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**Proceedings of the
Mult-Stakeholder
Workshop on**

JOBS IN SEZS: PROMOTING GENDER- SENSITIVE POLICIES IN THE MEKONG REGION

Organised by Mekong Migration Network (MMN) and Asian Institute of Technology (AIT)
Supported by International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada



Mekong Migration Network (MMN)



Proceedings of the Multi-Stakeholder Workshop on Jobs in SEZs: Promoting Gender-Sensitive Policies in the Mekong Region

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Founded in 2003, the Mekong Migration Network (MMN) is a sub-regional network of civil society organisations and research institutes working towards the protection and promotion of the rights of migrants and their families in the Greater Mekong Sub-region. MMN members operate in both countries of origin and destination, have unique expertise in the field, and are in close contact with migrant workers at a grassroots level. The Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), founded in 1959, is a regional institution for higher education based in Pathum Thani, Thailand.

Acknowledgments



Figure 1: Participants of the Multi-Stakeholder Workshop on *Jobs in SEZs: Promoting Gender-Sensitive Policies in the Mekong Region*

The Multi-Stakeholder Workshop on *Jobs in SEZs: Promoting Gender-Sensitive Policies in the Mekong Region* was jointly organised by the Mekong Migration Network (MMN) and the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT). Many organisations and people contributed to the proceedings and ensured its success. We wish to acknowledge their efforts with special thanks.

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Opening and keynote speakers: Ms. Ayesha Rekhi, Counsellor (Political/Economic) and Permanent Observer to ESCAP, Representative of Ambassador Donica Pottie, Embassy of Canada to Thailand, Lao PDR and Cambodia, Thailand; Ms. Gillian Dowie, Senior Programme Officer, International Development Research Centre, Canada; Dr. Eden Y. Woon, President, Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand; Ms. Reiko Harima, Regional Coordinator, Mekong Migration Network; Ms. Marja Paavilainen, Senior Programme Officer, International Labour Organization.

Panellists: Ms. Pataraporn Laowong, National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDC), Thailand; Mr. Randolph Dacanay, Asian Development Bank (ADB); Mr. Kaing Monika, Garment Manufacturers Association in Cambodia (GMAC), Cambodia; Mr. Komsoth Tim, Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MoLVT), Cambodia; Mr. Thit Lwin Aung, Future Light Center (FLC), Myanmar; Ms. Hnin Phyu Phyu Aye, Aung Myin Hmu Project, Myanmar; Mr. Sun Sameoun, Phnom Penh Special Economic Zone Management, Cambodia; Ms. Marja Paavilainen, International Labour Organization (ILO); Mr. Soe Naing, Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population (MoLIP), Myanmar; Dr. Than Than Thwe, Thilawa Special Economic Zone Management Committee, Myanmar; Ms. Sally Barber, UN Women; Mr. Sai Aung Tun, Foundation for Education and Development (FED), Thailand.

Presentation of findings: Ms. Carli Melo, MMN; Dr. Kyoko Kusakabe, AIT.

Facilitators: Mr. Bent Gehrt, Worker Rights Consortium (WRC); Mr. Sokchar Mom, Legal Support for Children and Women (LSCW), Cambodia; Mr. Brahm Press, MAP Foundation, Thailand.

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Project partners: Future Light Center (FLC), Myanmar; Legal Support for Children and Women (LSCW), Cambodia; Foundation for Education and Development (FED), Yaung Chi Oo Workers' Association (YCOWA), MAP Foundation, and Labour Rights Promotion Network (LPN), Thailand.

Migrant and garment workers: Special thanks go to the many migrants and garment factory workers who generously shared their time and stories to shed light on the details of their working and living conditions. Without their openness, this project would not have been possible.

Finally, we wish to thank all the participants of the Multi-Stakeholder Workshop for their active participation, lively discussion, and commitments to positive change for the benefit of garment workers in SEZs.

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Introduction and Workshop Summary

Special economic zones (SEZs) have emerged as effective instruments for capturing foreign investment and a key strategy in the pursuit of regional economic integration in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS). The IDRC-supported research project *Jobs at the Border: Promoting Gender-Sensitive Policies for Special Economic Zones in the Mekong Region*, jointly implemented by MMN and AIT, investigated labour and migration issues in four SEZs across Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand from 2016 to 2019. Guided by the question of whether the jobs being created within SEZs are promoting decent work, MMN and AIT conducted research on cross-border and internal migrant garment factory workers employed in these spaces. Garment factories are heavily dominated by women workers, who are often paid minimum wage or lower and are usually not entitled to any paid leave. The study found that one of the only ways that they can increase their income is through overtime work. Despite accumulating experience and improving their skills, women are still categorically labelled as “unskilled” or “low-skilled” workers. Their skills remain unrecognised and invisible. Being a woman worker as well as a migrant worker amplifies their vulnerability and marginalisation.

This problem of framing women workers as “unskilled” has been acknowledged and discussed over the past few decades, yet little has changed to date. In light of rapid technological advances, environmental concerns and demographic changes, governments and employers can no longer ignore the need for greater capacity development of their workers to adjust to these changes. Another issue that has long been pointed out, but has seen little progress thus far, is that of care. Even though some countries’ national laws require the establishment of factory-level day cares, and child allowances have been introduced in some GMS countries, childcare responsibilities still lie predominantly with women workers. The provision of greater care supports is imperative to ensure decent work and lifelong learning that fosters women workers’ development. Although SEZs may have the potential to increase opportunities for decent work, the project’s findings suggest that this potential has yet to be realised due to barriers, including legal, governance, and additional structural shortcomings.

Workers are entitled to secure employment where they can plan for their future career in the work that they do. This is equally relevant for migrant workers. In an increasingly globalised world, workers need to be able to imagine their future careers across borders and have their skills validated. All workers should be able to choose to take up a specific job because it will enable them to enhance their skills and see their growth reflected in their career and pay. Such career development is currently exclusively available to so-called “higher-skilled” workers. It is time for all workers to be recognised for their skills and entitled to professional development.

In this workshop - which took place at the Centre Point Hotel Sukhumvit 10 in Bangkok from June 20-21 2019 - MMN and AIT not only highlighted workers’ working conditions and access to labour rights in SEZs, which remain significant issues, but also their skills development and recognition, and care responsibilities, which are important factors for their future life plans. This research recognises that skills recognition and care work supports are greater challenges for women workers relative to men and, thus, were given a particular focus in the workshop’s agenda.

The Multi-Stakeholder Workshop framed the dialogue around the themes of labour migration, working conditions, labour organising, skills training and recognition, career development, and care responsibilities, with an overarching focus on labour within SEZs and the garment industry

in the Mekong. The SEZs included in this study are: Phnom Penh SEZ and Manhattan SEZ in Cambodia; Thilawa SEZ in Myanmar; and Tak SEZ in Thailand.

The objective of the workshop was to discuss whether and how SEZs can play a role in leading such changes or whether they are an impediment for change. MMN and AIT launched a report examining these themes and fostered in-depth discussion on the findings and recommendations that emerged from the project. The workshop took place in the form of a dialogue. In each panel, findings from the study were presented, followed by comments from various stakeholders and open discussion.

This workshop sought to bring together an inclusive, diverse, and representative group of participants to foster new exchanges on how SEZs across the sub-region can be reformed to better protect and promote the rights and welfare of workers, while continuing to support economic growth.

Participants

MMN and AIT invited principal decision-makers, practitioners and experts in relevant fields to actively participate in this workshop. These participants included representatives of governments, employers' associations, civil society organisations, trade unions, training centres, and regional and international organisations.

Outcomes of the workshop

Thilawa SEZ committed to a three-year plan for on-site childcare services for workers. Influenced by the project's findings on limited childcare supports for migrant workers in SEZs, Dr. Than Than Thwe of Myanmar's Thilawa SEZ Management Committee, presented a plan to conduct a detailed survey on the childcare needs of Thilawa SEZ workers. This survey is intended to lead to the implementation of SEZ-based, as well as potentially community-based, childcare centres. Factory owners' monthly Corporate Social Responsibility contributions will support the development of these centres.

“On-site childcare is a win for everyone!”

- Dr. Than Than Thwe, Joint Secretary 1, Thilawa SEZ Management Committee

Mr. Sun Samouen, Senior Human Resource Manager of Phnom Penh SEZ, also committed to beginning to investigate the possibility of setting up a childcare centre in Phnom Penh SEZ.

Workshop participants from Myanmar agreed on the need to study and account for inflation and the rising cost of living for families, in order to devise a new minimum wage rate that equates to a living wage.

Representatives of the Thilawa SEZ Management Committee and the Myanmar MoLIP expressed a commitment to working with trade unions and labour rights organisations moving forward, in order to address recommendations regarding workers' access to freedom of association and provision of social dialogue platforms.

Participants from all countries agreed on the need to provide improved mechanisms for skills development and career progression for garment factory workers in SEZs.

Workshop Programme

Day 1: June 20, Thursday	
8:30-9:00	Registration
9:00-9:30	Opening remarks Ms. Ayesha Rekhi, Counsellor (Political/Economic) and Permanent Observer to ESCAP, Representative of Ambassador Donica Pottie, Embassy of Canada to Thailand, Lao PDR and Cambodia, Thailand Ms. Gillian Dowie, Senior Programme Officer, International Development Research Centre, Canada Dr. Eden Y. Woon, President, Asian Institute of Technology, Pathum Thani, Thailand Ms. Reiko Harima, Regional Coordinator, Mekong Migration Network
9:30-9:50	Keynote address: <i>SEZs / EPZs and implications for labour rights</i> Ms. Marja Paavilainen, Senior Programme Officer, International Labour Organization
9:50-10:00	Group photo
10:00-10:30	Coffee Break
10:30-10:50	Participant introductions
10:50-11:30	Introduction to the workshop and launch of the report Presentation by Ms. Carli Melo, Mekong Migration Network
11:30-12:45	Lunch
12:45-14:30	Panel 1: Labour rights and working conditions in SEZs Facilitator: Mr. Bent Gehrt, Workers Rights Consortium <i>Presentation of key findings and recommendations, Ms. Carli Melo, Mekong Migration Network</i> <u>Commentators</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Pataraporn Laowong, National Economic and Social Development Board, Thailand • Mr. Randolph Dacanay, Asian Development Bank • Mr. Kaing Monika, Garment Manufacturers Association in Cambodia, Cambodia • Mr. Komsoth Tim, Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, Cambodia • Mr. Thit Lwin Aung, Future Light Center, Myanmar Open discussion
14:30-15:00	Break
15:00-16:30	Panel 2: Skills development and recognition in SEZs

	<p>Facilitator: Mr. Sokchar Mom, Legal Support for Children and Women, Cambodia</p> <p><i>Presentation of key findings and recommendations, Dr. Kyoko Kusakabe, Asian Institute of Technology</i></p> <p><u>Commentators</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Hnin Phyu Phyu Aye, Aung Myin Hmu Project, Myanmar • Mr. Sun Sameoun, Phnom Penh Special Economic Zone Management, Cambodia • Ms. Marja Paavilainen, International Labour Organization • Mr. Soe Naing, Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, Myanmar <p>Open discussion</p>
19:00 – 21:00	Welcome dinner
Day 2: June 21, Friday	
9:00-9:15	Recap of Day 1
9:15-10:45	<p>Panel 3: Childcare and family care in SEZs</p> <p>Facilitator: Mr. Brahm Press, MAP Foundation</p> <p><i>Presentation of key findings and recommendations, Dr. Kyoko Kusakabe, Asian Institute of Technology</i></p> <p><u>Commentators</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Than Than Thwe, Thilawa Special Economic Zone Management Committee, Myanmar • Ms. Sally Barber, UN Women • Mr. Sai Aung Tun, Foundation for Education and Development, Thailand <p>Open discussion</p>
10:45-11:10	Break
11:10-12:30	Group work: Country-level discussions
12:30-13:30	Lunch
13:30-14:30	Reporting back from group work
14:30-15:30	Plenary discussion
15:30-16:00	Break
16:00-16:30	Concluding discussion and closing

Opening Remarks



Figure 2: Opening remarks. (Left to right) Ms. Reiko Harima, Dr. Eden Y. Woon, Ms. Gillian Dowie, and Ms. Ayesha Rekhi

The Multi-Stakeholder Workshop on *Jobs in SEZs: Promoting Gender-Sensitive Policies in the Mekong Region* began with remarks from Ms. Ayesha Rekhi from the Embassy of Canada to Thailand, Lao PDR, and Cambodia; Ms. Gillian Dowie from IDRC; Dr. Eden Y. Woon of AIT; and Ms. Reiko Harima from MMN. Speakers commented on the timeliness of this project, and the important role the findings play in filling research gaps and directing future work on the promotion of decent work in special economic zones.

Ms. Ayesha Rekhi, Counsellor (Political/Economic) and Permanent Observer to ESCAP, Representative of Ambassador Donica Pottie, Embassy of Canada to Thailand, Lao PDR and Cambodia, Thailand

In her opening remarks, Ms. Rekhi drew attention to the fact that labour migration plays an important role in the economic and social development of the ASEAN region, and yet migrants often find themselves precariously employed and vulnerable to exploitation. Ms. Rekhi highlighted Canada's commitment to improving the protection of migrant rights and supporting the region's continued dynamic growth, through the TRIANGLE in ASEAN programme.¹ She also commented on the value of adopting a gender sensitive approach to understand the specific challenges faced by women migrant workers, and confirmed Canada's dedication to promoting gender equality. Ms. Rekhi acknowledged AIT and MMN's important contribution to the knowledge base on the impact of SEZs on decent work for women, and specifically highlighted Canada's interest in the results emerging from Tak SEZ in Mae Sot, Thailand. Ms. Rekhi called

¹ More information on TRIANGLE in ASEAN can be found at: https://www.ilo.org/asia/projects/WCMS_428584/lang--en/index.htm

upon government and tripartite partners to find solutions to the systemic factors that create conditions for abuses of workers' rights to occur:

“The rights of all workers in Thailand are fundamental, regardless of their migrant status, or the location of their work.”

Ms. Gillian Dowie, Senior Programme Officer, International Development Research Centre, Canada

Ms. Dowie commended this research as timely and connecting well to IDRC priority areas, and as helpful for informing how and where IDRC focus their work on issues related to labour and migration moving forward. She stated that IDRC is committed to continuing to work on research on the gendered impacts of these issues, and to contributing to transforming the lives of women and workers. Ms. Dowie thanked the research team for their work and commitment to producing knowledge on this critical topic. She stated:

“AIT is a long partner of IDRC and we value the contribution their researchers have made and their leadership in the region, particularly on gender and development. MMN is an exciting organisation proactively looking to protect the rights of some of the most vulnerable workers in the Mekong.”

Dr. Eden Y. Woon, President, Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand

Dr. Woon began by thanking, on behalf of AIT, the participants, IDRC, the Embassy of Canada, and MMN, and expressed his pleasure at having AIT associated with this project. Dr. Woon reflected on his own visits to special economic zones in China in the 1980s and commented on the remarkable level of development that has taken place in the space of 35 years – which points to the importance of the study of SEZs, as they can impact how a country develops. He also commented on the importance of applying a gendered lens to the topic, as many SEZ workers are women and aid the development of both SEZs and their countries. AIT is celebrating its 60th anniversary this year, and Dr. Woon stated that he hopes that AIT will continue to be part of this type of research and work into the future, stressing AIT's commitment to “social impact with innovation”.

Ms. Reiko Harima, Regional Coordinator, Mekong Migration Network

Ms. Harima thanked all attendees, partners, funders, and stakeholders, and drew specific attention to the individuals from the MMN member organisations that made the project possible. These partner organisations, Ms. Harima reminded the audience, work on issues of migration daily, and have earned the trust of migrant worker communities; this is what makes it possible to conduct a research project such as this one. Ms. Harima raised questions regarding oft-stated claims of SEZs attracting migrants to return to their country of origin, and whether or not SEZs are changing working conditions for the better. She articulated MMN's underlying questions guiding this study: Are SEZs creating employment for workers? If so, what kinds of employment are they creating, and what can be done to improve opportunities for workers?

Keynote Address



Figure 3: Ms. Marja Paavilainen, ILO, delivers the keynote address

‘SEZs / EPZs and implications for labour rights’, Ms. Marja Paavilainen, Senior Programme Officer, International Labour Organization

Ms. Marja Paavilainen of the ILO provided the keynote address for the event. Ms. Paavilainen acknowledged that limited research exists on special economic zones (or ‘export processing zones’) – particularly in relation to decent work for workers – and that this study fills an important gap. It is an important topic, given that 84% of the world’s 66 million export processing zone (EPZ) workers are in Asia. She also highlighted the relevance of this research to the ILO’s own work in Mae Sot as part of the TRIANGLE in ASEAN programme. Ms. Paavilainen provided some context on EPZs, noting that they are heterogeneous and can vary dramatically. In some cases, special incentives that are often applied in order to attract investors can result in weaker protections for migrant workers, and some EPZs are heavily guarded while others are more open to the public. This diversity underscores the need for up-to-date information, and the fact that there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to solving the barriers and challenges that currently prevent the realisation of decent work. She also acknowledged that many of these issues exist in labour markets generally, and that we need to understand how EPZs are different from what is happening outside their borders.

In closing, Ms. Paavilainen presented the following recommendations from the ILO for addressing labour rights in EPZs:

Governments should (ILO TME, 2017²), among others:

1. Promote collective bargaining and sustainable industrial relations
2. Improve working conditions and social protections, including maternity protection
3. Ensure that non-standard forms of work are not used to undermine workers' rights
4. Develop occupational safety and health systems which also apply in EPZs
5. Strengthen labour inspection in EPZs
6. Provide speedy access to effective remedy when violations are found
7. Support dialogue at national, regional and local levels to identify challenges posed by EPZs
8. Support enterprises to undertake due diligence
9. Adopt industrial policies to diversify into higher-added value economic activities and strengthen skills development

Employers' organisations should (ILO TME, 2017), among others, encourage and support enterprises to:

1. respect fundamental principles and rights at work, promote decent work
2. abide by national law
3. not engage in anti-union practices
4. support public labour inspection in EPZs
5. carry out due diligence

Workers' organisations should (ILO TME, 2017):

1. Provide targeted support to workers in EPZs, in particular women, youth, migrant workers and refugees
2. Engage in social dialogue at all levels

Companies should (ILO TME, 2017):

1. Respect workers' rights
2. Use their leverage to take steps to ensure that:
 - the rights of workers in their supply chains are also respected, and
 - workers have access to remedy when their rights are violated, as advocated for in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration)

Ms. Paavilainen's presentations slides are available for download [at this link](#).

² More information on the Tripartite Meeting of Experts to Promote Decent Work and Protection of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work for Workers in Export Processing Zones (EPZs) can be found at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/---ifp_seed/documents/publication/wcms_605081.pdf

Introduction and Launch of ‘Jobs in SEZs: Migrant garment factory workers in the Mekong Region’

Ms. Carli Melo, Mekong Migration Network



Figure 4: Ms. Carli Melo, MMN, launches the report

The report, *Jobs in SEZs: Migrant garment factory workers in the Mekong Region*, was officially launched by Ms. Carli Melo, Project Coordinator at MMN. This research and advocacy project began in 2016 as a joint undertaking between MMN and AIT, looking at the garment industry within Mekong SEZs, whose workforce is largely comprised of women, cross-border and internal migrants. Ms. Melo advised that the final publication will be shared with participants by email the first week of July 2019, and encouraged them to circulate it widely.

Ms. Melo provided some background and context on special economic zones, including the fact that they have grown steadily in number in recent decades, from nine in the 1960s, to 4,300 globally in 2015. They are also increasingly present in border regions of the GMS, where they can capitalise on cross-border trade and existing pools of migrant labour, and can also create mechanisms to manage the movement of people. While SEZs have often been viewed as mechanisms to accelerate a country’s industrialisation, Ms. Melo cited a 2015 ADB study on SEZs in Asia, which found varied levels of success among SEZs, and that only “a few have matched or exceeded expectations and contributed substantially to economy-wide development”.

Looking specifically at the garment industry in the GMS, Asian countries accounted for 62% of global textile and apparel exports in 2016, with Thailand, Cambodia, and Myanmar as key countries. The garment industry is an important source of employment for women but is also associated with harassment, pay gaps, and poor working conditions. The region has also seen a “race to the bottom”, in which buyers move from higher-cost to lower-cost producing countries and locations.

The research objective of this project was stated by Ms. Melo as, “to promote policies and practices that enhance the empowerment of women migrant workers in garment factories in Mekong SEZs”. Ms. Melo acknowledged project partners and the role they played in the collaborative design of research, field work, analysis of findings, and the development of recommendations. Specific thanks were extended to FLC, who led work in Myanmar; LSCW, who took the lead in Cambodia; and FED, who led the project in Thailand, supported by MAP Foundation, YCOWA and LPN.

Study sites were selected in four locations in Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar. Manhattan SEZ in Svay Rieng Province, Cambodia, and Tak SEZ in Tak Province, Thailand, were selected to investigate the precarious conditions associated with border areas. Thilawa SEZ near Yangon, Myanmar, and Phnom Penh SEZ in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, were selected as examples of zones in major urban centres which are (or are expected to be) dependent on internal migrant labour. Ms. Melo also explained that these four zones have higher concentrations of garment factories relative to other SEZs. After elaborating on the broader context of each of these zones, Ms. Melo presented the key thematic areas and findings to emerge from the study as follows:

- **Working conditions:** Conditions were found to be substantially different across the four zones, with labour rights and wages in Cambodia largely in accordance with the law, more concerns regarding labour rights in Thilawa, and wages and working conditions that were in violation of the law in Tak
- **Labour organising:** Severe restrictions on the right to freedom of association and the operation of trade unions were seen across sites
- **Skills development and recognition:** Skills training programmes exist in all three countries, however most respondents reported only having received on-the-job training for sewing specific garments. Skills were not recognised and did not lead to position upgrades or increases in wages
- **Care work:** Childcare supports were largely absent across study sites, despite laws in Cambodia and Myanmar stipulating the provision of on-site facilities. Instead, care duties were found to be performed by other women relatives, or the workers’ themselves, and migrant women carried a heavier burden

Ms. Melo’s presentation slides are available for download [at this link](#).

Open discussion



Figure 5: Ms. Pok Panhavichetr, Cambodian Women's Crisis Center (CWCC), poses a question during the open discussion

Questions were raised regarding the extent to which this study has successfully filled research gaps on working conditions in SEZs, and what more is needed. This study only looked at the garment industry, so there is a need for further research into other sectors, as well as a need to tease out in more depth the issues that are specific to SEZs from those that are relevant to the broader context of the individual countries. The topic of labour organising also received attention from the floor, with concerns raised regarding the gap between national laws and policies pertaining to unions and freedom of association, versus their actual implementation. A number of civil society representatives voiced challenges with accessing workers in SEZs as well as concern regarding breaches of labour laws, and called on the ILO for guidance. Ms. Paavilainen of the ILO clarified the ILO's role and capacity to provide a supervisory mechanism regarding the enforcement of national labour laws. She urged civil society colleagues to utilise official channels for the reporting of specific cases of violations, and or to reach out directly to ILO colleagues at the country-office level, who may be able to help facilitate negotiations between relevant parties.

Panel 1: Labour Rights and Working Conditions in SEZs

Facilitated by Mr. Bent Gehrt of the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC), this panel focused on collective actions, living wages, gender-based discrimination in the workplace, and social protection mechanisms for migrant workers in the GMS.



Figure 6: Mr. Bent Gehrt, WRC, facilitates Panel 1

Presentation of key findings and recommendations, Ms. Carli Melo, Mekong Migration Network

Key findings from the study pertaining to labour rights and working conditions in SEZs were presented by Ms. Carli Melo. The amount of overtime performed by workers in Thilawa SEZ, at 11 hours per week during high season, was highlighted, as well as concern that wages in Thilawa did not equate to a living wage. She also drew attention to the practice of ‘security deposits’ in Tak SEZ, brought to light through the study, whereby employers required workers to perform unpaid labour at the beginning of their employment. This practice contravenes national and international labour laws.

With regards to benefits and allowances, Phnom Penh and Manhattan SEZs were found to provide the most generous entitlements, while Tak SEZ had, by far, the lowest in terms of leave allowances. Concerns also emerged regarding the ways in which certain allowances can be used to apply pressure to workers, for example daily attendance allowances, which disincentivise workers from taking leave, even when sick.

Study results found that most respondents in Phnom Penh and Manhattan SEZs were in possession of a copy of their employment contract, while only one respondent in Tak SEZ (<1%) was, and less than 30% in Thilawa SEZ were. Occupational health and safety concerns

were present in all locations with reports of fainting, needles piercing fingers, electric shocks, and two cases of a hand being cut off by a machine. Restrictions on freedom of association were also seen across all locations.

Recommendations:

To national governments of Mekong countries:

1. Monitor and enforce employers' compliance with labour laws in SEZs
2. Monitor and enforce the payment of national minimum wages to all workers
3. Implement living wage rates as national minimum wages in Mekong countries
4. Promote and regulate social dialogue platforms for employers, employees, buyers, and SEZ management to ensure decent working environments

To factory owners:

1. Comply with national labour laws and regulations, including by allowing workers to form, manage, and join trade unions, and by providing workers with copies of their contracts
2. Pay workers a living wage

To regional organisations:

1. Monitor the labour rights performance of employers in SEZs and exert pressure on employers to comply with national and international labour standards
2. Advocate for living wages to be set as minimum wages for Mekong countries

Ms. Melo's presentation slides are available for download [at this link](#).

Ms. Pataraporn Laowong, National Economic and Social Development Board, Thailand



Figure 7: Ms. Pataraporn Laowong, National Economic and Social Development Board, Thailand

Ms. Pataraporn Laowong expressed concern regarding many of the negative labour rights issues and working conditions detailed in the report. She pointed to Thailand’s legal frameworks that are designed to provide protection for workers, and acknowledged the role that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) often play as “helping hands” in negotiations between workers and employers. Ms. Laowong therefore posed the question of: What barriers are currently preventing migrant workers from utilising these legal and informal mechanisms to ensure their rights are fulfilled? She also highlighted the need for further research to understand whether these issues are specific to migrant workers or are more broadly present in Thailand. The importance of social dialogue was raised and the role this can play in finding the nexus between business viability, security, and decent work for all: “Not just the creation of jobs, but also the creation of jobs of acceptable quality.” Ms. Laowong recommended greater knowledge sharing among migrant workers to raise awareness of their rights, and also questioned how buyers might be able to apply pressure when they are aware of unfair treatment of workers.

Ms. Laowong’s presentation slides are available for download [at this link](#).

Mr. Randolph Dacanay, Asian Development Bank



Figure 8: Mr. Randolph Dacanay, ADB

Mr. Randolph Dacanay shared reactions to the report, highlighting issues related to gender disparities. Mr. Dacanay posed pertinent questions as to whether gender-based inequities are also seen in relation to promotions and job positions, and whether women are at greater vulnerability to risk in work and living spaces. He raised the need for gender sensitivity within labour rights monitoring, questioning the extent to which women workers are able to raise their voices and express concerns in situations where labour inspectors are men, for example. Mr. Dacanay then provided some insight into ADB’s work on migrant health in the Mekong through the ‘Healthy Special Economic Zones’ project, noting the varied health needs of migrant workers. Mr. Dacanay noted that SEZs are an important component of the regional growth strategy in the GMS, yet stressed the need for greater coherence of SEZ policies and a regional mechanism for migrant health insurance.

Mr. Dacanay’s presentation slides are available for download [at this link](#).

Mr. Kaing Monika, Garment Manufacturers Association in Cambodia, Cambodia



Figure 9: Mr. Kaing Monika, GMAC

Mr. Kaing Monika began by praising the research project, and expressed gratitude for the opportunity to use the findings to assist in the continual improvement of labour conditions in Cambodia. Mr. Monika stressed that SEZs have been developed in Cambodia to facilitate trade and development, not to compromise the rights of workers, and that the same wages and protection standards apply to workers both inside and outside of zones. He expressed satisfaction regarding Cambodia's performance in the research findings, and acknowledged the role of the Better Factories Cambodia³ partnership as well as the commitment of the Cambodian government to introduce policies that link trade with labour conditions. Mr. Monika spoke with pride of the pioneering role of Better Factories Cambodia, stating that 'Better Work' initiatives that have since been rolled out in other countries are "the sons and daughters of Better Factories Cambodia."

³ More information on Better Factories Cambodia can be found at: <https://betterwork.org/where-we-work/cambodia/>

Mr. Komsoth Tim, Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, Cambodia



Figure 10: Mr. Komsoth Tim, MoLVT

Mr. Komsoth Tim stated the Cambodian government's commitment to creating an enabling environment for trade unions, including the enforcement of the Law on Trade Unions. Mr. Tim also pointed to government initiatives regarding skills training for garment workers through the establishment of vocational training centres, and urged employees to take advantage of opportunities for upgrading of skills. Other positive steps taken in Cambodia include the drafting of a new law on pensions for workers, as well as the introduction of mechanisms for streamlining labour inspections through inter-ministerial collaboration. Finally, Mr. Tim confirmed Cambodia's commitment to the various relevant international conventions it has ratified.

Mr. Thit Lwin Aung, Future Light Center, Myanmar



Figure 11: Mr. Thit Lwin Aung, FLC

Mr. Thit Lwin Aung corroborated a number of the research findings in Myanmar, reiterating some of the key challenges to creating better working conditions for SEZ garment factory workers. A crucial issue highlighted was with regards to employment contracts, as it is difficult for workers to have a clear understanding of their rights when they are not in possession of their contract. This also underpins the need for awareness raising activities among workers. Discrimination on the basis of marital status was also raised as a prevalent issue in the hiring of women factory workers in Myanmar, as employers give preference to applicants who are single, resulting in married women experiencing greater difficulty in securing employment. Mr. Thit Lwin Aung also voiced concerns regarding freedom of association and collective actions, arguing that Myanmar's labour laws are complex and place restrictions on workers demanding their rights. Trade unions and workers' associations are not encouraged, and there are cases where leaders have been threatened by their employers. Mr. Thit Lwin Aung called for the recognition of workers' associations, in addition to greater recognition of skills, and for wages that are sufficient to cover family expenses.

Mr. Thit Lwin Aung's presentation slides are available for download [at this link](#).

Open discussion



Figure 12: Mr. Zin Lin Htwe, YCOWA, raises a question from the floor

Regional mechanisms for social protection of migrant workers were discussed by participants, with ADB pointing to models in the Philippines and Sri Lanka that offer health coverage to nationals wherever they are working, stressing that migrants should be able to access health care of the same quality and at the same cost as they would receive at home. Cambodia's Law on Social Security was also highlighted by GMAC as an alternative model, which covers anyone working in Cambodia. Mr. Kaing Monika proposed cooperation between regional governments in order to replicate this in other countries. The issue of lack of migrant confidence in the systems of their destination country (touched upon by Ms. Laowong) was elaborated on by Ms. Reiko Harima, who explained that migrant workers often lack faith that destination country governments are genuinely willing to follow up on their complaints and find resolutions. Cases of companies suing complainants for defamation was also pointed to as a deterrent. Ms. Laowong thanked MMN for the report, and said it is "a very good starting point for policy makers to shed some light on the ground."

Panel 2: Skills Development and Recognition in SEZs



Figure 13: Mr. Sokchar Mom (right), LSCW, facilitates Panel 2

Mr. Sokchar Mom of Legal Support for Children and Women (LSCW), Cambodia, facilitated this panel on skills development and recognition. Panellists provided useful commentary on the report findings, pointing to other studies that corroborate the results, bringing to light positive initiatives currently underway to address the need for skills development and recognition, and discussing key challenges that still stand in the way.

Presentation of key findings and recommendations, Dr. Kyoko Kusakabe, Asian Institute of Technology



Figure 14: Dr. Kyoko Kusakabe, AIT, presents key findings

Dr. Kyoko Kusakabe of AIT presented findings of the study on skills development and recognition, opening by quoting ILO's vision for, "A universal entitlement for lifelong learning that enables people to acquire skills and reskill and upskill".⁴ Dr. Kusakabe acknowledged the role that SEZs can play in realising this goal, but stressed that there are currently large gaps and missed opportunities. Variation was seen between SEZs in this study regarding skills training, with the highest percentages of workers receiving training in Phnom Penh and Manhattan SEZs in Cambodia. Nonetheless, very few workers were found to have received promotions and there was no sign of career progression across all study sites.

	Thilawa SEZ	Phnom Penh SEZ	Manhattan SEZ	Tak SEZ
Skills training (%)	20	>80	>90	33
Promotion (%)	2	1	2	63
Average number of years in one job	1.6	2.7	5	3.5

Table 1: Skills training and career progression across study sites

Dr. Kusakabe linked the importance of investment in reskilling and skills recognition to the diversification of industry. She noted the dangers facing Myanmar and Cambodia, in particular, of over-reliance on the garment industry, and the importance of training workers on core competency standards so that they have more transferrable skills, as well as opportunities for

⁴ ILO (2019). Work for a Brighter Future: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---cabinet/documents/publication/wcms_662410.pdf

career development and progression. Dr. Kusakabe called on SEZs as the ideal place to demonstrate good practices in terms of skills training and recognition, as they are visible and can serve as showcases.

Recommendations:

To governments and employers:

1. Develop skills recognition programmes in collaboration with workers, buyers, and regional actors to ensure applicability across borders
2. Provide training to workers to enable career progression
 - Not only on sewing but also covering general competencies
 - Provide training during working hours
3. Identify reskilling needs of workers and develop capacity development programmes. This needs to be done in collaboration with civil society organisations (CSOs), buyers, and workers
4. Develop promotion scales and career progression mechanisms, in consultation with workers, CSOs, and labour unions

Dr. Kusakabe's presentation slides are available for download [at this link](#).

Ms. Hnin Phyu Phyu Aye, Aung Myin Hmu Project, Myanmar



Figure 15: Ms. Hnin Phyu Phyu Aye, Aung Myin Hmu Project

Ms. Hnin Phyu Phyu Aye provided an overview of the Aung Myin Hmu Project in Myanmar, which focuses on safe migration and empowerment for migrant women working in urban centres. The project works to improve the quality of employment, reduce migration risks, and improve workplace safety, and has seen 600 workers graduate from their project's training programme to date. Ms. Hnin Phyu Phyu Aye emphasised the research findings that sewing

training is not sufficient, pointing to the need for technical training on topics such as factory machinery and quality control, as well as supervisory-level training on leadership and human resources. She also highlighted the Aung Myin Hmu Garment Skills Training Centre's modules on industrial and basic skills competencies. Among Aung Myin Hmu graduates, 97% have been placed in jobs, and 64% earn more than non-trained workers.

Ms. Hnin Phyu Phyu Aye's presentation slides are available for download [at this link](#).

Mr. Sun Samoeun, Phnom Penh Special Economic Zone Management, Cambodia



Figure 16: Mr. Sun Samoeun, Phnom Penh SEZ

Mr. Sun Samoeun provided some background on Phnom Penh SEZ, including the fact that of its daily workforce of 18,500, 80% are women. Japanese companies are most highly represented among investors at 49%. Mr. Samoeun highlighted the strong support of the Cambodian government for the zone as a showcase for working conditions, and responded positively to the fact that many of the study findings indicated that Phnom Penh SEZ is more advanced than other study sites. However, Mr. Samoeun also acknowledged that there is room for improvement regarding skills development. Some of the challenges around skills training, according to Mr. Samoeun, include a perception on the part of some management that workers are not open to new opportunities as they view their employment in factories as temporary. Additionally, some employers do not value investment in training, as it detracts from productivity in the short term if workers are pulled out of work for training. Mr. Samoeun called for greater collaboration between the government and private sector to implement training programmes that meet the actual needs of the market.

Mr. Samoeun's presentation slides are available for download [at this link](#).

Ms. Marja Paavilainen, International Labour Organization

Ms. Marja Paavilainen added to the discussion on skills development by referring to a 2017 study by the ILO,⁵ which pointed to similar findings. While the ILO study supported the results of AIT and MMN's research that the vast majority of training received by workers was on-the-job, it also found that migrant workers developed leadership and social skills while abroad. However, only 16% were able to apply these new skills upon return home. In fact, most returnees experienced difficulty reintegrating and found that their skills were not recognised in their country of origin. This highlights the need to implement regional skills and prior learning recognition systems, in line with the 'Skills and Migration Cycle' presented by Ms. Paavilainen, below.

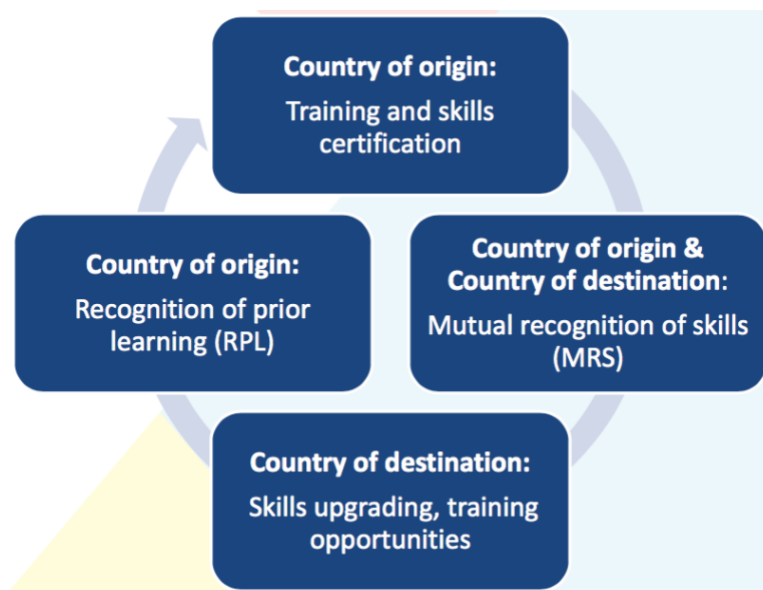


Figure 17: Skills and Migration Cycle, from Ms. Paavilainen's presentation slides

Challenges to implementing such systems include lack of incentives to destination countries and employers if there is not an actual need for higher skilled workers, and ILO therefore sees a need for skills shortage assessments to identify "hard to fill" jobs, providing evidence to incentivise training in order to fill such positions. Finally, Ms. Paavilainen drew attention to ILO's Future of Work initiative, highlighting that 56% of jobs are at risk of automation over next 20 years in Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam. This points to the likelihood of re-profiling of jobs. Employers will need to help with transitions, and governments will need active labour market policies.

Ms. Paavilainen's presentation slides are available for download [at this link](#).

⁵ ILO (2017). Risk and reward: Outcomes of labour migration in South-East Asia: https://www.ilo.org/asia/publications/WCMS_613815/lang--en/index.htm

Mr. Soe Naing, Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, Myanmar



Figure 18: Mr. Soe Naing, MoLIP

Mr. Soe Naing began by sharing some reactions and responses to recommendations in the report. Noting that AIT and MMN have called upon the Government of Myanmar to develop a garment industry-wide skills recognition programme, Mr. Soe Naing was pleased to share that this is currently being worked towards through the National Skills Standards Authority (NSSA). He explained the relevant structures and mechanisms of the NSSA that will help to enable this, including committees for competency standards and training development, skills assessment and certification, and a sector committee for the garment industry. Mr. Soe Naing also shared examples of employer-provided training programmes currently in operation spanning topics such as safety, leadership, and operation of machinery. He also noted some of the challenges faced by NSSA in implementing a fully-fledged programme, including limited capacity and resources, issues pertaining to employer awareness and collaboration, budget constraints, and a limited number of assessment and training providers in Myanmar.

Mr. Soe Naing's presentation slides are available for download [at this link](#).

Open discussion



Figure 19: Mr. Sutthisak Rungrueangphasuk (Aye), MAP Foundation, raises a question from the floor

Concern was raised from civil society partners that despite hearing about some positive initiatives from the panel, there remains little evidence in Myanmar of training being offered systematically to workers, as opposed to short-term training at the beginning of employment. Similarly, partners working in Mae Sot highlighted that training in Tak SEZ tends to be provided to managerial staff, while workers are not considered worth investing in as employers only deem it necessary for them to be skilled enough to be functional on the factory floor. The issue of linking skills development to access to higher paying jobs was also reiterated, and Aung Myin Hmu's Garment Skills Training Centre was able to point to their positive results on this front. According to ILO, the two arguments for skills development that resonate with employers tend to be efficiency and productivity, and that it is difficult to "sell" the idea of training if this cannot be demonstrated. The question was also raised of whether it continues to be a valid practice to hire foreign nationals for managerial roles in Phnom Penh SEZ, however Mr. Sun Samoeun noted that skills shortages still exist in Cambodia, particularly certain soft skills.

Panel 3: Childcare and Family Care in SEZs

This lively panel on childcare and family care was facilitated by Mr. Brahm Press of MAP Foundation. Plans for new childcare facilities in Thilawa SEZ were presented, avenues for further advocacy were discussed, and more light was shed on workplace discrimination based on gender, age, and marital status.



Figure 20: Panel 3. (Left to right) Mr. Sai Aung Tun, Dr. Than Than Thwe, Mr. Brahm Press

Presentation of key findings and recommendations, Dr. Kyoko Kusakabe, Asian Institute of Technology

Contrary to usual narrative of migrant children being left back home with relatives, Dr. Kusakabe stated that this study found that in many cases, women workers themselves were taking care of their own children while also working in garment factories (with the notable exception of workers in Phnom Penh SEZ, where greater dependence on workers' mothers was seen). In both cases, women were shouldering the majority of care work. In Cambodia and Myanmar, it is a legal requirement for childcare to be provided in the workplace if there are more than 100 women workers with children under the age of five, however Dr. Kusakabe shared the study findings that many places of employment had a specific room designated for childcare in order to meet legal requirements, but few had actual functioning day care services. Childcare is an important issue affecting the careers and income of women workers, and this study draws attention to the need for improved support. The study also looked at family care, primarily care for elderly parents, and found that most migrants remitted a large proportion of their income. Physical care was also usually being carried out by other women relatives, mostly sisters. Women respondents also reported feeling a higher level of responsibility for caring for their parents in the future, compared to men respondents.

Recommendations:

To governments, SEZ management, and employers:

1. Provide functioning childcare facilities in workplaces, noting that in Myanmar and Cambodia, it is required by law under certain circumstances
2. Support and assist with the establishment of community-level childcare, noting current barriers to care providers obtaining immigration status in Thailand
3. Provide mechanisms to support care for the elderly at the community-level in countries of origin

Dr. Kusakabe's presentation slides are available for download [at this link](#).

Dr. Than Than Thwe, Thilawa Special Economic Zone Management Committee, Myanmar



Figure 21: Dr. Than Than Thwe, Thilawa SEZ

Dr. Than Than Thwe opened by providing some background on Thilawa Special Economic Zone, which is a joint Japan-Myanmar venture, and has grown from five factories in 2015 to 74 in June 2019. 80% of the labour force currently comes from the local area, and the proportion of women workers is increasing. The rising maternal workforce has heightened the demand for childcare support, and Dr. Than Than Thwe therefore went on to outline a proposed model for childcare in Thilawa SEZ. The zone already has a Community Relationships Manager on staff, who has been instrumental in developing the plan. Thilawa plans to conduct a detailed survey to help with planning the design and functions of services, starting in women-dominated factories producing garments, food, toys, and electronics. Dr. Than Than Thwe presented an estimate of the number of children of workers in the zone, which was obtained by extrapolating from the AIT and MMN study findings of the percentages of respondents with

children. Further research by Thilawa SEZ will help to inform how many employees with children intend to utilise on-site day care facilities, and what proportion is in favour of community-based models of care. Benefits of on-site childcare put forth by Dr. Than Than Thwe included: increasing opportunities for women workers in the SEZ, reducing absences and increasing productivity, improving workforce diversity, enhancing job satisfaction and commitment, systematic healthcare and social and behavioural learning opportunities for children, improved corporate social responsibility records for employers, and flexible working arrangements for workers. While she also noted some challenges – notably with regards to the transportation of children to on-site day care, the cost of financing services and ensuring quality of care, and earning the trust of parents to utilise the services – Dr. Than Than Thwe concluded her exciting and forward-looking presentation by stating, “on-site childcare is a win for everyone!”

Dr. Than Than Thwe’s presentation slides are available for download [at this link](#).

Ms. Sally Barber, UN Women



Figure 22: Ms. Sally Barber, UN Women

Ms. Sally Barber from UN Women opened by congratulating MMN and AIT for an “excellent report”. Ms. Barber affirmed that while childcare and family care are often overlooked issues that are seen as “too difficult”, they have significant impact on women, their livelihoods and careers. Focusing on the rights women have and the obligations governments have under relevant international frameworks, Ms. Barber pointed to Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 8, including the promotion of shared responsibilities within households. Ms. Barber also drew attention to the fact that none of the countries in this study have ratified ILO Convention 183 on Maternity Protection, which could be a potential focus for advocacy. Similarly, of the three countries, only Cambodia is signatory to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. CEDAW has been widely

ratified, including by the three countries in this study, and views maternity protection and childcare as essential rights for all women, with articles 11 and 12 being of particular relevance. She also acknowledged the role of the private sector and highlighted the self-assessment tool developed by UN Women, entitled Women's Empowerment Principles: Equality Means Business.⁶

Finally, Ms. Barber presented a concrete list of opportunities for advocacy:

- Promote ratification of key international instruments
- Promote the importance of articles relevant to childcare, family life and women's participation in economic life, during development of national Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) action plans
- Assess policies and their implementation against regional guidelines and international standards (particularly CEDAW and ILO Convention No. 183)
- Use treaty body processes to increase implementation of international instruments
- Increase local, national and global pressure on businesses to meet or exceed national and international standards
- Gather evidence on the benefits of gender equality and non-discrimination for countries of destination and businesses
- Increase awareness among workers of their rights under national laws and international standards
- Promote more equitable parenting arrangements within migrant families
- Explore collaborative approaches to increasing the availability of childcare in SEZs

Ms. Barber's presentation slides are available for download [at this link](#).

⁶ UN Women (2011). Women's Empowerment Principles: Equality Means Business: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2011/10/women-s-empowerment-principles-equality-means-business#view>

Mr. Sai Aung Tun, Foundation for Education and Development, Thailand



Figure 23: Mr. Sai Aung Tun, FED

Speaking to the need for maternity protections and childcare support, Mr. Sai Aung Tun from FED reiterated the common issue of women resigning from their employment when becoming pregnant in situations where workplaces do not accommodate by allowing them to perform safer, modified forms of work. For pregnant women who remain employed and return to the same factory after giving birth, they often find that they must start again at the bottom, with lower wages than they were paid at the time they left for maternity leave. Mr. Sai Aung Tun noted that during pregnancy, women are often not allowed to take leave, and then after having children they often lack childcare support. When mothers take leave too often due to care responsibilities, they risk losing their jobs. Issues are compounded for migrant women when they are not in possession of their work contract and health insurance documents, which are often held by the employer and can be a barrier to receiving healthcare. Mr. Sai Aung Tun laid out the need for workers to have up-to-date and timely information on their rights under relevant laws and policies, including those pertaining to occupational health and safety. He also raised specific issues around the issuing of border passes under Section 64 of the Royal Ordinance on the Management of Foreign Workers Employment B.E. 2560 (2017): In addition to employers making use of this system to control migrant workers in the area, it is also problematic in terms of restricting parents from bringing family members to help care for their children. The impact of this in Mae Sot is that children are often separated from their parents and left back in Myanmar.

Mr. Sai Aung Tun's presentation slides are available for download [at this link](#).

Open discussion



Figure 24: Ms. Ei Hnin Hlaing from Action Labour Rights (ALR) raises a question

During the open discussion portion of the panel, Thilawa SEZ clarified that their plan for implementing childcare services is a direct result of the recommendations provided in the report by MMN and AIT. Dr. Than Than Thwe confirmed that the plan has a three-year timeline, starting with 11 women-dominated factories, and that the zone also intends to take discussions forward at the government level regarding community-based care options, providing facilities in residential areas. They have an existing fund for corporate social responsibility initiatives, which they plan to use to help fund childcare services, along with contributions from employers. A key point raised by civil society regarding the law on childcare in Myanmar was the stipulation that facilities only need to be provided when more than 100 mothers are employed, noting that there might be cases where there are fewer than 100 mothers but there are still children in need of support.

Much discussion also took place on the issues raised around discrimination based on age and marital status in Myanmar, with civil society claiming that garment factories are known to give preference to single women aged 18-25 years without families, and that women applicants are often required to provide a urine sample for pregnancy testing. Ms. Barber of UN Women made a strong statement in response, clarifying that CEDAW is very black and white on these points: dismissal based on pregnancy or marital status must be illegal in countries where CEDAW has been ratified.

Country-level Discussions

Breakout sessions were held based on country, with participants taking the opportunity to delve into greater depth on specific issues pertaining to their own country context. Each country-level discussion group comprised of a range of stakeholders, including government representatives, SEZ management, and civil society organisations. Groups were asked to identify three recommendations to be prioritised, noting any existing initiatives in place as well as what further action is needed.

Cambodia

Prioritised recommendation ⁷	Existing Initiatives	Possible actions	
		what	who
Recommendation 3 (to the Cambodian government): Social dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In PP SEZ quarterly meetings are held between factory owners, MoLVT, and the zone developer to discuss compliance with labour laws and regulations Labour inspections and meetings with workers' representatives and factory owners 	PP SEZ plans to formalise social dialogue which includes factory owners, workers' representatives, buyers, trade unions, and MoLVT.	MoLVT (secretariat role)
Recommendations 4,5 and 6 (to the Cambodian government): Skills development and promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Probationary period of 3 months Factory owners have their own training programmes and promotion schemes for worker Some Japanese owners in SEZ have their own training programmes PP SEZ provides soft skill training but not much GMAC has a training programme for middle managers Curriculum for middle managers and sewers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the internal regulation on human resource development for each factory Develop skills development in investment plans Work with GMAC and TVET to determine skills development schemes for garment workers 	MoLVT, TVET, GMAC, Trade unions and zone developers
Recommendation 7 (to the Cambodian government): Day care centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20% of the factory owners in the zone have child care facilities but no children utilising the services Employers provide allowances for child care for female workers 	<p>Additional surveys should be done with female workers and employers in relation to child care.</p> <p>Individual factories cannot provide day care centres; zone developers need to organise</p>	MoLVT, GMAC and PP SEZ, NSSF, MoWA, labour organisations, trade unions.

⁷ A list of all country-level recommendations from the report is provided in Appendix B

		facilities that can be jointly utilised. Lack of trust on the part of employees regarding child care provided by employers is also an issue.	
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Table 2: Recommendations prioritised by the Cambodia country group

The first recommendation prioritised during the Cambodia country-level discussion was regarding the promotion of social dialogue (as seen in the above table). Consensus was reached among participants on wanting to see platforms for ongoing discussion between workers, factory owners, trade unions, and buyers. Some initiatives are already in place that go some way to addressing this, including business-oriented quarterly meetings and labour inspections, however the Cambodia group called for the formalisation of dialogue between a broader range of parties, including workers' representatives and trade unions. MoLVT was nominated to facilitate the forming of social dialogue mechanisms and to invite all relevant parties.

The second area of focus of the Cambodia group was on skills development and promotion. While it was recognised that some factories currently operate training programmes and promotion schemes, concern was raised during the discussion that trainings might be very technical and not include soft skills. GMAC also currently has a training programme but targeting middle managers. The group proposed that skills development plans should be integrated within investment plans, and that GMAC should work in collaboration with TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) skills training and certification schemes to ensure that training provided to garment workers is nationally recognised. The group also discussed the impact of automation on the garment sector, and called for collaboration between MoLVT, TVET, GMAC, trade unions, and zone developers to look at how to handle this.

Provision of functioning day care centres was the third recommendation prioritised by the Cambodia group. Concern was expressed about the capacity of individual factories to provide services, and the need for zone developers to organise facilities that can be jointly utilised. Issues were also raised regarding lack of trust on the part of parents to place their children in employer-provided childcare, and a survey was proposed to understand better why workers are reluctant to utilise day care services. MoLVT was nominated as a potential lead for this survey, in collaboration with GMAC, Phnom Penh SEZ, and NSSF.



Figure 25: Cambodia country-level discussion

Open discussion (Cambodia)

The Cambodian Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) shared that it has established day care services within the ministry, and extended an invitation to collaborate on recommendation 7 to help develop a model for the SEZ. Civil society partners also pointed out the value of inviting labour organisations and trade unions to collaborate, as they will bring the voices of the workers to the table including expertise on issues such as the transportation of children to childcare.

Myanmar

Prioritised recommendation ⁸	Existing Initiatives	Possible actions	
		what	who
Recommendations 2 and 3 (to the Thilawa SEZ Management Committee): Develop and implement trainings		Conduct trainings on: labour laws, rights, social security, skills, standards and management, and sexual harassment. Training should be provided for employers, government officials, and workers.	MoLIP, trade unions/CSOs, employers
Recommendation 4 (to the Myanmar government): Increase minimum wage to a living wage		Formulate a living wage (i.e. taking into account inflation, etc.). SEZ to act as a model for this practice.	Government (MoLIP), Thilawa SEZ Management Committee, employers, buyers, trade unions

⁸ A list of all country-level recommendations from the report is provided in Appendix B

Recommendation 1 (to the Thilawa SEZ Management Committee): Unannounced inspections of factories		Conduct unannounced inspections of factories	Government, SEZ Management Committee, trade unions
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Table 3: Recommendations prioritised by the Myanmar country group

The Myanmar country-level discussion focused on skills training as its top priority. Acknowledging the presence of some existing training programmes for SEZ workers, including some that are run by factories, and others by MoLIP, there is room for improvement. The group specifically called for the development of trainings on labour laws to help teach workers their legal rights, and proposed collaboration between MoLIP, trade unions, employers, and NGOs for the development of trainings.

The next area of priority for the Myanmar group was to increase the minimum wage to a living wage. Participants discussed the need to formulate a living wage by looking at inflation and the cost of living in different regions. The minimum wage law in Myanmar currently allows for increase every two years, so it is due to go up again in 2020. The group proposed conducting surveys with workers to help inform the amount it is raised by.

The final priority recommendation to emerge from the Myanmar discussion was for unannounced inspections of factories, calling on government, SEZ management, and trade unions to collaboratively implement this.



Figure 26: Myanmar country-level discussion

Open discussion (Myanmar)

WRC added that part of the discussion that took place was around labour unions potentially jointly carrying out labour inspections with the inspectors. Mr. Soe Naing of MoLIP also

confirmed that the Myanmar government is currently developing rules for the labour law to provide greater protection to workers involved in collective actions.

Most of the discussion from the floor then centred around wages. A positive existing initiative in Thilawa SEZ was highlighted, whereby there is an agreement in the zone not to use training and probationary-period wages (workers are paid full wage from the commencement of employment). Mr. Soe Naing said that this practice is already in place and that investors have agreed to give the full minimum wage to all workers. With regards to formulating a living wage, GMAC shared Cambodia's standing practice of reviewing the minimum wage annually through tripartite negotiations in line with ILO standards, and encouraged the Myanmar counterparts to consider doing the same.

Thailand

Prioritised recommendation ⁹	Existing Initiatives	Possible actions	
		what	who
Recommendation 3 (to the Thai government) and recommendation 1 (to the Myanmar government): Section 64		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce related charges • Extend period for this section • Use in metropolitan areas • Reform requirement to reside in Myawaddy, to allow residents of different areas to enter under section 64 	
Recommendation 1 (to the Thai government): Labour inspections		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase reach through alternative channels • Paralegals • Educate workers • Improve investigation methods • Interview people outside of factories 	
Recommendation 7 (to the Thai government): Social dialogue		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-stakeholders integration • Regular meetings (every three months) in order to address social issues 	

Table 4: Recommendations prioritised by the Thailand country group

The Thailand country group talked extensively about use of Section 64 in Mae Sot. Specifically, the group reiterated issues around travel restrictions that Section 64 places on holders, as well as the age limit (under 55 years), the fact that dependents cannot accompany workers, and that it does not provide access to the social security scheme. Additionally, the costs associated with monthly renewals were discussed. The group specifically proposed the reduction of charges and fees, and for employees to be able to apply for renewals themselves, rather than having to go through costly agents. They also proposed that the Myanmar side allows residents from anywhere in Myanmar to apply, not just residents of Myawaddy.

Reform and strengthening of labour inspections was the second priority area raised by the Thailand group. They highlighted the need to overcome language barriers to improve employee awareness of their rights, and called for greater input of workers' voices so inspectors actually

⁹ A list of all country-level recommendations from the report is provided in Appendix B

understand what is happening on the ground. Inspections should focus more on the protection of workers, including wages and occupational health and safety.

The final priority recommendation put forth by the Thailand group was with regards to social dialogue. Quarterly meetings organised by MAP Foundation between stakeholders including government, CSOs, and trade unions were proposed as a mechanism to raise issues on the ground faced by workers so that government can provide immediate solutions.



Figure 27: Thailand country-level discussion

Open discussion (Thailand)

The open discussion echoed many of the concerns already raised regarding Section 64. Civil society representatives pointed to the stipulation that limits Section 64 only to those whose registered residence is in Myawaddy, Myanmar, which purportedly leads to a lot of corruption. MAP Foundation called for this clause to be reformed. The restrictions on freedom of movement that Section 64 places on holders was reiterated, as workers are not able to leave Mae Sot to seek higher paid work in other parts of Thailand.

Alternatives to labour inspections in factories were also discussed; it was proposed that inspectors should talk to workers in environments outside the factories (where they are more free to talk) to understand actual working conditions. Paralegals in the migrant community are currently providing referral mechanisms to NGO services, and it was suggested that this system should also link to labour inspections.

Concluding Comments and Takeaways



Figure 28: Takeaway comments from Mr. Tola Moeun, Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)

All participants were invited to share their key takeaway from the event, which are summarised below:

- Mr. Brahm Press of MAP Foundation commented on the relevance of the research: “We were at the front of a very important issue. We’ve contributed significantly, but now need to see that these things are followed up.”
- Ms. Gillian Dowie of IDRC noted the nature of MMN’s partnerships in-country, which made the study very strong and the research findings extremely useful
- Ms. Pok Panhavichetr from CWCC stated that she has seen very good models for childcare through this workshop, and would like to use this new knowledge to see what is possible in Cambodia
- Ms. Hnin Phyu Phyu Aye of Aung Myin Hmu Project commented that the results very obviously demonstrate the need for reskilling and skills upgrading for current garment workers (not just training for new workers), and expressed that she is excited to use the findings back in Myanmar
- Dr. Than Than Thwe from Thilawa SEZ shared that the research findings and recommendations are very valuable for Thilawa SEZ to see what they need to improve, noting that she now has a framework for childcare, labour rights and skills development. “We appreciate that you chose Thilawa SEZ as a site for your research. Please contact us in the future; we are willing to cooperate with MMN research!”
- Mr. Bent Gehrt from WRC noted MMN’s purpose of conducting research that leads to action. This research has already spurred the planning and ideas for Thilawa to think strategically about childcare, which has also inspired Phnom Penh SEZ to follow in the same footsteps. It is a very clear example of research that leads to potential action. He also

expressed hope that Myanmar counterparts take on board the recommendation to have annual reviews of the minimum wage rate

- Mr. Maurice Wee from UNDP expressed that it is great to see a report on SEZs which fills some gaps on an issue that has not received enough coverage. He also noted that the workshop was highly successful in convening stakeholders of SEZs, which is rarely seen
- Mr. Tola Moeun of CENTRAL reiterated his desire to see a practical solution for childcare in Cambodia, that takes into consideration a range of factors so that workers feel comfortable to use it. He also expressed hope for a regional mechanism for skills recognition for garment workers
- Mr. Kaing Monika from GMAC stated his appreciation for the good intention of the project, and that he intends to push for maximum improvement
- Mr. Sokchar Mom of LSCW reflected on his experience interacting with garment workers as part of the research team, noting that many of their issues are overdue to be addressed: “I hope that my colleagues here will continue this discussion at the country level and narrow down more how to strategically address the issues”
- Mr. Pisith Sok from the Cambodian MoWA shared that he was impressed with Thilawa SEZ’s plan for childcare and appreciated the opportunity to learn from it. He reiterated the importance of childcare services to enable women to contribute to the development and economy of the country
- Mr. Sun Samoeun of Phnom Penh SEZ echoed MoWA’s comments that Thilawa SEZ’s childcare example provides a model for Cambodia to consider, although he noted the need to look at the specific context of Phnom Penh SEZ. He stated, “we want to see more recommendations from the report mainstreamed into our plans for the zone.”
- Mr Komsoth Tim from the Cambodian MoLVT said he had learned a lot from the Myanmar team, and also confirmed Cambodia’s commitment to labour inspections and follow up on issues that they bring to light
- Mr. An Rama from the Cambodian Labour Confederation (CLC) reiterated the importance of this research in filling a knowledge gap, stating that the report and recommendations can now be used for the benefit of workers in SEZs. “We want SEZs (to be) SPECIAL for everyone, not only for employers, and workers will consider SEZs as heaven. Workers’ rights are human rights!”
- Mr. Thit Lwin Aung from FLC commented on the utility of the research findings to help improve on the negative aspects and focus on the positive aspects. He expressed a desire to continue to cooperate, and invited MMN and AIT to do more research
- Mr. Zin Lin Htwe from YCOWA stated that “women workers are the mothers of the future generations”, and that this research has made it clear what is happening to those in SEZs: “We have learned something from this research, it is very valuable to us.”
- Mr. Sai Aung Tun from FED thanked AIT and MMN for this research, and expressed gratitude to have worked together
- Mr. Sutthisak Rungrueangphasuk (Aye) from MAP Foundation expressed a sense of unity and shared commitment to change among those in the room: “Let’s move on from this today to find solutions”
- Mr. Ubon Malangphu from the Department of Employment in Tak Province commented on the value of being able to learn about some of the issues facing Cambodia and Myanmar, which helped shed light on the fact that Thailand is not alone in its challenges. He expressed desire to collaborate again in the future
- Ms. Supawee Sirithirasarn from the Immigration Office in Mae Sot District said the workshop helped her to see how things are happening on the ground and the needs of

migrants. She stated that she will share the executive summary of the report with her managers

- Ms. Carli Melo of MMN thanked MMN's partners, who have worked tirelessly on this research over the past three years. She thanked Ms. Veena and the AIT students working behind the scenes to make the workshop possible. She also thanked all the stakeholders who opened their doors to share and make this report possible, including the garment factory workers who took time to share their experiences and aspirations: "We need to remember that we are representing people who don't have a voice in these kinds of meetings". Ms. Melo expressed that she was left feeling inspired and hopeful that SEZs in the Mekong could actually be recognised as an example for decent work. Finally, she thanked Ms. Reiko Harima for her work
- Dr. Kyoko Kusakabe from AIT echoed Ms. Melo's comments, and thanked participants for their openness, level of engagement, constructive suggestions, and creative ideas. She commented on the salient nature of this topic, with forthcoming reports from ADB, UNDP, ILO, and IOM. She thanked IDRC for their support, and MMN for the opportunity to partner with their network. Dr. Kusakabe thanked the interpreters for their hard work, as well as the students and staff, and Ms. Veena

Appendices

A. List of attendees

MYANMAR

No.	Name	Organisation
1	Mr. Thit Lwin Aung	Future Light Center (FLC)
2	Dr. Than Than Thwe	Thilawa SEZ Management Committee
3	Mr. Soe Naing	Department of Labour, Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population (MoLIP)
4	Ms. Hnin Phyu Phyu Aye	Aung Myin Hmu Project
5	Dr. Ko Ko Zaw	CARE Myanmar
6	Mr. Wanna Soe	WE Generation
7	Ms. Ei Hnin Hlaing	Action Labour Rights (ALR)
8	Mr. Min Min Lat	Confederation of Trade Unions in Myanmar (CTUM)
9	Mr. Zin Lin Htwe	Yaung Chi Oo Workers' Association (YCOWA)
10	Mr. Myo Thein	Myanmar Industries Craft and Services Trade Unions Federation (MICS-TUSF)

CAMBODIA

	Name	Organisation
11	Mr. Sokcha Mom	Legal Support for Children and Women (LSCW)
12	Ms. Tep Mealea	Legal Support for Children and Women (LSCW)
13	Mr. Komsoth Tim	Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MoLVT)
14	Mr. Sun Samoeun	Phnom Penh SEZ Management
15	Mr. Kaing Monika	Garment Manufacturers Association in Cambodia (GMAC)
16	Mr. An Rama	Cambodian Labour Confederation (CLC)
17	Mr. Trevor Sworn	Cambodia Federation of Employers and Business Associations (CAMFEBA)
18	Mr. Tola Moeun	Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
19	Ms. Pok Panhavichetr	Cambodian Women's Crisis Center (CWCC)
20	Mr. Pisith Sok	Economic Development Department, Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA)

THAILAND

	Name	Organisation
21	Ms. Duangthip Chomprang	Institute for International Trade and Development (ITD)
22	Ms. Pataraporn Laowong	Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB)
23	Mr. Bent Gehrt	Worker Rights Consortium (WRC)
24	Mr. Brahm Press	MAP Foundation
25	Mr. Sutthisak Rungrueangphasuk (Aye)	MAP Foundation
26	Mr. Sai Aung Tun	Foundation for Education and Development (FED)
27	Mr. Moe Kyaw	Yaung Chi Oo Workers' Association (YCOWA)
28	Mr. Ubon Malangphu	Department of Employment, Tak Province, Ministry of Labour
29	Ms. Supawee Sirithirasarn	Immigration Office, Mae Sot District, Tak Province

INGOs

	Name	Organisation
30	Ms. Marja Paavilainen	Triangle in ASEAN, International Labour Organization (ILO)
31	Ms. Minna Maaskola	Better Work, International Labour Organization (ILO)
32	Ms. Kuanruthai Siripatthanakosol	International Labour Organization (ILO)
33	Ms. Pukchanok Pattanatabud	International Organization for Migration (IOM)
34	Ms. Sally Barber	UN Women
35	Ms. Janice (Chi Kei Wong)	UN Women
36	Ms. Alejandra Pineda	UN Women
37	Mr. Randolph Dacanay	Asian Development Bank (ADB)
38	Ms. Geeti Patwal	UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)
39	Ms. Constanza Pauchulo	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
40	Mr. Maurice Wee	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

ORGANISERS AND GUESTS

	Name	Organisation
41	Dr. Kyoko Kusakabe	Asian Institute of Technology (AIT)
42	Ms. Reiko Harima	Mekong Migration Network (MMN)
43	Ms. Carli Melo	Mekong Migration Network (MMN)
44	Ms. Gillian Dowie	International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada
45	Ms. Ayesha Rekhi	Embassy of Canada to Thailand
46	Dr. Eden Y. Woon	Asian Institute of Technology (AIT)

SUPPORT STAFF

	Name	Organisation
47	Mr. Sirayuth Thongprasert	Asian Institute of Technology (AIT)
48	Ms. J. Virgula	Asian Institute of Technology (AIT)
49	Mr. Jia Siteng	Asian Institute of Technology (AIT)
50	Ms. Veena N.	Asian Institute of Technology (AIT)
51	Ms. Mu Mu Winn	Translator
52	Ms. Sophea Peng	Translator
53	Ms. Orntima Nam Kularb	Translator
54	Ms. Hayley Welgus	Rapporteur
55	Ms. Thida Kim	Asian Institute of Technology (AIT)
56	Ms. May Myat Noe	Asian Institute of Technology (AIT)
57	Ms. Methinee Phoovatis	Asian Institute of Technology (AIT)

B. Country-level recommendations from the report

CAMBODIA:

To the Cambodian government:

1. Invest more heavily in improving working conditions, skills development, employer-labour relations, and improved employment opportunities for women in Cambodia. SEZs provide an opportunity to serve as a showcase for this.
2. Revise the labour union law so that all unions are able to recruit members and initiate cases, so that various channels of communication are available for workers to negotiate with employers.
3. Promote social dialogue between employers, workers, buyers, and also the zone developers to discuss issues of labour rights and business. Social dialogue shall be done in the form of tripartite plus format.
4. Provide training to garment factory workers to improve their competency and employment opportunities. Training should not be limited to sewing, but should be expanded to include general competencies such as managing work and supervising, to prepare workers to be more versatile and to advance to leadership roles. It is also important to equip workers with transferrable skills so they are better prepared to shift functions as Cambodia's industry diversifies.
5. Obligate employers to conduct needs assessments or training programmes for workers. As above, this should not be limited only to sewing skills, but should cover general competency skills.
6. Help develop promotion scales for garment factory workers so that workers' skills are recognized and reflected in their pay, and so that garment factory workers can have avenues for career progression.
7. Ensure that day care centres are functioning in factories, and that workers are able to easily bring their children to use these services. If factories cannot provide day cares themselves, communal day care centre should be organised either within the community or within the SEZ.
8. Ensure safe transportation for workers through an inspection programme of vehicles used by workers.

To employers:

1. Allow various trade unions to have space to recruit workers to join their union. Allow outside unions to come to support unions inside SEZ.
2. Provide training to workers in collaboration with the government and GMAC. Training needs to be provided within working hours to ensure that women workers can attend.
3. Introduce a promotion scheme for workers to recognize improvements to skills and to create career paths for workers.
4. Provide functioning day care centres. If individual factories cannot provide this, SEZ zone developers need to organise facilities that factories can jointly utilize.

To buyers:

1. Continue close monitoring of working conditions of the workers of their suppliers. Support activities of various labour unions in the factory to ensure voices of workers are heard.

MYANMAR:

To the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar:

1. Implement a labour law awareness campaign in collaboration with trade unions and labour rights organisations targeting garment factory workers and employers, including those in SEZs.
2. Prioritise and fast track the process of issuing social security cards to all workers contributing to the Social Security Fund.
3. Develop a garment industry-wide skills recognition programme to formally validate the acquired skills and work experience of garment factory workers.
4. Increase the statutory minimum wage to a living wage rate.

To the Thilawa Special Economic Zone Management Committee:

1. Conduct more frequent, regular, and unannounced labour inspections of factories in the SEZ jointly with the labour section of the One Stop Service Centre.
2. Provide comprehensive training to factory management personnel operating in the SEZ on national labour laws and regulations, workplace cooperation between management and employees, and effective supervisory skills.
3. Provide comprehensive training to workers in SEZ factories on national labour laws, their rights under these laws, and processes for reporting and settling labour disputes.
4. Grant trade unions and labour rights organisations access to workers in SEZ factories.
5. Develop of a model childcare facility for workers in the SEZ.
6. Encourage SEZ factory owners and their buying companies to pay their employees a living wage.

To factory owners:

1. Comply with national labour laws and regulations, including by allowing workers to form, manage, and join trade unions and independently nominate worker representatives for Workplace Coordinating Committees.
2. Pay workers a living wage.
3. Provide skills training to workers during working hours.

To buyers:

1. Support their suppliers in paying their employees a living wage.

THAILAND:

To the Thai Government:

1. Strengthen labour inspections and monitor labour practices of factories. Focus should be on: on minimum wage payment, deduction of wages, paid leave, overtime hourly rates, lower payment for trainees, confiscation of registration documents, and the practice of “deposits”.
2. Revise the labour law so that migrants can organise their own unions.
3. Review Section 64 so that it allows (a) workers to have stable employment by extending the stay permit period, (b) reduce costs so that it becomes cheaper than the nationality verification scheme, (c) allow dependents to accompany the workers, (d) allow workers to register themselves and not be linked to employers.
4. Provide childcare facilities for workers’ children.
5. Provide training to migrant workers for upskilling and reskilling.

6. Provide training to employers so that they are more aware of the labour law provisions, as well as the benefits of training workers.
7. Promote/regulate social dialogue platform between employers, buyers, employees and government itself regularly to ensure the safe and secure working environment.

To the Myanmar government:

1. Remove the requirement of having a residency in Myawaddy in order to be eligible for a border passbook.
2. Strengthen the monitoring of working conditions of Myanmar migrant workers in Mae Sot, through active engagement of the labour attaché.
3. Provide support to workers who launch a complaint to the Labour Inspectors.

To employers:

1. Comply with the Labour Law on minimum wage payment, overtime hourly rate payment, paid leave, payment for trainees, ensure that deductions are not applied, and abolish the practice of “deposits”.
2. Ensure that copies of contracts and the original copies of registration documents remain in the possession of the worker. This is a legal requirement.
3. Provide childcare facilities for employees.
4. Allow and support Workers’ Welfare Committees to function as a discussion and negotiation forum between employers and employees.
5. Provide training to workers and ensure that the improved skills and experience of workers are reflected in their pay and opportunities for promotion. Tax exemption arrangements for training costs should be used more extensively.
6. Establish a mechanism for industry self-regulation. It is important to note that some employers are following the law and providing adequate working conditions and benefits to workers, while others are not. There is a need for employers to organise and hold each other accountable for compliance.