



**Spotlight  
Initiative**



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

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Summary brief: Midterm evaluation of  
the Safe and Fair Programme:  
Realizing women migrant workers' rights  
and opportunities in the ASEAN region  
(2018-2022)

This brief presents the findings of the Midterm Evaluation of the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative's Safe and Fair: Realizing women migrant workers' rights and opportunities in the ASEAN region (2018-2022) programme. The evaluation team comprised two evaluation specialists namely Katherine Garven as Senior Evaluation and Violence against Women Specialist and Fernando Garabito as Senior Evaluation and Migration Specialist. The evaluation scope covered all programme activities carried out in Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam from the programme inception in 2018 to the end of 2020.\* It was initiated in January 2021 and completed in August 2021.

\* Due to the forward-looking nature of the evaluation, some events and activities that have taken place in the first quarter of 2021 have also been included in the evaluation scope in order to capture key developments and changing circumstances.

## Context and Background

With women representing roughly half of the estimated 10 million migrants in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region, labour migration is an important source of empowerment for women. However, it also can present risks of violence, trafficking and abuse throughout the migration journey from intermediaries and employers, as well as from partners and others. In countries of origin, women migrant workers face mobility bans and legislative restrictions that limit their access to regular labour migration routes in particular sectors. They also face challenges when reintegrating into their communities upon return due to negative social perceptions against women who migrate as well as challenges relating to their prolonged absence. In countries of destination, women migrant workers face a number of discriminatory laws and practices, and are often excluded from receiving essential services, including those to support survivors of violence.

## About the Safe and Fair Programme

As part of the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN) Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate Violence against Women and Girls, the Safe and Fair Programme is designed to address both the root causes and the factors exacerbating violence against women and gender discrimination towards women

migrant workers by strengthening labour migration governance and addressing risks inherent in migration systems that can result in violence and trafficking; strengthening rights-based and gender-responsive approaches to violence against women and labour migration governance and supporting access to essential services; supporting the organization, leadership, and empowerment of women migrant workers; and changing social attitudes towards women migrant workers. It is being implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN Women), in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), with a total budget of Euro 25.5 million (US\$ 30 million). Spanning 2018 – 2022, the supports programming in countries of origin (Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, Viet Nam) and countries of destination (Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand). It is guided by a Project Steering Committee, a Civil Society Organizations (CSO) Reference Group, a Regional Project Advisory Committee (RPAC), and National Project Advisory Committees (NPACs) in each programming country to ensure accountability and to allow the participation of diverse stakeholders, at all levels of the programme.

## Purpose of the Evaluation

The midterm evaluation of the Safe and Fair Programme sought to determine ways in which the programme can make mid-course corrections in order to fully realize its outcomes, and also attempts to contribute to organizational learning by identifying lessons that have been learned and emerging good practices. Specifically, its objectives were to assess the programme's relevance and coherence; identify effective strategies, barriers, and challenges to progress towards the programme's specific objectives; determine the extent to which the programme is cost-effective and was implemented in the most efficient manner; determine the extent to which it has implemented a human rights and gender responsive approach; and propose lessons learned, best practices and recommendations for the remainder of the programme.

## Evaluation Approach and Methodology

The evaluation drew on mixed quantitative and qualitative methods as well as contribution analysis. It used a utilization-focused design, a theory-based approach, and integrated feminist evaluation principles. It also used a participatory approach to engage relevant stakeholders; integrated a

gender equality and equity approach throughout the evaluation process; and used a critical instance case study approach to further explore the services to women migrant workers, particularly those who have experienced violence. Data was collected virtually through:

- an extensive document review;
- twenty-two focus group discussions engaging a total of eighty-one people comprising women migrant workers, ASEAN institutions, CSOs (women's organizations and workers' organizations), employers and recruiters, service providers, and media partners;
- sixty key informant interviews with government officials, EU, other UN entities and UN Resident Coordinators, Safe and Fair regional programming staff and national project coordinators (NPCs); and
- an online survey with the programme's NPCs.

The analysis drew on an Evaluation Matrix where information was triangulated across sources to ensure analytical accuracy. The evaluation was in line with the [United Nations Evaluation Group \(UNEG\) Ethical Norms and Standards](#).

## Summary of main findings

### Relevance

The Safe and Fair Programme is aligned with international norms, standards, and priorities regarding ending violence against women (EVAW) and labour migration, and is addressing a critical need to bring together gender equality, anti-trafficking and labour migration actors to end violence against women migrant workers. It is also well aligned with UN Reform principles as well as the terms of reference of the multi-year global EU-UN Spotlight Initiative. In addition, the programme has addressed a wide range of women migrant worker needs (including shifting needs because of Covid-19) across origin and destination countries that include engaging in safe migration practices, staying safe from violence, accessing humanitarian support in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, accessing services, and forming networks to support one another. However, while the regional nature of the programme provides added value, stakeholders are calling for a stronger regional approach to further promote cross-country synergies. Specifically, there remains room to further link information and services across a women migrant worker's migration journey and better connect stakeholders participating in NPACs across programming countries.

### Coherence

The programme is effectively drawing on the comparative strengths of both UN Women and ILO and is jointly planning, implementing and reporting on shared results to support holistic programming. This has facilitated the building of inter-linkages across thematic areas and stakeholder groups and has allowed the programme to effectively target violence

against women in the realm of labour migration. Even though it was initially designed prior to the formation of the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative, its programme design and results framework were successfully retrofitted to ensure alignment with the initiative. The programme is also well aware of and is closely collaborating with relevant UN programming across the region. Even so, there remain areas where further collaboration could produce additional synergies, including those with other EU-UN Spotlight Initiative programmes.

### Effectiveness

The programme has effectively contributed towards strengthening legislation and governance frameworks to protect the rights of women migrant workers by mainstreaming EVAW principles throughout policy work. It has also supported numerous women migrant workers to join trade unions or become networked into migrant workers associations and has supported the formation of new trade unions and women migrant workers' networks. This being said, fewer training sessions took place than planned due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which means that its training target will likely not be achieved by the end of 2022.

The programme has also strengthened the capacity of service providers (including health workers, police and justice officials, consular staff, and Migrant Worker Resource Centres (MRC) staff, among others) to respond to the needs of women migrant workers, including the right to live a life free from violence, and has increased access to essential services across their migration journey. In addition, it has supported the

integration of rights-based and survivor-centered approaches into laws, policies and practice on prevention and response to violence against women (VAW) to end impunity and improve women's access to essential services, including justice, with a focus on women migrant workers.

The strengthening of women migrant workers' first line of support (i.e. the family) requires further attention, especially the engagement of men at the community level in order to foster more empathy and support among first-responding family members. Direct engagement with men and boys is also required to address family and community violence against women migrant workers, as well as negative social attitudes towards them in their communities of origin.

The programme's work on social attitudes has been far-reaching but has also lacked a strategic and specific focus to concretely target priority stakeholders such as employers or family/community members whose changes in social attitudes could have the largest immediate impact on the lives of women migrant workers.

### Efficiency

The programme has delivered most of its activities in a timely fashion. Even though it experienced some delays, it has been generally quite adaptive and has successfully mitigated most of their effects. The establishment of NPACs and the RPAC has been an efficient and effective way of bringing stakeholders together to influence the programme's decision-making to ensure its alignment with their needs and priorities. Even though the programme's joint programming arrangements are mostly aligned with UN Reform principles, they

are still quite resource intensive and do not fully promote efficiencies due in large part to some duplication between roles and responsibilities and high expectations regarding the degree of coordination and consultation to be done with the other joint entity. Staff (particularly NPCs and regional staff representing both entities) has reported being overworked, which could lead to consequences such as burnout and poorer quality results. The programme has invested significant resources into its M&E system. While reporting is regular and appreciated by stakeholders, it does not effectively capture the programme's contributions towards outcome and impact level results due in large part to weak outcome and impact-level indicators in its results framework.

### Potential for Impact

The programme is promoting gender transformative change by directly engaging women migrant workers as active change agents; increasing their access to resources through the provision of services; fostering institutional change through influencing national policies and frameworks; and challenging negative social biases and misperceptions against women migrant workers. The programme is already achieving a direct impact in the lives of women migrant workers by supporting increased access to services such as shelters, consular support, health services, legal aid, etc. Changes in policy to better protect the rights of women migrant workers and any improvements in social attitudes towards women migrant workers will also positively affect the lives of women migrant workers. However, it will take some time for impacts generated from these initiatives to become visible.



## Potential for Sustainability

Programming elements largely promote sustainability. The programme's research and awareness raising activities on violence against women migrant workers has brought attention to this important issue across key stakeholder groups, fostered a better understanding of the issues, and instilled among stakeholders the need to better protect the rights of women migrant workers to live a life free from violence, thus creating the necessary conditions for stakeholders to better advance the rights of women migrant workers even after the programme comes to an end. Its work on building the capacities of MRCs has strengthened the capacity of these government-run institutions to continue serving women migrant workers in a more gender sensitive way long after the programme has ended. Also, by supporting the integration of gender equality and EAW principles into national policies and frameworks, the programme has helped to ensure that the rights of women migrant workers will be better protected in the future through the support of gender sensitive legislation. This being said, the overall length of the programme at five years is quite short to achieve long-term sustainable change. It currently does not

have a sustainability plan or any exit strategies to further promote the sustainability of its results.

## Gender, Equity and Human Rights

The programme has generated significant knowledge on violence against women migrant workers, gender and labour migration, and overall rights of women migrant workers that has helped to raise awareness of the rights of women migrant workers and further target its programming. However, it has faced some major challenges in supporting the collection of national data on violence against women migrant workers, which largely remains patchy, unreliable, and/or non-existent. It responded to these challenges by shifting its focus towards improving data collection capacity among government partners at the country and regional levels.

The programme has also successfully encouraged the active engagement of women migrant workers and has provided opportunities for them to use their voices and better connect with each other. These empowering processes have led to the establishment of formal support networks and unions for women migrant workers that will continue to further foster their empowerment.

## Conclusions derived from findings

Six (6) conclusions are presented below that draw on evidence from across findings and evaluation criteria, and provide a high-level analysis of their implications on the Safe and Fair Programme and the future of its work.

**Conclusion #1:** The Safe and Fair Programme is filling important gaps with respect to protecting the rights of women migrant workers to a life free from violence. In combination with the gender transformative nature of its programme and its intentional integration of sustainable programming elements, it is likely that the programme will generate meaningful impact and that many of its results will be sustainable over time. At the same time, there are opportunities for increased synergies with other UN labour migration programmes in the region and with other EU-UN Spotlight Initiative programming.

**Conclusion #2:** The Safe and Fair Programme reflects strong joint programming and UN Reform principles that facilitate achieving results that are greater than the sum of its parts. It has effectively leveraged the comparative strengths of both the ILO and UN Women by drawing on both agencies' technical expertise and stakeholder networks to effectively intersect ERAW and labour migration. Even so, there remains room to improve the efficiency of the joint working arrangements as well as the monitoring and reporting of joint results.

**Conclusion #3:** The regional dimension of the Safe and Fair Programme has helped to support women migrant workers throughout their migration journey across both countries of origin and destination with strengthened service delivery across migration corridors and contributing to grassroots-level and real-world perspectives and experiences to regional labour migration policy-making among ASEAN bodies. There remains, however, significant room to increase the added value of its regional work through further cross-country knowledge exchange and stakeholder networking.

**Conclusion #4:** Husbands and other family members are typically the closest support network for women migrant workers. However, the Safe and Fair Programme's project document and results framework have placed limited emphasis on engaging these key stakeholders in order to support those women migrant workers who may be escaping violence at home or in their communities of origin. Even though this approach was intended to support women migrant workers, the lack of engagement of husbands and family members has been a missed opportunity as they can be well placed to provide direct support to women migrant workers throughout their migration journey, including before and after occurrences of violence.

**Conclusion #5:** While the Safe and Fair Programme's communications work to improve social attitudes towards women migrant workers has reached over six million people which is over twelve times as many people as originally planned, the work has been scattered and has lacked a strategic focus which is negatively impacting the ability of the programme to effect meaningful behaviour change in this area. It has been largely focused on reaching large numbers of individuals as opposed to ensuring that it is affecting meaningful changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour.

**Conclusion #6:** Collecting disaggregated and intersectional data on VAW and labour migration has proven to be a highly complex task that requires political will and significant investments in time and resources. The Safe and Fair Programme has gained important insights around these challenges that can be applied to the remainder of the programme and to future programming on ending violence against women migrant workers.

## Recommendations

The following five (5) recommendations stem from the evaluation findings and conclusions and are designed to strengthen the remainder of the Safe and Fair Programme and improve future programming aimed at promoting the rights of women migrant workers and ending violence against them. The recommendations are presented in order of priority, although some can be implemented simultaneously.

**Recommendation #1: Strengthen the regional dimensions of the programme.** Further leveraging the Safe and Fair Programme's regional elements will facilitate the programme in better supporting women migrant workers across their migration journey by helping key stakeholders, including service providers, to learn from and network with each other to provide more coherent and coordinated services across origin and destination countries.

**Recommendation #2: Increase programming efforts to strengthen the immediate support network (i.e. husbands and other family members) of women migrant workers.** In order to provide women migrant workers with the support that they require, husbands and other family members need to be sensitized about the migration experience, capacitated to provide emotional and other kinds of support, and be able to help women migrant workers access essential services. Husbands and other family members are often also the source of violence against women and need to be targeted to encourage behaviour-change.

**Recommendation #3: Further strategically target the programme's communications campaign to more effectively influence changes in social attitudes and integrate C4D elements to influence behaviour change where feasible.** Strengthening the strategic focus and further targeting of the communications campaign, along with integrating behaviour change elements, will facilitate more meaningful changes in social attitudes and behaviours among target audiences.

**Recommendation #4: Further collaborate with other UN labour migration programmes across the region to promote enhanced synergies around engaging recruiters and employers and providing financial training and business support to returning women migrant workers.** There are clear opportunities for the Safe and Fair Programme to expand its reach and better support returnee women migrant workers by partnering with other UN labour migration programmes in the region.

**Recommendation #5: Further strengthen the Safe and Fair Programme's alignment with Results Based Management (RBM) good practices and improve the efficiency of joint programming arrangements.** By making relatively small adjustments to the Safe and Fair Programme's results framework and joint working arrangements, the programme can significantly improve its results management and reporting as well as increase staff's sense of well-being.





# Spotlight Initiative

Publication of this summary brief does not constitute an endorsement by UN Women or the ILO of the opinions expressed in them, or any products, processes or geographical designations mentioned.

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

**Deepa Bharathi**

**Chief Technical Adviser Safe and Fair Programme**

ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

Tel: +66 2 288 1192

Email: [bharathi@ilo.org](mailto:bharathi@ilo.org)

**Valentina Volpe**

**Ending Violence against Women Specialist, Safe and Fair Programme**

UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

Tel: +66 2 288 1152

Email: [valentina.volpe@unwomen.org](mailto:valentina.volpe@unwomen.org)