental and climate change, gender equality, and social inclusion, highlighting how climate crises disproportionately impact marginalized communities, particularly women and gender minorities. It explores strategies for fostering resilience, equity, and inclusive policies in climate adaptation and migration governance.

## 8.1 Research and Development for Society on Regional Dialogue Supporting Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Climate Action Planning

*Thai Representative to the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC)*

The speaker presented the research project "Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Climate Action Planning in ASEAN," which analyses how gender considerations and principles of social inclusion are integrated into climate policy across the region. The study aims to provide evidence-based insights into the barriers, opportunities and best practices for ensuring inclusive and equitable climate policies.

### Project Overview

A key objective of the study is to institutionalise the mainstreaming of women's and children's rights in ASEAN climate action plans. The study will be conducted in two phases, with the first phase covering Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, while the second phase will cover Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore.

### Goals

The study aims to promote cooperation between ASEAN member states and civil society organisations in the development of gender-responsive climate policies. A key focus is on promoting regional dialogue to remove barriers to inclusion, particularly for women, children, people with disabilities and indigenous communities. In addition, the project aims to raise awareness of the principles of gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) in climate policy, natural resource management and environmental programming. Another important component is strengthening advocacy skills to ensure that communities' narratives and experiences are represented in high-level policy-making platforms.

### Key Results

The study highlights both progress and challenges in integrating GESI principles into climate policy. Women's participation in climate policy-making has increased, but there are still significant challenges in achieving gender-balanced leadership and representation. Children and youth are playing a more active role in disaster risk reduction, but rural youth continue to face barriers to meaningful participation due to economic and infrastructure constraints. For persons with disabilities, progress has been largely limited to disaster risk reduction, while efforts towards accessibility and inclusion more broadly remain

insufficient. Recognition of indigenous peoples' rights varies widely across ASEAN, with the Philippines leading the way in recognising indigenous peoples' rights to land and the environment.

#### Obstacles to GESI integration

Several structural and systemic barriers continue to hinder the effective inclusion of GESI in climate action planning. One of the most pressing challenges is the lack of disaggregated data, which limits the ability to assess the specific vulnerabilities of different social groups. In addition, low stakeholder awareness and insufficient technical expertise on GESI hinder progress. Financial constraints are also a major hurdle, as only limited funding is available for gender-sensitive climate initiatives. Policy priorities in many ASEAN countries continue to be focussed on economic growth rather than inclusivity, resulting in policies that are not aligned with GESI principles. In addition, there is still some resistance to GESI in some areas, as it is often perceived as an externally imposed agenda rather than an essential component of sustainable development.

### Opportunities and Good Practices

Despite these challenges, the study identifies several opportunities and best practices that can support the integration of GESI into climate governance. The use of technology, including social media and big data analytics, has facilitated cross-border collaboration and community engagement. Civil society networks have also proven helpful in strengthening advocacy efforts and ensuring that marginalised voices are included in climate discussions. In addition, data-driven approaches combined with cultural and local knowledge have significantly improved the effectiveness of climate change initiatives and made them more relevant to the realities of vulnerable populations.

### Recommendations

To advance GESI-appropriate climate policy, the study offers targeted recommendations for policy makers and civil society actors. Policy makers should prioritise inter-agency coordination and ensure that GESI focal points are established in all government agencies to promote cross-sectoral cooperation. The introduction of GESI-compliant budgeting is also important to provide adequate resources for inclusive climate initiatives. In addition, accessible communication strategies need to be implemented to ensure that climate information reaches all stakeholders, including those with limited literacy or no digital access. For civil society organisations, the use of social media platforms and advocacy campaigns can be an effective way to raise awareness of GESI and mobilise public support for inclusive climate policies. Strengthening knowledge-sharing platforms and developing creative, participatory approaches can help to engage marginalised groups more effectively. Finally, investing in gender-specific tools and community-led initiatives will ensure that climate policy is both inclusive and sustainable.

### Conclusion

The research highlights the urgent need for ASEAN member states to integrate gender equality and social inclusion into climate action planning. While progress has been made, significant gaps remain, particularly in data availability, financing and political commitment. Strengthening regional collaboration, fostering multi-stakeholder engagement and ensuring marginalised voices are heard will be critical to advancing a more inclusive and sustainable climate governance framework in the region. With data-driven, locally-embedded and community-orientated approaches, ASEAN can create climate policies that are not only effective, but also equitable and fair.

## 8.2 Case Study: Climate Change, Migration, and Inclusion in the Upper Kok River Basin

**Speaker:** Stefano Zenobi

*Research Associate, Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)*

### Background

Stefano Zenobi presented his research on the complicated relationship between climate change, migration and inclusion in the Upper Kok River Basin, a geographically and culturally significant area where more than ten indigenous groups live. These communities rely on shared resources within a small sub-district, but face growing environmental and socio-political challenges that threaten their livelihoods, cultural practices and overall resilience.

The Upper Kok River Basin is increasingly vulnerable to environmental degradation and the effects of climate change, which are undermining traditional ways of life. Climate-related stressors such as deforestation, changing rainfall patterns and soil erosion have affected agriculture and water resources and increased pressure on the economy and food security. At the same time, social and political challenges such as statelessness, lack of recognition of customary land and inadequate access to public services exacerbate the marginalisation of the indigenous population. In addition, drug trafficking and illegal economic activities continue to be a problem that exacerbates the vulnerabilities in an already fragile region.

### Research Focus

The study seeks to understand the extent to which climate change affects migration and to identify the key variables that influence migration decisions in the region. A central focus is whether women, stateless people and indigenous peoples are disproportionately affected and how they develop coping mechanisms to deal with these overlapping challenges. In addition, the research examines the role of environmental remediation and community-led governance as adaptation strategies to mitigate displacement and strengthen resilience.

### Preliminary Key Findings

One of the key findings is that climate change and environmental degradation have a significant impact on local communities. However, many residents find it difficult to distinguish between climate change and general environmental degradation, leading to ambiguity in assigning responsibility for ecological decline. Nevertheless, coping strategies remain largely unchanged as communities continue their traditional practices of resource management and adaptation.

Statelessness has proven to be a crucial factor that increases vulnerability, as stateless people are severely restricted in their mobility and migration options. Without legal recognition or access to formal identity documents, many are unable to relocate in response to environmental pressures, forcing them to endure deteriorating conditions without the ability to seek alternative livelihoods elsewhere.

Despite these adversities, the community has played a crucial role in efforts to adapt to climate change. Local groups have implemented restoration projects that focus on water and forest management in an attempt to revitalise ecosystems and strengthen environmental resilience. These initiatives have led to

positive results at the local level. However, they remain fragmented and not fully integrated into broader regional planning, leaving gaps in long-term sustainability.

The region's vulnerability to climate disasters was underlined by a severe flooding event between August and September 2024, which had devastating consequences for the communities in the Upper Kok River Basin. Satellite images from the aftermath showed that the forests in the Myanmar part of the river are severely degraded, highlighting the transboundary nature of the environmental problems. The floods highlighted critical weaknesses in disaster preparedness and response mechanisms, emphasising the need for greater regional cooperation on climate adaptation strategies.

## Conclusion

Zenobi's research emphasises the urgent need for a holistic and inclusive approach to addressing climate-induced migration in the Upper Kok River Basin. Indigenous communities, particularly stateless people and women, are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation but have limited options for formal support or mobility. Strengthening integrated planning and regional cooperation is essential to improve adaptive capacity, secure land rights and ensure that climate action is both equitable and sustainable. As climate change continues to alter migration patterns in the region, community-led recovery efforts, legal recognition of vulnerable populations and coordinated cross-border environmental policies will be critical to mitigate long-term displacement risks and promote resilience.

## 8.3 Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Climate Action Planning in Southeast Asia: The State of Policies and Implementation

**Speaker:** *Cyndi Course*

*Research Associate, Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)*

Cyndi Course presented the research project "Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) in Climate Action Planning in Southeast Asia," which examines how gender, social justice and marginalised groups are integrated into national and regional climate policy in ASEAN. The study assesses the extent to which GESI principles are embedded in climate strategies, identifies key barriers and opportunities, and analyses policy mechanisms for mainstreaming inclusion in climate policy.

### Research Focus

The aim of the study is to assess the extent of GESI integration into national climate action plans, identify challenges in policy implementation and propose practical solutions to close existing gaps. It aims to examine structural inequalities within climate action planning and identify the most effective ways to ensure that marginalised groups — including women, youth, people with disabilities and indigenous communities — have equal access to climate-related resources and decision-making processes.

### Concepts and Methodology

The study conceptualises GESI as an intersectional framework that ensures gender equality, youth participation, inclusion of persons with disabilities and the rights of indigenous peoples in climate policy. In order to analyse policy trends, the study conducted file reviews of national climate policies, policy mapping and qualitative data collection through interviews and focus group discussions. The DSPIR

(Drivers, States, Pressures, Impacts, and Responses) framework was used to assess how climate policies address existing social inequalities and environmental pressures.

## Results

The study found that the integration of GESI is stronger at a strategic and conceptual level than in practical implementation. Of the 23 national climate policies analysed in the ASEAN countries, only 10 explicitly address structural inequalities, while only 7 policies explicitly recognise women, youth and indigenous peoples as important stakeholders in climate action. While the commitment to inclusivity is increasing, the translation of these commitments into actionable strategies remains uneven.

In practice, civil society organisations play a crucial role in integrating GESI, but gaps remain between political commitments and actual implementation. Greater progress has been made in efforts to include gender equality and youth engagement, while the inclusion of persons with disabilities and indigenous groups remains limited.

Progress varies greatly by group. Women's representation in decision-making has increased, but gender inclusion efforts often suffer from tokenism, donor-driven demands and an imbalance in leadership opportunities. Youth engagement in climate action is increasing, but rural and marginalised youth face challenges in representation and access to resources. The study found that people with disabilities have been more successfully integrated into disaster risk management strategies, but support for accessibility and participation remains insufficient. Indigenous communities are recognised in certain REDD+ programmes, but persistent legal exclusions and land rights violations hinder their full inclusion in climate governance.

## Barriers to GESI Integration

Several structural and institutional barriers hinder the effective involvement of GESI in climate action planning. One major challenge is the lack of disaggregated data, which limits the ability to develop targeted measures that address the specific needs of marginalised groups. In addition, limited financial resources, weak cross-sectoral coordination and communication barriers limit the scope of GESI-sensitive climate policy.

Resistance to GESI integration also stems from deep-rooted cultural norms and political priorities that prioritise economic growth over inclusion. In some cases, GESI is perceived as an externally imposed concept, leading to resistance from policy makers and local stakeholders who see it as incompatible with the national development agenda.

## Opportunities and Best Practises

Despite these challenges, some opportunities and best practices have emerged. Technology, including social media and big data analytics, is proving to be a valuable tool for data collection, stakeholder engagement and grassroots mobilisation. Strategic collaborations with civil society networks and international organisations have strengthened advocacy efforts and increased pressure on governments to pursue inclusive climate policies.

Effective entry points for GESI integration include aligning climate policy with global rights-based frameworks, using social movements to influence policy, and promoting incremental, localised

approaches to change. Building alliances with policy makers and community leaders has also proven helpful in overcoming resistance and fostering a bottom-up approach to integration.

## Recommendations and Way Forward

To accelerate progress, the study calls for a multi-level approach to institutionalising GESI in climate governance. Strengthening an inclusive policy framework at national, regional and local levels is crucial. In addition, participatory governance structures need to be institutionalised to ensure that women, youth and marginalised communities are actively involved in decision-making processes.

Capacity building efforts should be expanded to train policy makers, civil society actors and technical experts on best GESI practices and ensure that inclusion is embedded in climate adaptation and mitigation programmes. Governments should allocate resources specifically to GESI-relevant climate initiatives and increase financial and technical support for gender-transformative and socially inclusive solutions.

In addition, data accessibility and transparency must be improved to enable evidence-based decision-making that reflects the realities of those most affected by climate change. Public awareness campaigns and educational initiatives can challenge resistance to GESI policies and promote a more inclusive public discourse on climate action.

## Conclusion

The study emphasises the urgent need for ASEAN member states to adopt a comprehensive and intersectional approach to climate policy. While political commitment to gender equality and social inclusion has increased, challenges remain in translating these commitments into meaningful, well-funded and effectively implemented actions. By harnessing technological advancements, strengthening cross-sector partnerships and institutionalising participatory governance, Southeast Asia can develop climate policies that are both effective and equitable, ensuring that no community is left behind in the fight against climate change.

## 8.4 Mainstreaming GESI for Inclusive Climate Action Across ASEAN

**Speaker:** *Dr. Peeranan Towashiraporn*

*Director, Risk Analytics and Climate Services, Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC)*

Dr. Peeranan Towashiraporn presented the study "Improving the Resilience of Agriculture to Climate Change Risks in SAARC Countries" and emphasised the urgent need to mainstream gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) into climate action across ASEAN. The study highlights the increasing frequency and intensity of climate-related disasters and emphasises the urgent need for inclusive and data-driven responses.

## Climate Disasters in Asia: A Growing Threat

The presentation emphasised that Asia is disproportionately affected by disasters, making it one of the most climate-vulnerable regions in the world. The data showed that Asia and Africa have suffered the greatest losses from climate-related disasters, with a sharp increase in extreme weather events from 1901 to 2023. Comparisons between Africa, Asia, South America, North America, the Southwest Pacific and Europe show that rising temperatures and increasing disaster trends are alarming. In view of this development, adaptation strategies and integrative climate measures are more urgent than ever.

## SERVIR-Southeast Asia: A Regional Geodata Centre for Climate Resilience

One of the key initiatives to promote data-driven climate resilience in the region is SERVIR-Southeast Asia (SERVIR SEA), a partnership between USAID, NASA and the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC). SERVIR SEA pursues an impact-orientated, demand-driven approach that is geared towards long-term regional sustainability goals. It is aligned with USAID's regional development cooperation strategy, SERVIR's global strategic plan and ADPC's broader climate strategies.

The initiative focuses on five thematic priorities: Agriculture and Food Security, Water Security, Weather and Climate Resilience, Ecosystem and Carbon Management, and Air Quality and Health. These themes are interlinked and serve as pillars for the integration of GESI principles into climate governance and disaster risk reduction.

## Overarching Strategy for GESI in Climate Policy

To ensure that GESI is embedded in climate adaptation policy, SERVIR SEA is implementing a cross-cutting strategy centred around data accessibility, community empowerment, knowledge integration and policy influence.

The first pillar— - data - focuses on exposure and multidimensional vulnerability assessments and provides an interactive dashboard, known as SEA X-Ray, that summarises exposure and vulnerability data to support climate risk assessments.

The second pillar — ACCESS— - aims to empower communities through inclusive climate action. The findings from the stakeholder engagement workshops have been instrumental in shaping SERVIR SEA's Gender and Inclusive Development Action Plan (GIDAP), which ensures that marginalised communities — particularly women, indigenous groups and persons with disabilities — have a voice in climate-related decision-making. The third pillar —UNDERSTAND— emphasises the integration of indigenous and local knowledge into climate adaptation planning. This includes the mapping of traditional knowledge systems and the use of climate responses developed by communities to complement scientific data.

The fourth pillar — TAKE ACTION— - focuses on cooperation with local organisations on the ground. One example is the partnership with AIPP (Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact), IPF (Indigenous Peoples' Foundation) and the Highland Natural Conservation Group in Chomthong (HNCC) to develop a community-based climate adaptation plan. Through these joint efforts, 4,480 indigenous Karen people, including 2,200 women, have improved their climate change adaptation strategies, demonstrating the impact of community-led climate resilience initiatives.

## Recommendations and Key Results

To further integrate gender equality and social inclusion into climate governance, the study outlines key focus areas that need to be prioritised. These include creating inclusive platforms, raising awareness and ensuring equitable representation in climate-related decision-making processes. Practical measures are needed to address these issues, such as the establishment of a GESI Community of Practice (COP) to facilitate cross-sectoral learning, the development of capacity-building programmes for climate actors and improved access to gender-disaggregated data to inform policy decisions. In addition, targeted efforts must be made to improve women's access to resources and decision-making power in climate governance structures.

Expected outcomes of these actions include strengthening regional knowledge-sharing platforms, increasing multi-stakeholder investment, improving access to climate-related data and enhancing the technical capacity of policy makers, researchers and local communities.

## Conclusion

Dr. Peeranan Towashiraporn's presentation highlighted the urgent need to institutionalise GESI within ASEAN climate action. While some progress has been made in the integration of gender-responsive policies and the inclusion of indigenous peoples, major challenges remain, particularly in the availability of data, provision of finance and policy enforcement. Going forward, regional cooperation, multi-stakeholder partnerships and a strong emphasis on local, community-led climate adaptation strategies will be critical to ensure that ASEAN's response to climate change is inclusive, equitable and effective.

## 8.5 Revisiting National Adaptation Plans from a Climate Security Perspective: The Case of Sri Lanka/ACCSAP

**Speaker:** Dr. Sivapuram Venkata Rama Krishna Prabhakar  
*Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)*

Dr. Sivapuram Venkata Rama Krishna Prabhakar presented his study "Strengthening the Climate Security (CS) Outcomes of Adaptation Plans: Moving from Concept to Practice," which examines the evolving relationship between climate adaptation strategies and security concerns. The study examines how National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) can be restructured to improve climate security outcomes and how these efforts align with broader concepts of human security and national security.

### Paradigm Shift: From National Security to Climate Security

The study contextualises climate security within a broader security paradigm and shows how climate change adaptation must go beyond environmental concerns to address human and national security challenges. Traditionally, security has been viewed through a national and geopolitical lens, focussing on military threats, territorial integrity and economic stability. However, the current global climate crisis calls for a new security paradigm — one that incorporates climate security as a fundamental component of human security. The increasing frequency of climate-related disasters, resource conflicts and displacement demonstrates the urgent need to integrate security considerations into adaptation planning.

## Central Research Questions

The study seeks to understand the synergies and co-benefits that arise when climate change adaptation strategies are harmonised with climate security objectives. It analyses which specific adaptation measures contribute to strengthening climate security and how these measures can be effectively coordinated between different stakeholders. By identifying these linkages, the research aims to provide a framework for improving security outcomes through well-structured adaptation plans.

## Data Collection and Community Engagement

Field research for the study was conducted in Sri Lanka and focussed on community-based insights on climate adaptation and security risks. Focus group discussions were conducted in Wariyapola (Kurunegala, North Western Province) and Yatinantota, Dombepola (Kegalle District, Sabaragamuwa). These interviews provided valuable insights into how local people experience climate-related vulnerabilities and how existing adaptation plans intersect with their security concerns. The study emphasises the importance of incorporating local knowledge and community experiences into national-level policy frameworks to ensure that adaptation strategies are relevant, effective and inclusive.

## Findings and Policy Implications

The findings emphasise the need for National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) to explicitly address climate security concerns. While NAPs currently focus on climate resilience and sustainable development, they do not directly address peace and security issues. However, the study suggests that NAPs have significant secondary and tertiary impacts on security, particularly in regions prone to climate-related resource conflicts, displacement and economic instability.

To increase the effectiveness of NAPs, the study suggests identifying synergies between climate adaptation and security frameworks. This would involve developing concrete links between adaptation measures and security objectives at the local level. Strengthening institutional cooperation between climate bodies, security authorities and humanitarian organisations could provide a more integrated approach to addressing climate-related risks.

Furthermore, the study emphasises that NAPs need to include practical strategies that take into account local security dynamics. By focusing on how climate adaptation measures change security perspectives at the community level, policy makers can design interventions that not only strengthen resilience but also reduce vulnerability to conflict and displacement.

## Conclusion

Dr. Prabhakar's research highlights the growing urgency of integrating climate security into national and regional adaptation planning. As climate change continues to exacerbate socio-political and economic vulnerabilities, NAPs need to evolve to address security challenges more comprehensively. In the future, cooperation between governments, civil society and local communities will be crucial to ensure that adaptation strategies not only increase resilience to climate change, but also contribute to long-term peace and security.

## 8.6 Rural Communities After the Adoption of the UNDROP

**Speaker:** Henry Thomas Simarmata Apintlaw

*Professor at the Research Center, Faculty of Law, Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Sea Nomads Contact Group (SNCG)*

Professor Henry Thomas Simarmata Apintlaw presented his study on "Rural Communities after the Adoption of UNDROP (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas)," focusing on the mobility of people, rural workers, the consequences of migration, the increased impact of climate change and different migration patterns. The study shows that migration in rural areas is closely intertwined with structural inequalities, environmental changes and economic changes, making the protection of rural communities increasingly urgent.

### Understanding Migration in Rural Communities

Migration in rural areas is not a monolithic phenomenon, but occurs in various forms. The study distinguishes migration based on patterns of movement, highlighting categories such as nomadic and semi-nomadic migration, as well as the specific migration patterns of rural labourers. These distinctions are important to understand the varying degrees of precarity and mobility of rural populations, as well as the broader socio-economic and environmental factors that drive their displacement.

The study also highlights that out-migration in rural communities is often forced rather than voluntary and is driven by a combination of tenure insecurity, loss of biodiversity, discrimination, health concerns and lack of clean drinking water. These issues have worsened in 2023 and 2024 as rural populations increasingly face marginalisation, resource depletion and climate-induced displacement. The confluence of land insecurity and environmental degradation exacerbates migratory pressures and leaves many communities in legal and economic limbo as they face an uncertain future.

### Climate Change and the Struggle for Control of Resources

Climate change is a major factor exacerbating rural exodus and intensifying competition for natural resources and land rights. As governments and corporations accelerate resource extraction and the commercialisation of energy transition projects, rural communities are coming into direct conflict with industry interests. This competition has triggered horizontal conflicts in which local communities struggle to protect their land, biodiversity and cultural heritage against external pressures. The study highlights the rapidly occurring man-made environmental changes where land degradation, deforestation and ecosystem disruption are driving rural populations further into migration.

### Agricultural Workers and the Commercialization of Biodiversity

One of the critical aspects of rural depopulation is the role of agricultural labourers in seed multiplication and biodiversity conservation. With the expansion of global agribusiness, many traditional seed varieties and biodiversity resources are being absorbed into commercial networks, often without recognising the intellectual property rights and knowledge contributions of rural communities. This development has led to a growing dependence on commercial agricultural inputs, further displacing farmers from their traditional role as custodians of biodiversity. The study also shows how the climate-induced migration of rural labour has changed the rural economy and altered the dynamics of food production and land use in the affected regions.

## Conclusion

The study highlights that migration in rural communities is characterised by a complex interplay of environmental, economic and political factors. With the adoption of UNDROP, a legal and policy framework for recognising the rights of rural populations has been established, but implementation remains uneven. Greater protection of land rights, sustainable resource management and policies that recognise the contribution of rural people to biodiversity conservation are urgently needed to effectively protect rural communities. In addition, climate change adaptation strategies need to be developed with the active participation of rural communities to prevent further displacement and marginalisation. As the pressures of climate change, resource extraction and commercial agriculture increase, rural communities need to be positioned as key actors in environmental and migration policies to ensure that their rights and livelihoods are protected.

## Session 9: Migration Rights, Youth, and Economic Empowerment

This session explores the intersection of migration rights, youth, and economic empowerment, highlighting how young migrants navigate legal frameworks, labor markets, and social mobility. It examines policies and initiatives that foster economic inclusion, skills development, and rights protection for migrant youth in a globalized economy.

### 9.1 Migration, Business, and Human Rights in Thailand

**Speaker:** Jitradee Singhakowin  
*National Project Officer, IOM Thailand*

Jitradee Singhakowin presented an in-depth analysis of the intersection of migration, business and human rights in Thailand. She highlighted the challenges faced by migrant workers and the impact of international human rights standards on businesses operating in the country. The discussion focused on Thailand's dependence on migrant workers, the risks of forced labour and the legal and policy gaps that hinder the protection of migrant workers' rights.

Thailand is currently home to around 3 million migrant workers from neighbouring countries, who make up more than 10% of the country's labour force and account for up to 80 of the workforce in certain sectors such as manufacturing, fishing and construction. Despite their crucial role in the Thai economy, these workers remain at high risk of exploitation. Migrant workers in Thailand are three times more likely to be affected by forced labour than local workers. Many of them are subjected to unfair wages, excessive working hours and exploitative recruitment practices. The scale of forced labour in the region is alarming: more than 15.1 million victims have been identified in the Asia-Pacific region alone, many of whom work in the private sector. This emphasises the urgent need for stronger legal protection and corporate accountability.

The presentation also examined Thailand's approach to business and human rights, particularly in relation to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). While Thailand has made a political commitment to responsible business conduct, there remains a significant gap in legislation requiring human rights due diligence (HRDD) for companies operating in the country. Without clear legal requirements, many companies remain unable to ensure ethical labour practices, leaving migrant

workers exposed to labour exploitation, wage theft and precarious employment conditions. Strengthening the HRDD framework and integrating human rights principles into corporate governance is crucial to bring the Thai migration and business ecosystem in line with global human rights standards.

To address these challenges, the speaker emphasised the need for concrete measures to improve the protection of migrant workers' rights in Thailand's business and labour practices. These measures should include increased regulatory oversight, ethical recruitment policies, stronger enforcement of labour laws and improved access to grievance mechanisms for migrant workers. The role of multinational companies, civil society organisations and international organisations was also highlighted as crucial in advocating for fair labour practices and promoting ethical supply chains.

Finally, the discussion called for a more comprehensive approach to human rights and corporate accountability, ensuring that migrant workers are not only recognised as essential contributors to the Thai economy, but also protected according to the principles of fair labour and human dignity. Aligning Thailand's migration policies with international human rights frameworks and corporate accountability guidelines will be instrumental in creating a fairer and more equitable labour environment for all workers, regardless of their nationality or immigration status.

## 9.2 Digital Economy and the Future of Work: Empowering Migrant Workers and Refugees through the Gig Economy

**Speaker:** Akkanat Wantanasombut  
*Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University*

Akkanat Wantanasombut examined the transformative impact of the digital economy on labour markets, highlighting both the opportunities and challenges for migrant workers and refugees. As digital platforms become increasingly influential in job placement, they are changing the traditional nature of employment, offering flexibility and new working arrangements through the gig economy. However, this change also brings with it legal, economic and social issues that require robust legal frameworks and policies to ensure fairness and equity.

### The Gig Economy: Opportunities and Emerging Labour Models

The gig economy can be broadly categorised into two types: geographically tied work and crowd work. Geographically bound gig work requires physical presence in a specific location, such as delivery services, housework and cleaning services. One notable example is UP&GO, a co-operative platform that enables cleaners to collectively own and manage their services, ensuring greater control over their wages, working conditions and labour rights. This model provides a worker-run alternative to traditional gig platforms and emphasises collective ownership and fair pay.

In contrast, crowd work is location-independent and allows workers to complete tasks remotely, which often include content creation, data management, translation services and programming. Platforms such as Tarjimly offer migrants and refugees the opportunity to work as translators, requiring basic training before they can earn an income. Similarly, Gaza Sky Geeks, a digital training programme based in Gaza, teaches young people programming and coding skills, enabling them to participate in the global digital economy. These initiatives demonstrate the potential of technology for the economic inclusion of marginalised communities and provide employment opportunities in conflict-affected and displaced areas.

## The Digital Economy as an Equaliser for Marginalised Communities

The digital economy has significant potential to empower displaced and migrant workers by overcoming geographical, legal and institutional barriers that traditionally exclude them from formal employment. Digital platforms remove many of the structural barriers associated with physical mobility, legal documentation and labour market restrictions, enabling migrants, asylum seekers and refugees to pursue paid work. This can increase financial security, promote social inclusion and reduce dependence on humanitarian aid. However, while these platforms open up new pathways to employment, they also bring significant risks for workers who lack legal protection, stable wages and social benefits.

## Challenges and Concerns in the Gig Economy

Despite its benefits, the gig economy also brings with it critical challenges that urgently need to be addressed. One of the most pressing issues is the lack of legal and regulatory protection for gig workers, many of whom work in informal or unregulated sectors. This makes them vulnerable to wage exploitation, unstable working conditions and the lack of social protection such as health insurance, pensions and the enforcement of labour rights.

Economic concerns are another important issue, as many migrant workers have difficulties accessing financial services. Without proper financial inclusion mechanisms, such as access to bank accounts, digital payment systems and credit facilities, many gig workers remain trapped in a precarious economic situation. Furthermore, the intersection of gender and vulnerability in digital workspaces continues to be a cause for concern. Women in the gig economy often face additional challenges in terms of unequal pay, gender discrimination and unsafe working conditions. These inequalities are even more pronounced for refugee women. They often face an increased risk of exploitation, lack of legal documentation and caring responsibilities that limit their employment opportunities.

## The Need for Inclusive Strategies and Protective Measures

As the digital economy continues to transform the labour market, proactive policies and regulatory frameworks are essential to protect workers' rights and promote fair labour standards. Governments, international organisations and technology companies must work together to develop policies that ensure economic security, social protection and equitable access to digital work opportunities. Key measures should include: Regulatory measures to formalise gig work and extend legal protections to platform workers. Stronger financial inclusion mechanisms to ensure migrants and refugees have access to digital banking, fair wages and financial literacy programmes. Gender-sensitive policies that remove barriers to women's participation in the digital economy and protect them from exploitation. Digital skills training programmes tailored to displaced and migrant workers so they can compete in the global digital labour market.

## Conclusion

The digital economy is transforming the future of work and creating new opportunities for marginalised communities, including migrant workers and refugees. While gig platforms can enable greater economic inclusion, they also pose significant risks in terms of labour rights, financial security and gender inequalities. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive policy interventions, regulatory frameworks and multi-stakeholder collaboration. If managed effectively, the digital economy has the

potential to become a powerful tool for positive social and economic change, enabling displaced people to access decent employment, achieve financial independence and build sustainable livelihoods.

## 9.3 The Analysis of the Transformation of Germany's Immigration Policy: Neglecting Migration from ASEAN to Germany

**Speaker:** *Colinna Uy*  
*Trade Policy Advisory Board*

An in-depth analysis of the evolving immigration policy in Germany was presented, examining the changes in migration management, economic policy and the integration of foreign workers. Her research critically addresses Germany's historical reluctance to embrace immigration despite economic imperatives, the subsequent policy changes that have shaped the modern migration framework, and the potential of ASEAN migration to Germany — a largely overlooked aspect of migration policy discourse.

### Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

The study draws on functionalism and labour migration theory as a basis for understanding how German immigration policy has changed over time in response to economic and demographic pressures. It integrates both qualitative and quantitative research methods, drawing on academic think tanks, international organisations and official statistics from German and EU reports. By combining a historical analysis of policy with current migration data, the study presents a comprehensive assessment of German immigration trends and the socio-economic impact of evolving attitudes towards migration.

### Historical Development of German Immigration Policy

The study traces the key phases of change in German immigration policy, beginning with the post-Cold War period, which reshaped the demographic landscape and labour market dynamics in Germany. It also examines the economic miracle of the 1950s and 1960s, a period in which Germany actively recruited foreign workers, primarily from southern Europe and Turkey, as part of the guest worker programme to meet the demands of rapid industrial expansion.

Despite the economic benefits of labour migration, Germany took a restrictive approach to long-term immigration and resisted policies that encouraged permanent settlement and integration. This reluctance continued until the Migration Act of 2005, which marked a significant policy shift towards a regulated labour migration and integration framework. More recently, the new Skilled Labour Immigration Act aims to attract highly skilled workers from non-EU countries, demonstrating that Germany increasingly sees migration as an economic necessity rather than a temporary solution. Yet despite this progress, the country continues to struggle with political resistance, public scepticism and bureaucratic hurdles that limit the full potential of labour migration.

### The Neglect of Migration from ASEAN to Germany

A major gap in German immigration policy is the lack of consideration given to migration from ASEAN countries, a region with a skilled and diverse labour force that could make an important contribution to Germany's economic needs. In contrast to migration flows from Southern and Eastern Europe, ASEAN

migrants have not been prioritised in Germany's labour integration strategies, despite the region's growing importance in global economic networks.

The study highlights that ASEAN migrant workers have untapped potential in sectors with critical labour shortages, including healthcare, engineering, information technology and skilled trades. Strengthening migration relations between Germany and ASEAN countries could bring mutual economic benefits by filling the gaps in the German labour market while providing ASEAN workers with access to stable jobs and career development opportunities.

## Policy Implications and Future Prospects

To reap the full economic and social benefits of a more inclusive migration strategy, Germany needs to rethink its approach to skilled migration and expand its engagement with ASEAN labour markets. This requires structural policy adjustments, such as: Reducing bureaucratic hurdles and delays in visa processing for skilled workers from ASEAN countries. Improving recruitment programmes tailored to ASEAN professionals, especially in sectors with acute labour shortages. Strengthen bilateral labour agreements and vocational training partnerships between Germany and ASEAN countries. Promote cultural and language integration programmes to ensure a smoother transition for ASEAN migrants.

## Conclusion

The study highlights that German migration policy has evolved considerably over the decades, but that it remains a challenge to make full use of migration as a tool for economic growth and labour market stability. While the country has made progress in recognising the value of skilled migration, it has largely focused on European and selected non-EU countries, overlooking ASEAN migration. Addressing this gap could provide Germany with a new, sustainable source of labour while fostering deeper economic ties with ASEAN. As Germany faces an ageing workforce and increasing demand for labour, expanding its migration strategy to ASEAN countries could be an important step in ensuring the long-term economic resilience and sustainability of its workforce.

## 9.4 Overview of Gender-Responsive Labor Migration Governance

**Speaker:** Nansiri Lamsuk

*Programme Specialist - Migration, UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific*

An in-depth analysis of the gendered governance of labour migration was presented, highlighting the need for a policy and framework that takes into account the different experiences and vulnerabilities of migrant workers across gender lines. She emphasised how migration is influenced by a complex interplay of economic, social and political factors that affect both the motivations for migration and the barriers migrants face in accessing safe and regular migration routes.

A major problem with labour migration is the high risk of violence, forced labour and human trafficking, especially for women and marginalised groups. For example, female labour migrants are disproportionately affected by exploitative recruitment practices, wage discrimination and precarious working conditions. In light of these facts, it is crucial that migration policies and legal frameworks adopt a gender-sensitive approach that ensures that the rights of all migrants, regardless of their gender, are protected at every stage of the migration cycle.

## Understanding Migration Governance and Gender-Sensitive Approaches

The speaker defined migration governance as the integration of legal norms, policy frameworks, cultural traditions and institutional structures to manage migration in an organised and rights-based manner. However, without a gender-responsive approach, migration governance can reinforce systemic inequalities that leave women and other vulnerable groups without adequate protection or opportunities for safe mobility. A gender-just migration policy therefore goes beyond recognising gender inequalities and seeks to actively address them by promoting equality, empowerment and inclusive measures. This means developing labour migration policies that are tailored to the needs of different genders and ensure access to decent work, protection from abuse and fair wages. In addition, governments, international organisations and employers must enact gender-sensitive labour laws, support migrant women in leadership positions and establish strong mechanisms to report and combat gender-based discrimination and violence in the workplace.

### Conclusion

The presentation emphasised the urgent need for migration policy frameworks to go beyond neutrality and actively incorporate a gender perspective. Ensuring equality and empowerment in labour migration policies is critical not only to protect migrant workers from exploitation, but also to promote economic growth and social cohesion in both countries of origin and destination. As migration continues to shape global labour markets, gender-responsive policies will be crucial to ensure that all migrants, regardless of their gender, can travel, work and live in dignity and safety.

## 9.5 Struggling for Belonging: The Urban Adaptation of Suri Youth in Mizan Teferi, Ethiopia

**Speaker:** *Gabriel Seubboon Chaiyasit*  
*UNICEF Regional Office*

The paper “Struggling for Belonging: The Urban Adaptation of Suri Youth in Mizan Teferi, Ethiopia,” was presented, exploring the challenges and experiences of change among Suri youth as they migrate from their indigenous homeland in southwestern Ethiopia to the urban environment of Mizan Teferi. The study explores the intersection of migration, cultural adaptation and identity formation and highlights the difficulties these youth face in transitioning from rural, community-based traditions to an unfamiliar urban environment.

The research shows that Suri youth face significant cultural and socioeconomic obstacles in their adaptation process, including acculturation stress, identity conflict, and limited access to resources. Urban migration places them in a complex socio-political landscape where traditional cultural values often clash with modern urban norms. This tension between cultural preservation and adaptation is at the centre of their experiences as they struggle to preserve their heritage while integrating into a rapidly changing urban society. The study suggests that a balanced approach— that allows Suri youth to preserve their cultural identity while engaging in urban life is the most effective strategy to promote both cultural preservation and social integration.

## Push and Pull Factors for Migration

Several push and pull factors contribute to the migration of young Suri from their rural homes to Mizan Teferi. Political instability, inter-ethnic conflicts and economic difficulties are among the main reasons that force them to leave. Many migrate in search of better educational and employment opportunities and see urban migration as a path to greater economic and social stability. However, their journey often comes with numerous cultural and psychological challenges, including discrimination, social alienation and the pressure to adapt to the urban lifestyle. These struggles increase their vulnerability and sense of displacement, making it difficult for them to develop a sense of belonging in their new environment.

## Strategies for Cultural Preservation and Social Integration

To overcome these challenges, the young Suri have developed various initiatives aimed at cultural preservation and social integration. They have launched cultural heritage programmes and cultural exchange workshops that serve as platforms to introduce younger generations to Suri traditions, language and rituals, while promoting cultural pride and awareness in the city. They have also launched youth-led social integration initiatives, including mentorship programmes, youth clubs and stress counselling services that provide them with emotional and psychological support to help them cope with the difficulties of adapting to the city. These programmes not only strengthen community bonds among Suri migrants, but also promote intercultural engagement with the wider population of Mizan Teferi, fostering mutual understanding and reducing social exclusion.

## Conclusion

The study highlights the complex and multi-layered nature of migration, identity and adaptation among young Suri in Ethiopia. Their journey reflects the broader challenges faced by indigenous and rural migrant communities worldwide as they struggle to preserve their cultural heritage while seeking opportunities in urban centres. While migration offers potential benefits in terms of education and employment, it also presents significant cultural and psychological hurdles. To ensure successful adaptation, a dual approach is required that not only facilitates economic and social integration, but also preserves cultural identity. The study ultimately argues for more inclusive urban policies that recognise the unique experiences of indigenous migrants and support their efforts to build a sense of belonging while preserving their rich cultural traditions.

## 9.6 Situation of Children Affected by Migration in ASEAN

**Speaker:** Venera Urbaeva

*Regional Programme Specialist for Migration, UNICEF EAPRO*

The presentation focused on the situation of children in ASEAN who have been displaced or migrated, emphasising the child protection risks they face, the barriers to accessing essential services and the key policy recommendations to improve their well-being. The discussion emphasised the scale of child migration in the region, the challenges associated with displacement, internal migration and children left behind, and the need for more comprehensive policies to protect their rights.

## Key Statistics and Migration Trends of Children in ASEAN

The scale of child migration in the ASEAN region is significant and growing. According to recent data, two out of five international child migrants worldwide live in the Asia-Pacific region. In 2020 alone, ASEAN

recorded 1.27 million international child migrants, over 90 per cent of whom migrated within the region. Many of these migration cases take place through irregular routes due to complex, costly and often exclusionary migration procedures. This leaves children vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking and limited access to legal protection.

Children who are forcibly relocated are among the most vulnerable, particularly in countries such as Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, which host large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers. In these displaced communities, children make up 25 to 40 per cent of the population. They are exposed to serious protection risks, have no access to education and inadequate healthcare. The crisis in Myanmar remains one of the main causes of forced displacement and contributes to a significant proportion of refugees and asylum-seeking children in the region.

Another group severely affected by migration are the children left behind by migrating parents. Due to limited opportunities for family migration, many children remain in their home countries while one or both parents migrate for work. While remittances from migrant parents can supplement household income, they often cannot compensate for the emotional and developmental challenges that a prolonged parental absence brings. The lack of stable care structures can lead to psychosocial problems, disrupted education and increased vulnerability to exploitation.

Internal migration is also a widespread phenomenon in ASEAN countries, with a large proportion of young migrants moving within their countries in search of economic opportunities. In some areas, the number of internal migrants with children is even higher than that of international migrants. Nevertheless, they often remain invisible in the political debate because they lack the necessary protection and support systems.

## **Policy Recommendations for the Protection of Migrants and Displaced Children**

Addressing these urgent challenges requires an approach that combines the efforts of governments, civil society organisations and the private sector. Strengthening the legal framework is an important first step to ensure that the protection of children's rights is enshrined in national migration and labour laws. This requires harmonisation of policies across ASEAN member states to promote safe and legal migration pathways for children and their families.

Building the capacity of social service providers, law enforcement agencies and border officials is equally important to ensure that migrant and displaced children receive adequate protection, legal assistance and psychosocial support. In addition, improving data collection and research is critical to developing evidence-based policies that reflect the realities of child migration. The current gaps in migration data often lead to blind spots in policy, meaning that many vulnerable children do not receive the support they need. The business sector also plays a crucial role in promoting child protection in migration policy. If private sector actors adopt ethical labour practices, strengthen corporate social responsibility programmes and support migrant families through childcare facilities and workplace policies, this can contribute to safer migration outcomes for children.

## **Empowering Children as Agents of Change**

Beyond policy reforms, it is important to recognise children as active participants in shaping their future. Empowering migrant and displaced children through education, vocational training and youth leadership

initiatives can help them better cope with the challenges of migration. Providing platforms that allow children to voice their experiences and influence policy decisions is an important step towards a more inclusive migration policy in ASEAN.

## **Conclusion**

The presentation highlighted the urgent need for ASEAN countries to prioritise the protection and well-being of children affected by migration. Whether they are cross-border migrants, internally displaced persons or children left behind by migrating parents, these children are highly vulnerable and require coordinated policy action. By strengthening legal protection, improving accessibility to services, engaging the private sector and empowering children through education and participation, ASEAN can create a more humane and rights-based migration framework that ensures no child is left behind.

# Day 3:

## Special Session:

### Connectivity: Conflict, Crime, Care, and Climate – Exploring Shared Responsibilities for Migration in the Modern Era

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December 19, 2024

**At L Room, Social Innovation Hub, Visid Prachuabmoh Building,  
Chulalongkorn University**

This theme examines the interconnected forces of conflict, crime, care, and climate in shaping migration patterns and governance. It explores how states, institutions, and communities share responsibilities in addressing migration challenges amid rising geopolitical tensions, environmental crises, and humanitarian needs.

#### Brainstorm Session

##### Connectivity

Migration symbolises the essence of connectivity. It bridges borders, cultures and economies in our globalised world and creates lasting social, economic and political ties that reshape the regions of origin and destination. In this context, it is very important to recognise the connections between the various factors and aspects of migration connectivity, including economics, sociology, geography, history, political science, demography, archaeology and genetics.

## Organisational Connectivity

Organisations that work intensively on migration issues, such as the IOM, ILO, UNHCR and other UN agencies, INGOs and CSOs, do not work closely with academic institutions. There are significant gaps in the areas of migration research.

### Nexus between research and policy

Migration is an opportunity for human security, human development and prosperity. Yet, in reality, we do not see much on how migration research can be better integrated into global policy-making processes. Collecting and analysing data is very important, but apart from the data produced by the CIA, we do not see much from the government sector. Therefore, it is crucial to explore what mechanisms can bridge the gap between academic migration research and real-time policy responses in times of crisis. There is also a need to identify how interdisciplinary research can strengthen migration management frameworks and the Global Compact for Migration (GCM).

## Institutional Coordination

When considering which global organisations should be central to promoting transnational research-policy dialogue on migration, it is important to consider how international organisations such as the IOM, UNHCR and the World Bank can better coordinate to minimise duplication of initiatives. It is also important to recognise the role that regional organisations such as ASEAN, the EU and the AU can play in aligning migration research agendas with the global migration framework. In terms of institutional coordination, it is very important to identify the extent to which the ACWC can play a role and how we can advance the action plans under the ACWC by coordinating with agencies that carry out their work on the protection of women and children.

## Global Compact and Governance

States and international organisations can work together to create a common database to track progress towards GCM goals, establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that migration research influences GCM implementation beyond national, interest-driven policies, and integrate global research consortia into migration governance through targeted funding and institutional partnerships.

## Migration Policy and Advocacy

Migrant organisations and non-governmental organisations can work with academic researchers to influence migration policy formulation. At the same time, private sector actors, such as technology companies, should play an important role in collecting, analysing and disseminating migration data. In addition, migration research can improve long-term development policies in countries of origin and host countries.

Sometimes academic terms are high-level conceptual frameworks that are very difficult for practitioners, especially those from civil society organisations and NGOs, to understand and put into practice. Moreover, academic research is high-level research that hardly reflects the perspective and findings on the ground. There is a research gap between practitioners from CSOs/NGOs and researchers from academic institutions.

### *Conflict and Migration*

- Armed conflict
- Civil unrest
- Socio-political conflict
- Socio-economic tension
- Well-founded fear of persecution
- Armed conflict
- Tribal and ethnic conflict

All forms of human rights violation and violence such as domestic violence and gender-based violence, genital mutilation, forced marriage, femicide, women and children associated with armed conflict (child soldiers and supporters for armed groups) children and women affected by armed conflict

### **Crime and Migration**

- Trafficking, smuggling, and transnational organized crime (human smuggling, human trafficking, forced criminality and cyber-crime)

### **Care and Migration**

- Domestic workers and caregivers

### **Climate and Migration**

- Climate change
- Natural disaster
- Forced displacement and migration due to development projects (Devoy mega project, Dam project, hydro power project, railway, speed trains).

### **Plenary Discussion**

During the plenary session, participants discussed conflict and migration, climate change and migration in ASEAN, the integration of disasters and climate change, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and intersectional approaches to migration, as well as cooperation with the private sector.

In addition to the issue of environmental rights, we also need to work with the business sector to protect our environment. Cross-border environmental and migration issues are very important and this topic should be included in the business part. The development of the ASEAN Working Group on Environmental Framework should be promoted to support the relevant ASEAN declarations. In this context, it is also necessary to analyse what is the main cause of climate change.

Important steps were also proposed. Firstly, a listing of documents on related issues related to migration and connectivity should be started, including climate change, armed conflict and political tensions, transnational crime and care economy with SDGs and intersectional approaches in the ASEAN context. Secondly, it should focus on the selected geographical areas with specific issues and finally, it needs to identify potential collaboration with related institutions to strengthen coordination with key stakeholders, including NGOs/CSOs, government sectors, private sectors, international development organisations and local communities.

## Key insights from Dr. Ratchada Jayagupta, Dr. Ahsan Ullah, Dr. Omar Khalid, and Mr. Wanchai Roujanavong

**Connectivity:** *Conflict, Crime, Care, and Climate – Exploring Shared Responsibilities for Migration in the Modern Era*

### Introduction

Migration has become one of the defining forces of modernity, characterised by interlinked global challenges such as armed conflict, organised crime, environmental change and the dynamics of care work. The increasing complexity of migration is reflected in the dizzying numbers: By 2022, more than 100 million people worldwide will have been forcibly displaced (UNHCR, 2022), making it imperative to analyse migration not as an isolated phenomenon but as a multidimensional problem.

Global migration patterns today are driven by overlapping crises. Geopolitical instability fuels displacement, climate change exacerbates vulnerability, and transnational organised crime networks exploit migration flows for human trafficking and forced labour. Meanwhile, the demand for carers is increasing due to demographic shifts in the ageing population, adding another layer to the governance of migration. These factors create a feedback loop that requires innovative, co-operative and sustainable policy solutions.

Regional organisations such as ASEAN and global frameworks such as the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime play an important role in shaping migration policies and strengthening the resilience of affected populations (UNODC, 2021). At the same time, localised adaptation strategies— - from basic protection programmes for displaced people to sustainable climate adaptation models— - show innovative ways to tackle these complex challenges. The challenge now is to manage migration in a way that prioritises sustainability, inclusivity and collective responsibility.

### Role of Connectivity in the Sustainable Management of Migration

Connectivity is the structural backbone of global migration governance, influencing policy coordination, law enforcement, climate resilience and social inclusion. Without meaningful connectivity between institutions, nations and civil society actors, responses to the challenges of migration risk being fragmented and reactionary, rather than systemic and forward-looking.

The International Migrants Day 2024 (IMD) conference provides an important platform to bridge these gaps and promote dialogue between the various stakeholders. Under the theme “Connectivity: Conflict, Crime, Care, and Climate – Navigating Shared Responsibilities Under Growing Complexities,” the conference emphasises the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in the development of sustainable migration policies.

The special session on "Connectivity", co-chaired by Dr Ratchada Jayagupta from Chulalongkorn University and Dr. Ahsan Ullah from the University of Brunei Darussalam, reflects this ethos of cross-institutional and regional collaboration. Their diverse academic and geographical perspectives enrich the discourse on migration governance and highlight the need for transnational collaboration to address the evolving challenges of migration.

## The session aims to:

- Examine the links between migration governance and key global challenges, particularly conflict, organised crime, care work and climate change, to assess their impact on policy responses, migrant vulnerability and long-term social outcomes.
- Present empirical case studies and region-specific solutions that highlight innovative strategies for managing migration, particularly in the ASEAN and Asia-Pacific contexts.
- Promote policy collaboration between governments, academics and civil society organisations to co-create an inclusive and rights-based migration framework.
- Explore technological and policy innovations in areas such as climate adaptation, transnational labour mobility and digital governance to ensure sustainable and equitable migration outcomes.

## Key Themes and Issues

### *Migration and Armed Conflict: The Case of Myanmar*

Displacement due to armed conflict remains one of the main causes of forced migration worldwide. The situation in Myanmar serves as a case study to understand the causes of displacement, the humanitarian response and ASEAN's role in stabilising and supporting displaced populations (ASEAN Secretariat, 2020). While ASEAN has played a diplomatic and humanitarian role, regional mechanisms need to be strengthened to address the long-term challenges of displacement and reintegration.

### **Transnational Crime and Exploitation of Migrants**

Organised crime has increasingly intersected with migration routes. Human trafficking, forced labour and smuggling networks are active throughout Southeast Asia. Digital platforms have been misused to facilitate human trafficking. This requires a multi-stakeholder approach to strengthen digital governance, dismantle illegal networks and provide legal protection to vulnerable migrants. The discussion will analyse the effectiveness of international frameworks such as the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and examine best practises for regional enforcement.

### **The Role of Care Work in Migration and Labour Mobility**

The demand for migrant labour in the care sector is increasing as the ageing population in high-income countries increases the need for health and elderly care services. This discussion will highlight the important contribution of migrant workers in these sectors while addressing the exploitation, gender inequalities in labour and policy gaps that leave many migrant care workers vulnerable to abuse and informal working conditions.

### **Climate Change, Disasters and Migration**

Climate change is exacerbating displacement as rising sea levels, extreme weather events and resource depletion force millions of people to migrate. The session will look at climate-resilient migration strategies, disaster risk reduction models and legal frameworks for climate-induced displacement, particularly in Asia-Pacific countries most affected by climate risks.

## Key Insights from the Panelists

- Dr. Ratchada Jayagupta underlined the interlinked dimensions of migration policy and advocated cross-sectoral cooperation to address labour mobility, crime prevention and environmental displacement. She emphasised that migration governance must be aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to promote long-term resilience and equity.
- Dr. Ahsan Ullah focused on the geopolitics of migration, highlighting how migration trends are shaped by global power dynamics, economic inequalities and political instability. He emphasised the importance of regional and global partnerships to ensure an inclusive migration policy that balances economic demands with humanitarian protection measures.
- Dr. Omar Khalid spoke about the intersection of migration, crime and security and drew attention to the fact that migrants, especially those in precarious situations, are often criminalised rather than protected. He called for stronger enforcement of international labour laws to protect the rights of migrants and dismantle exploitative networks.
- Wanchai Roujanavong emphasised the legal and institutional framework for combating human trafficking and forced labour and called for more accountability mechanisms, corporate responsibility measures and legislative reforms to eliminate systemic labour exploitation.

## Conclusion

The International Migrants Day 2024 special session on connectivity is a unique opportunity to look at the issue of migration policy from a holistic and interdisciplinary perspective. It emphasises the power of cross-institutional collaboration and demonstrates how regional and global partnerships can drive effective, sustainable and equitable migration policies. The leadership of Dr. Ratchada Jayagupta and Dr. Ahsan Ullah is an example of the importance of bringing together academic and policy communities to tackle the complex challenges of modern migration.

By recognising migration as an interconnected issue shaped by conflict, crime, care work and climate change, this session aims to lay the foundation for a more equitable, inclusive and sustainable migration framework in the years to come.

## Key Takeaways and Cross-Cutting Themes

The 2024 International Migrants Day Symposium underscored the deep interconnections between conflict, crime, care, and climate in shaping migration dynamics. Several key themes emerged from the discussions:

**Interconnected Migration Drivers:** Migration is increasingly shaped by a combination of conflict-driven displacement, climate-induced mobility, transnational crime, and labor migration in the caregiving sector. Understanding these interconnections is crucial for crafting effective migration policies.

**The Role of Regional and Global Cooperation:** Addressing migration challenges requires stronger regional frameworks and multilateral partnerships that prioritize shared responsibility. The discussions emphasized the role of organizations such as ASEAN in fostering cross-border cooperation and developing integrated migration policies.

**The Need for Rights-Based and Inclusive Migration Policies:** The symposium highlighted the importance of gender-sensitive, youth-centered, and rights-based approaches to migration governance. Vulnerable populations, including women, children, and stateless individuals, require targeted protections to prevent exploitation and ensure their rights.

**Climate Change as a Major Migration Factor:** Climate-induced migration is increasingly affecting internal displacement and cross-border movement. The symposium called for urgent climate adaptation measures, sustainable infrastructure development, and legal recognition of climate refugees.

**Digitalization and Migration:** The discussions highlighted how technology is transforming migration governance, improving migrant access to information, financial inclusion, and social services. However, the misuse of technology, particularly in trafficking and forced criminality, remains a pressing concern.

## Specific Suggestions and Way Forward

Based on the discussions, the symposium outlined several actionable recommendations for improving migration governance:

**Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Legal Frameworks:** Governments must establish coherent legal frameworks and regional agreements to regulate migration pathways effectively. ASEAN and other regional bodies should enhance policy coordination and information-sharing to tackle irregular migration and trafficking.

**Promoting Safe and Orderly Migration Pathways:** Governments should create safer, more accessible migration channels by expanding work visas, humanitarian corridors, and asylum mechanisms. Enhancing pre-migration training and legal assistance for migrants can also reduce exploitation risks.

**Addressing Climate-Induced Migration:** Policymakers must integrate climate resilience and environmental adaptation into national migration strategies. Investment in sustainable urban planning, relocation programs, and legal frameworks for climate refugees is essential.

**Enhancing Digital Inclusion and Protection Mechanisms:** Governments and international organizations must bridge the digital divide to ensure migrants have safe access to online financial services, legal aid, and employment networks. Strict regulations should curb the misuse of digital platforms in trafficking and forced criminality.

**Supporting Vulnerable Groups:** Special emphasis should be placed on women, youth, and stateless individuals, ensuring access to education, healthcare, and legal identity. More investment is needed in community-led initiatives that support migrant integration and social inclusion.

## Recommendations

Recommendations from the Special Session on "Connectivity: Conflict, Crime, Care, and Climate"

Strengthen regional migration frameworks to manage cross-border mobility more effectively.  
Establish early warning systems and crisis response mechanisms for conflict and climate-induced displacement.

Combat human trafficking and forced criminality by enhancing law enforcement cooperation and digital monitoring.

Recognize and integrate care work as a key pillar of migration policy, ensuring fair labor conditions for migrant workers.

Develop sustainable climate adaptation policies to address climate-induced displacement and resilience-building efforts.

#### Proposed Roadmap for Addressing Interconnected Migration Challenges

Phase 1 (Short-Term, 1-2 Years): Strengthen regional legal frameworks, enhance emergency response mechanisms, and increase digital inclusion initiatives.

Phase 2 (Medium-Term, 3-5 Years): Establish sustainable migration pathways, expand migrant labor protections, and improve urban resilience strategies.

Phase 3 (Long-Term, 5+ Years): Institutionalize climate migration frameworks, integrate AI and digital solutions for migration governance, and foster transnational cooperation on migrant rights.

## Strategic Plans

### Promoting Rights-Based Migration Policies:

- Strengthen legal protections for migrants, refugees, and stateless individuals through inclusive policy reforms.
- Advocate for gender-sensitive migration policies that protect women and children from exploitation and violence.
- Expand access to legal identity documentation to prevent statelessness and facilitate migrant integration.

### Strengthening International Cooperation and Regional Frameworks:

- Enhance ASEAN-led migration governance by developing coordinated regional migration policies.
- Establish joint border management initiatives to combat trafficking, smuggling, and forced migration.
- Increase bilateral agreements to promote legal migration pathways and labor mobility partnerships.

### Enhancing Climate Resilience and Digital Inclusion:

- Invest in climate adaptation measures that protect communities vulnerable to displacement.
- Develop migrant-inclusive smart technologies that provide real-time information on legal rights, employment, and services.
- Implement digital financial inclusion programs that ensure migrants can securely access banking and remittance services.

### **Supporting Women, Youth, and Vulnerable Groups:**

- Expand vocational training and educational programs for migrant youth to improve economic empowerment.
- Strengthen support services for migrant women, ensuring access to safe workplaces, reproductive healthcare, and gender-sensitive policies.
- Establish community-based support networks that provide legal aid, mental health support, and employment assistance for displaced persons.

## Conclusion

The 2024 International Migrants Day symposium highlighted the interlinked challenges of migration today and emphasised the role of conflict, crime, care and climate in shaping global mobility patterns. The discussions emphasised the urgent need for a rights-based approach to migration governance that incorporates the perspectives of policy makers, academics, civil society and affected communities. An important outcome of the symposium was the recognition that migration governance cannot be addressed in isolation — climate-induced displacement, labour migration and conflict-induced displacement require integrated, cross-sectoral solutions. The symposium emphasised the importance of international cooperation, regional frameworks and inclusive measures to create sustainable and equitable migration systems. It also emphasised the need for digital inclusion and recognised the growing role of technology in ensuring migrants' access to justice, financial services and information.

A key conclusion of the symposium was the need for local, yet globally-informed policy responses that prioritise the wellbeing of migrants while addressing broader socio-political and environmental concerns. Sessions on ageing and migration, gender-based violence, protracted displacement and migrant labour rights highlighted the intersections of migration issues that require a holistic policy framework. The symposium also emphasised the role of education, skills development and social inclusion in strengthening migrants' resilience and promoting long-term integration. By synthesising different perspectives, the event paved the way for a collaborative, action-oriented migration policy that is aligned with global commitments such as the Global Compact on Migration and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It is expected that the outcomes of the symposium will feed into policy recommendations, advocacy work and future research to ensure that migration policy remains inclusive, adaptive and focussed on human dignity and shared responsibility.

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