



## Safe and Fair Programme: Realizing Women Migrant Workers' Rights and Opportunities in the Association of South-East Asian Nations



An initiative of the United Nations funded by the European Union



International  
Labour  
Organization



### QUICK FACTS

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## BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

### Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

*Safe and Fair: Realizing women migrant workers' rights and opportunities in the ASEAN region (2018-2022)* is a programme implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), designed to make labour migration safe and fair for women migrant workers across the ASEAN region. With a total budget of Euro 25.5 million<sup>1</sup>, the programme is part of the multi-year European Union (EU) – United Nations (UN) *Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate Violence against Women and Girls*.

The programme uses a holistic multi-stakeholder approach to address the multiple intersecting factors affecting safe labour migration for women by engaging with ASEAN Member States' government authorities; ASEAN institutions; workers' organizations; employers and recruitment agencies; civil society organizations; community-based organizations; families and communities; research institutions and academia, media networks, youth, and the general public. See Annex 3 for a detailed stakeholder map prepared by the Evaluation Team. The programme supports programming in countries of origin (Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, Viet Nam) and countries of destination (Brunei Darussalam<sup>2</sup>, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand), although the Programme did not have a physical presence in Brunei or Singapore<sup>3</sup>.

The Safe and Fair (SAF) Programme is structured around three objectives, relating to strengthened labour migration governance frameworks, increased provision of violence against women (VAW) services, and improved data, knowledge, and attitudes towards WMWs.

<sup>1</sup> The total approved budget in USD is \$30,000,000 (rounded up), which includes \$16,648,833 allocated to ILO and \$13,036,461 allocated to UN Women. ILO and UN Women each contributed \$314,707. UNODC contributed USD 186,882.

<sup>2</sup> The Programme has not implemented any activities in Brunei Darussalam.

<sup>3</sup> The Programme also targets WMWs migrating to East Asia (China (Hong Kong, Taiwan) and the Republic of Korea), and the Gulf Cooperation Council States, although no programming was planned to take place in these countries.



**Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation**

The evaluation has the dual purpose of promoting accountability and learning. The scope of the evaluation covered all programme activities carried out across all programming countries from the programme inception in 2018 to the end of evaluation data collection period (15 September 2023). It used the standard OECD/DAC evaluation criteria of *relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, and impact* and included an additional criterion to assess the extent to which the programme mainstreamed the ILO and UN Women’s cross-cutting priorities of gender equality, equity, human rights, disability-inclusion and non-discrimination, tripartism and social dialogue, and environmental sustainability. Human rights, equity and gender equality principles were also thoroughly integrated throughout the standard OECD/DAC evaluation criteria.

The primary users of the evaluation will be the programme’s management team; its donor (the European Union); the Fund Governing Body through the Spotlight Secretariat and the European Commission; the ILO Evaluation Office at headquarters and the UN Women Independent Evaluation Service; and the ILO, UN Women and UNODC regional and field offices. Secondary users include women migrant workers; civil society organizations that have partnered with the programme, stakeholders that have benefited from the programme (including ASEAN governments and institutions, labour recruiters, employers, labour organisations, and researchers; as well as other organisations and UN agencies working on labour migration, violence against women, and human trafficking at national and regional levels.

**Methodology of evaluation**

The evaluation used a mixed methods design, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative primary and secondary data through an extensive document review, two surveys, key informant interviews (KIIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs). It was based on a ***theory-driven case study approach*** with case studies conducted in two countries of origin (Cambodia and Vietnam) and two countries of destination (Thailand and Malaysia). The case studies were designed to facilitate an analysis of the extent to which the SAF Programme supported WMWs throughout their entire labour migration journey from pre-migration to reintegration as well as to understand the factors that contributed

towards the achievement or non-achievement of results. The evaluation design also incorporated feminist evaluation principles, as well as a gender equality and equity approach throughout the evaluation process. In total, the Evaluation Team conducted 101 KIIs and 25 FGDs with 285 stakeholders (220 women and 65 men) both virtually and in-person with in-person interviews taking place across case study countries. Interviews used a purposeful sampling approach and took place with stakeholders from across all stakeholder groups and across all programming countries. The two surveys were administered online to two groups of stakeholders: SAF regional team members and SAF National Programme Coordinators (NPCs) to examine operational programming including the efficiency and effectiveness of joint organizational working arrangements<sup>4</sup>.

## MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

**Relevance:** The Safe and Fair Programme was well aligned with and contributed towards the advancement of international and regional gender equality and labour migration norms, standards, and priorities by bringing together, for the first time, labour migration and EAW actors to provide strengthened support and services to WMWs throughout their labour migration experience. The SAF Programme was also aligned with the goals and objectives of the Spotlight Initiative and was an important addition to efforts aimed at ending violence against women. However, there was room for its approach to promoting participatory and bottom-up change as well as its engagement with CSOs to have further advanced the Spotlight Initiative's principles and priorities. The SAF Programme largely integrated a holistic approach to programming aimed at eliminating violence against WMWs by providing programming that spanned across a WMWs' migration journey. Some of these elements, such as strengthening the capacities of first responders in both countries of origin and destination, have the potential for further scale-up while others, such as support for safe remigration to destination countries and reintegration into countries of origin, require strengthening. Lastly, the SAF programme adjusted its

<sup>4</sup> Both surveys experienced at 89 per cent response rate (8 out of 9 responses for the regional staff survey and 16 out of 18 responses for the national-level NPC survey).

programming approaches in response to the COVID-19 pandemic by providing increased service provision, information, and shifting activities online wherever feasible. At the same time, there was room to have further modified its programme design and results framework to more fully respond to the most pressing needs of WMWs.

**Coherence:** The SAF Programme was implemented largely in alignment and in consultation with other UN labour migration programming and initiatives in the region. Yet there also exists potential to generate programmatic synergies with other UN labour migration, EAW, and trafficking programming in the region to create greater impact. The SAF Programme also achieved important cross-border and regional-level successes, particularly in partnership with ASEAN, while at the same time, the regional SAF Programme staff invested significant time and effort in supporting national-level initiatives, which detracted effort away from regional level programming. Through the SAF Programme, ILO and UN Women were successful at jointly planning and implementing activities while achieving thematic synergies across programme outcomes. Yet fewer synergies were achieved with UNODC due to its limited programme participation. At the same time, the programme was designed in components, with ILO leading Outcome 1 and UN Women leading Outcome 2. This separation with clear division of roles and responsibilities sometimes extended down to the national level where partners were often not shared across agencies, challenging the programme's coherence at the national level.

**Effectiveness:** As of September 2023, SAF Programme reports confirm that the programme has largely met and/or surpassed nearly all of its targets across output indicators as well as surpassed several outcome indicator targets. The programme was particularly effective at strengthening VAW referral pathways for WMWs across the labour migration journey in both countries of origin and destination. The quality and availability of services provided through these referral mechanisms remain, however, in need of strengthening. The SAF programming effectively raised awareness of the importance of safe migration practices through regular migration channels among WMWs across migrant worker



communities in countries of origin, thus contributing to VAW prevention and anti-trafficking efforts. At the same time, there remain considerable incentives that are outside the control of the Safe and Fair Programme for WMWs to engage in irregular migration even if they understand the potential benefits of using regular migration channels, as well as the need for further investment in reinforcing those gains made. Further, there are concrete examples of the SAF Programme having effectively leveraged the comparative strengths of UN Women and ILO by supporting government ministries in countries of origin and destination to strengthen political frameworks and implementation plans. These served to better protect the rights of WMWs and increase VAW service provision to WMWs. There appears to be some improvement in attitudes towards WMWs among target groups, but the scope of this change is minimal and isolated, in part due to a lack of coordination between SAF stakeholders and a lack of financial investment under the programme's third outcome area regarding changing attitudes. Lastly, the programme missed key opportunities to advance social norms work at the community level to promote women's empowerment principles and address domestic violence in migrant worker communities.

**Efficiency:** The SAF Programme was able to overcome substantial delays and operational challenges. However, in some cases, the delays affected its ability to implement programming and generate momentum towards higher level results. The SAF Programme invested considerably into its M&E system and regularly shared monitoring data with stakeholders. However, this required significant time and resources from implementing partners and NPCs, and disseminated monitoring data was most often at the activity and output level which limited its usefulness to key partners and decision-makers.

**Cross-Cutting:** The SAF Programme integrated a strong women's empowerment and survivor-centered approach throughout its initiatives, putting women at the center of programming and giving WMWs opportunities to strengthen their networks and use their voices to share their experiences and advocate for their interests. The SAF Programme made some important progress in



advancing the rights of particularly vulnerable groups of WMWs including undocumented WMWs, domestic workers, LGBTIQ+ migrant workers. At the same time, the needs of other vulnerable sub-groups of migrant workers including those facing climate change crises and those with disabilities were not directly addressed within the programme design. The programme has generated significant research and knowledge products and has increased the capacity of government and CSO partners to collect and use disaggregated data to better support the prevention and response of violence against WMWs.

**Impact:** The SAF Programme has contributed towards making the labour migration journey of WMWs safer and fairer by advancing the integration of EAW into labour migration governance frameworks, increasing levels of understanding about WMWs among select stakeholders, and improving access to services, and supporting WMWs as change agents. While the programme's focus on addressing structural and cultural barriers that hinder gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) is aligned with gender transformative programming, transformative change that addresses the root causes of violence against WMWs requires greater investment to change social norms within migrant worker communities and across a woman's labour migration journey.

**Sustainability:** Of the major outcomes achieved by the SAF Programme in enabling safer and fairer migration for WMWs across ASEAN, elements of sustainability include government buy-in and institutional strengthening as part of the systems level work in advancing policy change and supporting partners on their operationalization. Challenges to sustainability include the fragmented nature of programming and the inability to further develop many initiatives that are still in their infancy, as well as the limited investment in work on changing attitudes under Outcome 3.

## Conclusions

1. The SAF Programme has made considerable advancements in supporting the rights of WMWs while preventing and

addressing multiple forms of violence that is often committed against them.

2. The SAF Programme has set a strong foundation for future ERAW and labour migration programming where many of the programme's initiatives have the potential to be further rolled-out, scaled-up, or replicated to achieve more widespread impact.
3. There is significant opportunity for future labour migration and ERAW programming to address the root causes of VAW through social norms change.
4. While the programme focused on supporting a wide variety of labour migration and ERAW stakeholders across a WMW's labour migration journey, more programming emphasis is needed to improve the quality and availability of VAW services, engage employers, facilitate safe re-migration, and support reintegration and the sustainable development of migrant worker communities.
5. The SAF Programme made notable advancements in supporting the rights of undocumented WMWs and domestic workers. To advance the SDGs and fully align with the leave no one behind principle, future labour migration and ERAW programming will need to be designed to address the unique need, priorities, and vulnerabilities of other sub-groups of particularly vulnerable WMWs, including LGBTIQ+ migrant workers, WMWs with disabilities, and WMWs from climate-affected communities.
6. Future regional joint programming requires a more cohesive design that further encourages joint work and the sharing of partners; that can be flexibly modified to respond to contextual changes and stakeholder feedback; that empowers national stakeholders to take leadership roles; that fosters regional synergies and cross-border work including that with other UN entities; and that uses MEL systems that are responsive to the needs and priorities of programming stakeholders.



## RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

### Recommendations

**Recommendation #1:** Further invest in programming that promotes the rights of WMWs and ends violence against them by continuing to roll-out, scale-up, and replicate the successful programming elements that have been initiated under the SAF Programme.

**Recommendation #2:** Increase investment in social norms work when implementing labour migration and EAW programming to further address the root causes of violence against women.

**Recommendation #3:** Further promote the sustainable development of migrant worker communities including the reintegration of WMWs.

**Recommendation #4:** Continue to strengthen holistic support to WMWs across their labour migration journey while investing in improvements in the quality and reach of services for WMWs.

**Recommendation #5:** Continue to support the rights of domestic workers while increasing programmatic focus on undocumented WMWs, LGBTIQ+ migrant workers, WMWs with disabilities, and WMWs from climate-affected communities.

**Recommendation #6:** Include mechanisms that allow for more flexibility to modify the programme design and implementation approaches throughout programme implementation in response to stakeholder feedback and changes in operating context.

**Recommendation #7:** Ensure that future regional joint programming is designed cohesively, empowers national-level leadership, encourages regional level cross-border work, and leverages potential synergies with other UN programming.

**Recommendation #8:** Strengthen future MEL systems to be more responsive to the needs of programming stakeholders by simplifying the reporting processes for implementing partners and designing

*communications products that are tailored to the specific needs of different stakeholder groups.*

**Main lessons learned and good practices**

**Good Practices:**

- 1. Providing information and establishing connections with WMWs before violence occurs:** It is easier and more effective to provide this information before a woman engages in labour migration so that she can make informed choices about how to do so safely. It is also much easier to reach WMWs with information on VAW services before they depart than once they are working abroad and may have already experienced forms of violence. This investment at the community level shows great potential and warrants further scale-up. *(Derived from findings 3, 9, and 10)*
- 2. Supporting WMW peer networks:** Forming peer networks of WMWs increased the programme's capacity to reach more migrant worker communities while also providing an opportunity for WMWs to develop their self-confidence and an outlet to engage in meaningful work that promotes the sustainable development of their communities and the safety of their community members. *(Derived from finding 3)*
- 3. Fostering institutional capacity strengthening:** This includes the development of memorandums of understanding (MOUs) between duty-bearers who were not used to working together as well as standard operating procedures (SOPs) to provide concrete steps to guide future institutional work. Focusing its work at the institutional level as opposed to the individual level has helped to promote the sustainability of results while also mitigating the challenges faced by high government staff turnover. *(Derived from findings 3, 9, 11, and 19)*
- 4. Encouraging equality in cross-ministerial collaboration:** Through the NPACs, the SAF Programme successfully brought together national-level ministries

working on labour rights as well as those working on women's rights to collaboratively advance the rights of WMWs and reduce their exposure to exploitation and violence. In many cases, these ministries co-led the NPAC, which was a unique opportunity for both ministries to work together as equal partners. Most often, the ministries of labour are better financed and have more influence. Therefore, the equal working relationship fostered by the SAF Programme helped to elevate the status of the ministries working on women's rights, which provided these ministries with important opportunities to advance their priorities and objectives. *(Derived from finding 1)*

**5. Integrating women's empowerment principles into the programme design:** The SAF Programme deliberately encouraged the empowerment of WMWs by providing opportunities for them to express themselves, organize, and advocate for their rights. Indeed, the programme facilitated opportunities for WMWs and organisations that represent them to engage in dialogue with duty-bearers including government representatives and service providers to express their needs, priorities, and future visions and to influence policies and actions that affect them. *(Derived from finding 15)*

**6. Harnessing technology to advance WMW rights:** The SAF Programme made good use of technological opportunities to engage with WMWs through initiatives such as the My Journey App in Cambodia where WMWs could access information on safe labour migration practices and VAW services, as well as directly reach out for support when needed. The app has the potential for continued roll-out, scale-up, and replication in other countries. *(Derived from findings 3 and 9)*

**7. Supporting integrated service provision:** The SAF programme supported the integration of the Gender Responsive Migrant Worker Resources Center (MRC)

and the One- Roof Integrated Services (LTSA) in Indonesia, which provided migrant workers with ease of access, all under one roof, to comprehensive gender-responsive services, including information, pre-employment consultations, trainings for prospective migrants, psycho-social counselling service, case handling, and legal aid. For WMWs who have experienced violence and abuse, the integration of the women's crisis centre under the One-Roof service means that they can access services and counselling without delay. *(Derived from finding*

**8. Supporting MRCs that promote the sustainable development of migrant worker communities:** The SAF Programme provided extensive support to MRCs across programming countries to strengthen gender-responsive service provision. In some cases, the programme supported MRCs who use a full migration paradigm that includes support for both migrant workers as well as the families and community members left behind. This was the case with the Quezon City Public Employment Services Office (PESO) who administers an MRC in the Philippines where the SAF Programme supported the development of its five-year strategic plan that integrates support for WMW family members and community members so that the benefits of migration are better used to support the community's long-term sustainable development. *(Derived from finding 3)*

**Lessons Learned:**

1. Development programmes need support from donors to adjust their design and results frameworks to more flexibility respond to the needs of rights holders when faced with large-scale crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Information sessions on safe labour migration practices in migrant worker communities are excellent opportunities to bring together community members, including women and



- men, to engage in dialogue on gender equality and social norms change, including intimate partner violence (IPV).
3. Family members of WMWs, community members, and local authorities require capacity support to understand the unique vulnerabilities facing WMWs and how to best support a WMW in need if they are to be effective first-responders and if the linkage between migrant worker communities and access to support services is to be strengthened.
  4. Development programming that promotes gender equality can achieve greater impact when it intentionally includes support to further integrate GE principles into the work of other UN entities who are executing similar programming.
  5. WMWs require support to continue working legally in destination countries or to re-migrate through regular channels when their employment contracts (and corresponding work visas) are about to expire. Without this support, they risk losing their legal status and becoming more vulnerable to exploitation and violence.
  6. Communications and advocacy messaging that call for service provision to all women is an effective strategy to gain support for the inclusion of undocumented WMWs into policies and service provision.
  7. To ensure a reasonable workload and to facilitate the sharing of partners, a joint programme the size and magnitude of the SAF Programme requires national staff members from both UN agencies to implement programming in each programming country.
  8. Engaging stakeholders through ongoing consultative processes like the Safe and Fair Programme's RPAC, NPACs, and CSO Reference Group throughout the course of programme implementation is helpful to promote stakeholder ownership and buy-in. However, flexible programming mechanisms must be in place to use stakeholder feedback to make improvements to the programme design and implementation approaches for these processes to be truly meaningful for stakeholders.