

## Asia

The search for better economic opportunities is one of the main drivers of migration in Central and South East Asia, while issues of vulnerability linked to emigration can lead to labour and sexual exploitation. In consequence, the management of Labour migration and fighting against Trafficking in Human Beings are two key topics in the region.

### Regional migration trends and challenges

In 2017, out of 258 million migrants worldwide, 80 million (60%) lived in Asia, representing the **first region of destination** for international migrants. Between 2000 and 2017, Asia saw a higher increase in international migrants than any other region in the world with 1.8 million migrants per year, a total of 30 million over the whole period.

Asia also represented the **first region of origin of migration flows**, with 106 million out of 258 million international migrants born in Asian countries. In 2017 the majority of international migrants from Asia resided in another Asian country, making Asia-to-Asia the largest regional migration corridor in the world.<sup>1</sup>

In **Central and South East Asia**, the search for better economic opportunities and higher wages represents one of the main drivers of migration. In Central Asia, Russia, and to a lesser extent Kazakhstan, are important destinations for labour migrants working mainly in the construction and service sectors; while in South East Asia, migrants from Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar move to Thailand, among other destinations, to work in fields such as agriculture, fishery, domestic work, construction and manufacturing.

**Remittances** sent by migrant workers to their families have become an essential part of the national revenue in this continent, especially in Central Asian countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, where inward remittances accounted for 30.4% and 26.9% respectively of the GDP, and the Philippines in South East Asia, with inward remittances representing



10.2% of the GDP.<sup>2</sup>

**Migrants' vulnerability**, in some cases due to their irregular status and debts incurred during the migration process, make them subject to becoming victims of Trafficking in Human Beings (THB) for the purposes of labour and sexual exploitation.

In Central Asia, high levels of poverty and unemployment, economic stagnation and demand for low-skilled labour in Russia and Kazakhstan have led to an increase in seasonal and permanent migration.

In South East Asia, disparities in development levels and demand for low-skilled labour in some growing economies in the region have pushed an important number of people to look for employment abroad. In both cases, a significant number of labour migrants have ended up being trafficked and exploited.

States in Central and South East Asia are strongly **engaged in managing labour migration** and addressing THB, also through regional cooperation instruments. The Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) signed the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of Migrant Workers in 2007, and created a Committee to supervise its implementation. The ASEAN Declaration Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children of 2004, and the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking signed in 2015 and which entered into force in 2017, also show the key role played by the ASEAN Community in addressing this issue.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), [International Migration Report 2017](#)

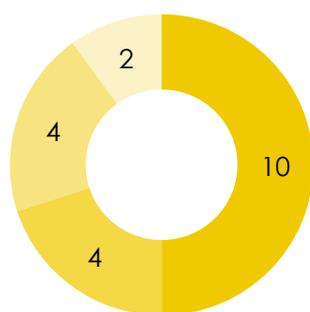
<sup>2</sup> World Bank, [Personal remittances, received \(% of GDP\)](#),

## MIEUX in Asia

Up to 2018, MIEUX has implemented 17 Actions<sup>3</sup> in Asia, of which 10 in South East Asia and 7 in Central Asia.

Since its launch, both South-East and Central Asian countries have considered MIEUX as a key partner in view of strengthening their capacities for an enhanced governance of migration, especially in order to address important challenges linked to **labour migration and THB**. The noteworthy number of government requests and subsequent Actions implemented in the field of THB and labour migration clearly underlines the importance of addressing such issues in Central and South East Asia.

**MIEUX Actions in Asia according to thematic areas**



- Irregular Migration and Trafficking in Human Beings
- Labour Migration
- Horizontal Intervention
- Migration and Development

Central and South East Asian countries have been accompanied by MIEUX in responding to some of the most pressing challenges related to managing labour migration and addressing THB. MIEUX has provided expertise through a variety of activities, namely, fact-finding missions; capacity building activities; remote or on-site support to the development of operational tools documents and

<sup>3</sup> An Action can cover multiple themes. Therefore the sum of Actions and thematic areas in the graph (20) is higher than the total actual number of Actions cited

information/ awareness raising campaigns.

The table below summarises key objectives linked to managing labour migration and addressing trafficking in Asian countries in which MIEUX has worked or is currently working; the approach MIEUX followed; and the results produced or expected.

### Kyrgyzstan (2013-2014)

<i>Objective</i>	Managing labour migration flows, also through information and awareness raising campaigns
<i>MIEUX Approach</i>	To strengthen the capacities of public authorities to elaborate a communication strategy and design an information campaign on migration, notably irregular migration, trafficking, migrant rights, and return and reintegration
<i>Result</i>	Migration Communication Strategy, adopted by a Ministerial Decree

### Tajikistan (2017 - ongoing)

<i>Objective</i>	Protecting migrant labour and social rights
<i>MIEUX Approach</i>	To enhance the capacities of national authorities to efficiently manage external labour migration flows and to effectively protect the rights of Tajik migrant workers and their families abroad
<i>Result</i>	Roadmap on External Labour Migration

### Philippines (2014-ongoing)

<i>Objective</i>	Countering exploitation of migrant labour, especially forced labour and trafficking
<i>MIEUX Approach</i>	To reinforce the capacity of Philippine institutions to counter trafficking and illegal recruitment, especially through the investigation and prosecution of illegal recruitment cases linked to THB, while enhancing coordination among relevant agencies

*Result* 'Investigation and Prosecution of THB and Illegal Recruitment Cases' Handbook

### Timor-Leste (2016-ongoing)

*Objective* Strengthening institutional knowledge and skills to investigate THB cases

*MIEUX Approach* To enhance capacities of governmental actors in the investigation of trafficking

*Result* 'Investigation and THB case preparation' Handbook

### Philippines (2010-2012)

*Objective* Enhancing institutional capacities to conduct awareness raising campaigns on THB

*MIEUX Approach* To improve the capacities of public authorities to develop and implement awareness raising mechanisms to better prevent potential migrants from becoming victims of irregular migration and trafficking

*Result* 'Campaigning against Illegal Recruitment and Trafficking in Persons using Social Marketing Techniques' Handbook

### Thailand (2013 – 2017)

*Objective* Improvement of cooperation among relevant actors working on THB issues

*MIEUX Approach* To enhance capacities of relevant authorities, as well as the cooperation and coordination among them, with a view to protecting victims of THB and to addressing issues linked to homelessness in the context of migration

*Result* Multidisciplinary teams are better equipped to assist victims of trafficking

## Managing labour migration and countering THB in Asia: the way forward

In recent years, Central and South East Asian countries have achieved key results in the field of migration governance, especially on addressing labour migration and THB issues. Nonetheless, on the basis of MIEUX experience in the region, the following aspects will require dedicated attention in the years to come:

### Preventing abusive migration practices and protecting migrant workers' rights

As highlighted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) *Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration*, it is crucial to enhance measures to detect and identify abusive practices against migrant workers; provide remedies for migrant workers whose rights have been violated, and appropriate sanctions for offenders; and offer adequate assistance and protection to victims of abuse.

As an example of equipping a Government to prevent abuse, between 2014 and 2016 MIEUX implemented an Action in Myanmar to equip government officials with tools to develop and implement information campaigns on legal channels for employment abroad and the potential risks of emigration, developing the 'Management of Labour Migration in Myanmar Practical Handbook' in accordance to international human and labour rights' standards.

### Using more and better data on labour migration for enhanced labour migration policies and actions

Only when it is based on reliable data can policy-making be truly effective in managing labour migration flows in accordance with labour market needs, and the objective to prevent and address abuse and exploitation of migrant workers, as well as to protect their rights. However, insufficient institutional knowledge and capacities, as well as a lack of inter-institutional cooperation in data collection and analysis, are among the most relevant shortcomings preventing data from becoming available and operational.

One way in which MIEUX has contributed to

redressing the situation is through its Action in the Lao People's Democratic Republic between 2013 and 2015, equipping the Laotian authorities with data collection, analysis and dissemination methods, and providing guidance on coordination on data collection and management. The 'Guidelines for Inter-agency Cooperation on Production of Migrant Statistics' was developed with MIEUX's support as a practical tool on labour migration data.

## Further addressing the link between labour exploitation and trafficking

While many Asian countries have placed strong emphasis on addressing THB for the purposes of sexual exploitation, the same level of attention has not been paid to THB for the purposes of labour exploitation, in spite of its relevance to the continent, especially in cotton production in Central Asia and the fishing industry and domestic work in South East Asia.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC's) *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2016*, trafficking for the purpose of forced labour accounts for 64% of the detected victims in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and 30% in East Asia and the Pacific. It is therefore essential to further develop tools and practices to address the link between trafficking and labour exploitation, e.g. through policies and laws, taking into account the whole spectrum of the trafficking phenomenon, better regulating and monitoring labour recruitment practices, strengthening efforts and capacities (for instance of labour inspectors) to identify and protect victims, and to prevent trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation, and to investigate and prosecute offenders.

## Strengthening national capacities and expertise, and promoting awareness raising on THB

According to MIEUX's experience, one of the challenges encountered by Central and South East Asian countries in countering THB is frequently the insufficient capacities and expertise of actors working in this field.

National authorities could benefit from targeted

capacity building activities, such as those supported by MIEUX in the fields of international instruments, and national policies and laws addressing trafficking; identification and protection of victims; investigation and prosecution techniques; and awareness raising campaigns and outreach programmes, in order to increase their theoretical and practical knowledge to address THB issues, and thus capitalising on regional and international standards and good practices.

## Fostering coordination and cooperation among relevant national stakeholders and among Governments

Horizontally, more structured cooperation and coordination mechanisms among relevant institutions and agencies, as well as with non-governmental stakeholders is needed to enhance migration governance.

Vertically, cooperation and coordination between local levels of the national administration and local authorities can also be improved. In this direction, a MIEUX Action in the Philippines focused, among others, on supporting enhanced coordination between the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) and Local Government Units (LGUs) on trafficking issues.

Furthermore, regional and international cooperation still represent a key resource that could be further developed in order to effectively address labour migration and trafficking.

For instance, between 2010 and 2012 MIEUX implemented a regional Action in South East Asia aimed at promoting an inter-governmental, results-oriented regional dialogue to support the regional cooperation framework on mobility and migration issues, and at enhancing the protection and promotion of rights of migrants in the region, also covering labour migration issues.

Through these Actions, MIEUX has been supporting exchange, cooperation and coordination at national, regional and inter-regional levels on labour migration and THB in Central and South East Asia for the past decade.

**This publication has been produced under the joint EU-ICMPD Migration EU eXpertise (MIEUX) Initiative. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of MIEUX and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.**

