



# Spotlight Initiative

*To eliminate violence  
against women and girls*



## Changing Attitudes and Behaviour Towards Women Migrant Workers in ASEAN: Technical Regional Meeting

Executive summary: Meeting report forthcoming

Bangkok, Thailand  
26-27 November 2018

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

International Labour Organization  
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## Executive summary

Women make up 42.4 per cent of migrant workers in Asia (UNDESA, 2017). Yet, gender inequalities and sexism are perpetuated through migration for work, manifesting in discriminatory attitudes, perceptions and behaviours towards women migrant workers.

Attitudes and perceptions around migrant workers are frequently rooted in historic nationalistic ideas and events, perpetuated by language in the media and school curricula. Commonly held perceptions are that migrant workers take people's jobs, that their work is of low value, and that they are a security risk. In addition to being subject to attitudes about migrant workers, women migrant workers are also subject to broader patriarchal and sexist attitudes. These include the belief that women's work is easier or has a lower value than men's work; that women are compliant; and that women are inherently at risk of abuse.

Such attitudes result in women being directed into jobs considered low skilled and of low value, such as domestic and care workers, entertainment workers, and workers in manufacturing and food processing. The commonly held beliefs also contribute to the narrative that sees a conflation of women's labour migration issues with sex work and trafficking that commonly focuses on women as victims of migration, rather than empowered agents contributing to their families and societies.

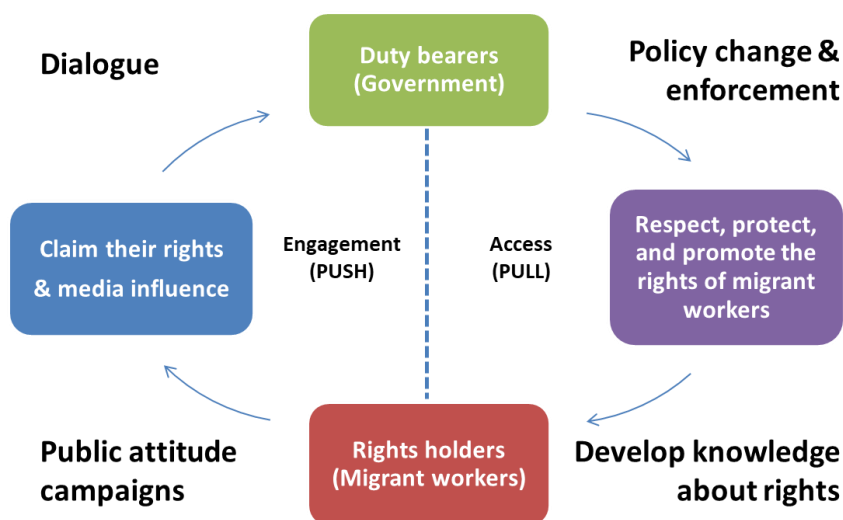
The different attitudes and perceptions around women migrant workers as women and as migrants manifest in multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Discriminatory practices limit women's access to migration that is safe – free from violence and with access to survivor-centred responses – and fair – respecting the right to decent work. In practice, negative attitudes can result in women migrant workers facing an increased risk of violence, whilst also facing barriers to accessing services as a survivor of violence.

Commonly held public attitudes and perceptions around women migrant workers can detrimentally influence policies on labour migration and violence against women (VAW), as well as trafficking, forced labour, and gender equality including in skills-building and education. Politicians and decision-makers can be drawn into introducing gender-based migration restrictions in-line with public sentiments, for instance restricting women from migrating for domestic work, or setting age requirements for migration for women higher than those for men (ILO and UN Women, 2017). The perception that women are weak and in need of protection has been seen to directly lead to several bans on women's migration in the region, which in turn has limited their options to safe and fair migration. When women are not

legally allowed to migrate, they are restricted from official pre-departure training programmes, regular migration routes, and often state-funded assistance when they face problems (ILO and UN Women, 2017).

Changing attitudes and perceptions is central to changing behaviours towards migrant women for the benefit of policy change and in practice. Figure 1 shows an example where attitudes fit within Sida’s human rights-based approach. Changing attitudes means addressing root causes: such as unequal power, patriarchy and discrimination. This includes addressing some fundamental questions about why women are often seen as unequal.<sup>1</sup> Shifting employer, family, government and general public perceptions of migrant women workers is needed for a transformation of xenophobic, paternalistic, victimizing, and sexist attitudes into respect, agency, and equal treatment of migrant women as workers. Shifting attitudes of public officials and service providers is also crucial to challenge cultural stigma and victim-blaming, enabling women migrant workers to report cases of violence and receive respectful care in the country of destination. Communication is a critical tool for creating this change.

**Figure 1. Human rights-based approach <sup>2</sup>**



Source: Sida, 2015

<sup>1</sup> D. Bharathi: Opening remarks, Changing attitudes and behaviour towards women migrant workers in ASEAN technical regional meeting, Safe and Fair, ILO and UN Women, 26-27 November 2018, Bangkok, Thailand.

<sup>2</sup> As included in the presentation of D. Lindgren: “Knowing your target audience: Key learning from past research that still hold true”, Changing attitudes and behaviour towards women migrant workers in ASEAN technical regional meeting, *op cit.*



A regional meeting on changing attitudes and behaviour towards women migrant workers in ASEAN was organized in 2018 by the EU-UN Safe and Fair programme and implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). The Safe and Fair programme delivers technical assistance and support with the overall objective of making labour migration safe and fair for all women in the ASEAN region. Women migrant workers, representatives of migrant worker organizations and civil society, along with experts, development partners and the UN, convened over two-days to identify the key negative attitudes and behaviours that face women migrant workers and to share good practices in using communication to change attitudes and behaviour.

Key areas of learning from the meeting included why and how communication can be an effective tool for changing attitudes and behaviours and exploration of some of the attitudes that have resulted in negative behaviour and policy around migrant women. The meeting further explored tools and approaches used to enhance communication for behavioural change.

The meeting report is designed not only to report on meeting findings but also as a guide and tool for the UN and partners developing campaigns and communications to address negative attitudes towards migrants. It includes tools related to: structured approach to communications, analysis, strategic design, development and testing, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

