HEROES, VICTIMS, OR SLAVES? WORKERS!

STRENGTHENING MIGRANT AND TRAFFICKED WOMEN'S RIGHTS TO INCLUSIVE RE/INTEGRATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND EUROPE

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The **Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW)** is an international network 100 NGOs from all regions of the world that advocates for the rights of migrants and trafficked persons. GAATW members provide direct assistance to migrants and trafficked persons, run information campaigns, and engage in policy advocacy at the national and regional levels. The International Secretariat of the Alliance is based in Bangkok, Thailand and supports its members with research, knowledge building, and international advocacy. We focus on women's rights to mobility and decent work.

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Acknowledgments

INTRODUCTION

From Southeast Asia to Europe: Strengthening migrant and trafficked women's rights to inclusive re/integration is a project of the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women – International Secretariat (GAATW-IS) together with ten partners from Southeast Asia (the Philippines, Vietnam, and Thailand) and Europe (Poland, Germany, the Netherlands, France, and the UK). The project began in 2020 with the goal of encouraging rights-affirming labour migration and anti-trafficking measures for Southeast Asian women who migrate to or have returned from Europe. The project focuses on women's socioeconomic inclusion through 1) research with migrant and trafficked women to document their experiences and needs; 2) national, regional, and international advocacy to address these needs; and 3) capacity-strengthening of civil society to better understand the nexus between migration, trafficking, and labour rights.

As a Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR), we sought to provide a feminist analysis of labour migration, trafficking, and re/integration and to distil - from women's stories and perspectives - messages to policymakers who have the power to change laws and policies. This report describes the research phase of the project, reflects on the process, and shares the findings and learnings. It is intended to be an advocacy tool for NGOs, media, funders, and policymakers who support the demands of Southeast Asian women migrant workers, both in countries of destination and origin.

GAATW's experience over the past three decades shows that the concepts of trafficking and re/integration need critical evaluation at the intersection of labour rights, migrant rights, and women's rights. For too long, migrant women's experiences have been viewed solely through the lens of victimhood. While it is important to acknowledge suffering, this creates a split image of women's identities and experiences and prevents society from seeing them as complex and complete human beings.

Nearly thirty years after the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women and its platform for action, we have sufficient experience to re-examine the building blocks of policy development in the field of anti-trafficking and promote women's right to mobility. We decided to focus on the migration of Southeast Asian women to Europe as this is a migration corridor that has received relatively scant attention in more recent years, despite its prominence in anti-trafficking discourses in the 1980s and 1990s.

The format of this report is designed to challenge the established ways of doing research and implementing projects where often "the straight-edged, linear blocks of orthodoxy restrict and impair the authenticity and integrity of a research process that is dynamic, non-linear and emergent".[1] Instead, the report seeks to help readers vicariously experience what the researchers and research participants went through in the past two years, and thus make sense of the findings beyond seeing them as mere "facts" and "data".

Instead of the conventional structure in academic and policy contexts, this report focuses on the key concepts that we were prompted to investigate and interweaves desk review with empirical data, analyses with observations and reflections.[2] Following Chapter 1. Research methodology, Chapter 2 explores the present-day SEA-Europe route the way it was revealed in our study. Chapter 3 explores what we found about the available support systems and environment. Chapter 4 discusses potential contributions of our research to concepts and policy. Chapter 5 concludes the report with reflections and recommendations. The red thread interwoven throughout is the importance of complementing our strategies and approaches with the dimension of socio-economic inclusion. We view this aspect as paramount for prevention of trafficking and exploitation as well as for providing tangible re/integration opportunities. Crucial, therefore, is bridging movements and building alliances to exercise pressure in this direction.

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[1] Fisher, K. and Phelps, R. (2006). 'Recipe or performing art?': Challenging conventions for writing action research theses', in *Action Research, Vol. 4(2): pp. 143–164,* p. 148
[2] Cf. McNiff, J. (2016). Writing up your action research project, Routledge.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Photo: Workshop with participants organised by CCEM
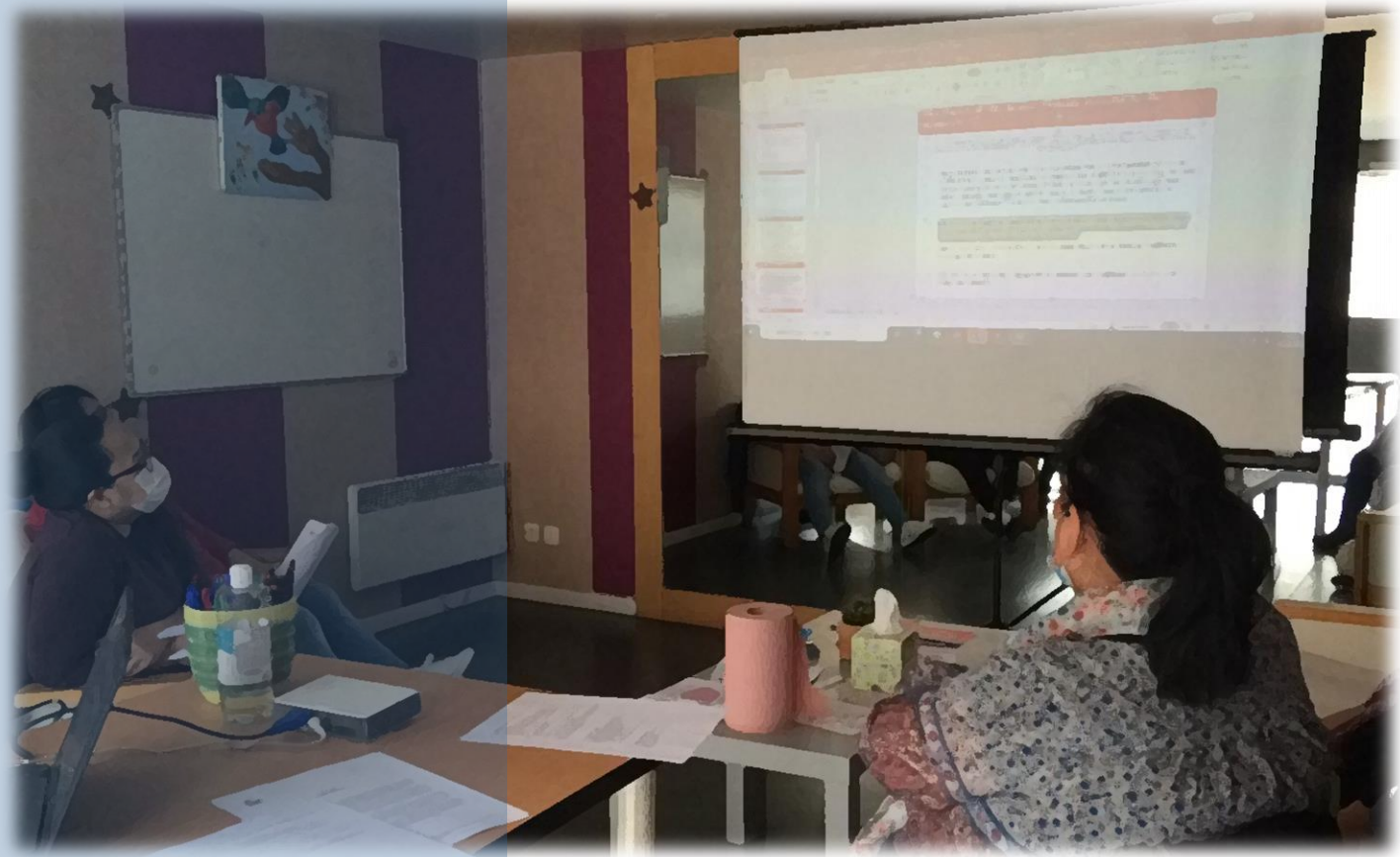
Why this research?

In the 1980s and 1990s, the migration of women from Southeast Asia, particularly Thailand and the Philippines, to Europe was at the forefront of the renewed interest in the issue of "trafficking in women". GAATW itself was born and grew out of research that aimed to understand these women's experiences. In recent years, however, NGOs, academics, and policymakers have focused more on other "corridors" – from South and Southeast Asia to East and West Asia, from Africa to Europe, and from Latin America to North America. At the beginning of the project, we knew that Southeast Asian women continue going to Europe, but how do they live there today? Do they achieve their goals, do they "integrate", do they return, how do they live upon return? Furthermore, most anti-trafficking and migrant rights NGOs, and certainly GAATW members, provide assistance for socioeconomic inclusion. What services do they provide, what do women think about these, what else do they need? We hoped that documenting women's re/integration needs can be useful to other NGOs as well as policymakers and donors. Finally, we recently concluded similar research on socio-economic inclusion of migrant women in South Asia, Latin America, and North America.[3] This wider project allowed us to make this research theme global and in the final section of this report, we draw comparisons between countries and regions.

How does FPAR work?

FPAR differs from other research approaches because it is anchored in feminist ways of thinking and doing known as *feminist epistemologies*.[4] FPAR proceeds from the assumption that "since gender differences structure personal experiences and belief, and male dominance prevails in society as a whole, conventional science is primarily an expression of men presented as if it were a [common] human experience."[5]

Garrick and Rhodes explain that conventional social research is typically produced within a positivist framework.[6] In their view, positivism implies that there is a structure and "logic" of a theory that produces research questions, which leads to the choice of methodology and from there findings which are measurable, quantifiable, objective and reveal casual connections with predictive power about social phenomena. Unlike these conventional ways of "doing" science, the feminist approach requires acknowledgement that knowers are always situated – all researchers and scientists, therefore, always speak from a viewpoint specific to their position within the web of social relations.

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3   GAATW-IS (2022). Sustainable Reintegration – What Do Women Migrant Workers in the South Asia-Middle East Corridor Say?, GAATW, Bangkok, https://gaatw.org/publications/Return_Reintegration_SA-ME.pdf; Cebrián, E. (2022). 'I spent many days on the road but I made it here': Socio- economic inclusion of migrant and trafficked women in South America, GAATW, Bangkok, https://gaatw.org/publications/SouthAmericaSocioeconomicInclisionReport.pdf; and Raguparan, M. (2022). 'Of Course People Will Hire the White Person': Social and economic inclusion of migrant women in Vancouver, Canada, GAATW, Bangkok, https://gaatw.org/publications/Canada_FPAR_Report.pdf.
4   Cf. Anderson, E., "Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), available at: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/feminism-epistemology/ (accessed September 2022).
5   Hammersley, M. (1992). On feminist methodology, *Sociology, vol. 26, No 2, p. 182*.
6   Garrick, J. and Rhodes, K. (2000). Research and knowledge at work: Perspectives, case studies and innovative strategies, London: Routledge.

Second, the feminist approach insists on the plurality and intersectionality of categories such as "woman", "race/ethnicity", "class", "gender", or "victim". Women are diverse and different aspects of social dynamics, structures and processes are interwoven within their complex identities. The knowledge of the feminist knower is also always grounded in the lived experience and as such they are always open to surprises and curious about how the human experience unfolds outside of pre-conceived notions, theories, and discourses.

Because of the centrality of the role of personal experience, it is advisable in such research to "focus neither on the method nor on the experience, but rather [to] seek to correct the experience by the use of the method and the method by the use of experience."[7] In practice, this means combining research methods with an acknowledgment of the ways in which both researchers and participants (and the participants as researchers) feel, think, act, behave and organise - as well as experience themselves.

The rejection of the hierarchy between researchers and the researched is another key characteristic of the FPAR approach. In our study, women migrants from Southeast Asia participated in various roles - as informants/respondents, as cultural mediators involved in the research design and recruitment of respondents, and as researchers and advocates. The position of the researchers also varied accordingly - sometimes taking the lead, sometimes actively listening and trying to understand, and sometimes supporting migrant women to conduct the research themselves.

What did we want to achieve?

The ultimate goal of an FPAR is the emancipation of women. The first step in this process is empowerment - of individual women respondents to regain faith in themselves and others, even if for simply being listened to; of women's and grassroots organisations to strengthen their structures, processes, arguments and approaches; of communities to break the myths about migrant women and connect with and support each other; of movements to consolidate and link with other movements. As Mies states, "the 'truth' [of such a theory elaborated within an FPAR] is not dependent on the application of certain methodological principles and rules, but on its potential to orient the process of praxis towards progressive emancipation and humanisation."[8]

The underlying interests in critical research are to bring about change, to empower and emancipate, to challenge the status quo by ensuring and utilising the participation of the various stakeholders and tensions and struggles between them. Consequently, any research within this paradigm inevitably acknowledges that research by default also changes the system under investigation and should involve purposefully introducing change and studying this change (and any unintended impacts) as they unfold. As a part of this paradigm, FPAR does not necessarily start with research questions. Action research is about working towards practical changes, about reflection, and about merging practice and research with the goal of improving practice or

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7   Hammersley, p. 192.
8   Mies, M. (1993) "Towards a methodology of feminist research", in Hammersley (ed.), Social Research: Philosophy, Politics and Practice (London: Sage, 1993)

situations.[9] Thus, the most significant learning about the system will emerge throughout the second and third phases of our project (advocacy and intermovement dialogues).

Therefore, instead of starting with theory and research questions, GAATW-IS defined the purpose of the study and put out an open invitation for interested organisations in SEA and Europe. We provided an induction training to the selected partners and together we developed a comprehensive list of questions in which we, as a consortium, were interested. However, it was up to the partners to finetune the purpose and, where necessary, add their own specific research questions. Most partners adhered to the jointly developed purpose and questions. Overall, the questions that were explored during individual interviews, focus groups, and observations were grouped around the following research objective:

A feminist analysis of trafficked and migrant women's experiences of (including their access to and results/impact from) "re/integration", as well as women's own grassroots strategies and agency to improve their situation.

The main themes that were agreed to provide focus to the research were:

1. States' and other stakeholders' roles in supporting and protecting trafficked and migrant women.
2. Opportunities and barriers for long/short-term re/integration (or social, political, and economic inclusion) of migrant and trafficked women.
3. Women's own agency, experiences, and narratives.
4. The impact of crises such as Covid-19 on migrant and trafficked women's well-being and security.

Collaboration between researchers and practitioners (and between the practitioners as researchers and the beneficiaries) is seen as central to the action research process.[10] It was thus reasonable that some of the partners tailored the jointly developed themes and questions to their contexts.

Limitations

Unlike conventional social science studies, instead of large numbers of respondents, the focus in this research is on in-depth qualitative data and on understanding individual cases at the microlevel. Consequently, we claim generalisability only to the extent to which the information links to wider literature and triangulates across sites. The sample we worked with was also not purposefully developed as research in such sensitive fields requires acknowledging the reality of who we had access to. Given that all researchers except in Thailand are service providers, inevitably most of the interviewed women were in difficult situations and had

9   Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. (2008). The SAGE Handbook of Action Research, SAGE: London; Rapoport, R. (1970). Three Dilemmas in Action Research: With Special Reference to the Tavistock Experience, *Human Relations, vol. 23, issue 6,* https://doi.org/10.1177/001872677002300601; Carr, W. and Kemmis, S. (1986). Becoming critical: Education, knowledge and action research, Routledge.
10   Whyte, W. (1991). Participatory Action Research, SAGE: London.

turned to their organisation because they needed support. At the same time, our focus on the intersection of gender, race/ethnicity and class inevitably reveals stories of struggle and suffering.

The specific research questions were so many that it was not always possible to ask them all. The resultant learning was also vast, so it is difficult in this report to do justice to all the findings, some of which will remain at the level of the individual partner organisations. However, action research focuses more on participation and ensuring the relational processes and the methodological appropriateness for each participant (researcher, cultural mediator, or interviewee). It is about the opportunities for reflection, the iterations, and the "cycles" of lived experience, praxis, and the conceptual-theoretical integrity and the organisational change in practice. Key is precisely the plurality of knowing, the significance of the work, and the emergence of a new and enduring structure of doing things - not a detailed generalisable picture of reality.

Furthermore, the value of action research is not whether the research process was successful in terms of its initial definition – it may well be that the originally defined objectives were disguising different needs and objectives. It is also *not* about testing preconceived hypotheses or about generalising research findings. It is about depicting the context, change processes, resultant learning and theorising of individuals and groups in a process of mutual change and inquiry. It is the exploration of the data and how change was managed that provides a useful theory which may contribute to learning about the studied problem.[11]

The research process

FPAR process

FIG. 1. RESEARCH PROCESS AS PLANNED

The project was planned to form three distinctive phases of research and action as shown in Fig. 1. We aimed to start with data collection and publication in the first year, implement actions in the second year while critically reflecting throughout, and to finish by summarising the learning and planning. Action research, however, is more of a "living practice" than a formal research process[12] and is thus dependent on the internal and external dynamics at all levels - from the individual researchers and participants and their relationship,

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[11] For these and further details on the quality, value and significance of action research, see Reason & Bradbury (2008).
[12] Carson, T. (1997) "Reflection and its resistances: Teacher education as a living practice", in T. Carson & D. Sumara (eds.), Action research as living practice, pp. 77–91, New York: Peter Lang.

through the organisational contexts, to the wider geography and time period in which the project is located. This requires the researchers to account for how the research both shapes and is shaped by them.[13]

Challenges such as the meeting and travel restrictions due to Covid-19 and other obstacles for both the researchers and the participating women, inevitably caused delays and required practical solutions. The pandemic along with the nature of everyday work, the specifics of the lives of migrant women, and the practicalities of working with different languages and cultures, and across countries and continents meant that within the process as planned, there were many shifts, iterative cycles, and delays. Consequently, the research stages resembled more those shown in Fig 2.
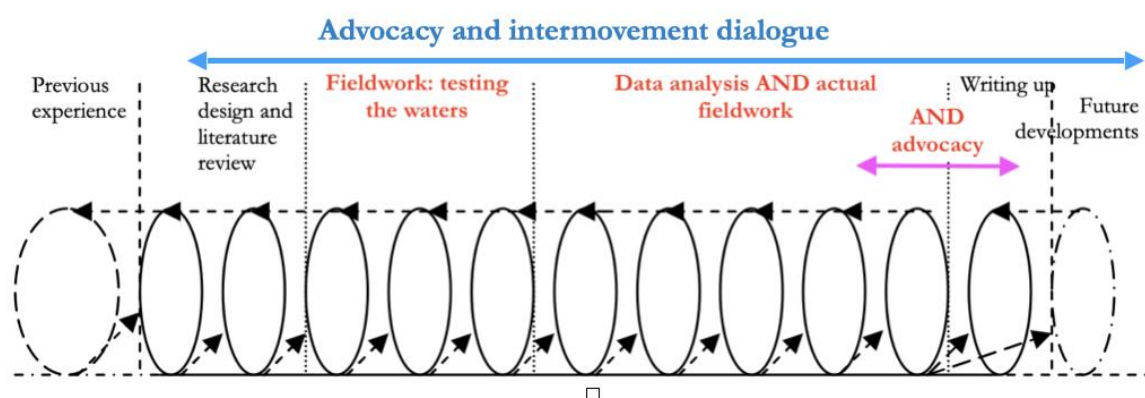
FIG. 2. THE RESEARCH PROCESS IN REALITY

This "messiness", however, is an asset as it reflects the ways in which FPAR is following the unfolding meanings in the data, the real-life conditions and developments, and the opportunities for intervention. FPAR must also inevitably acknowledge that the timeframe a project sets up is an artificial element of the work; in reality, both the researchers and the participants derive meanings and learning from their past experiences and observations *as well as* the data gathered within the set timeframe.

Study participants

Altogether **329** migrant workers – **312** women and **17** men - were interviewed (see Figs. 3-5). **121** were interviewed upon return in the Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand. **254** Southeast Asian migrants were interviewed either at destination or upon return. **34** participants were not from the three research countries in Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines). **68** had migrated to/returned from regions other than Europe. Each team worked at their own pace, so the share of participants at the different research sites is uneven.

Some of the partners decided to include in their research women who had migrated from or returned from other countries. For example, some of the partners in Southeast Asia interviewed women who had returned

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13   Sumara, D. and Carson, T. (1995) 'Reconceptualizing action research as living practice', in T. Carson and D. Sumara (eds.), Action research as living practice (pp. xiii–xxxv). New York: Peter Lang.

from West or East Asia; in Europe, there was a small number of research participants from African countries. While this was not the initial plans, it allowed us to compare the experiences of women from Southeast Asia and from other countries of origin.

FIG. 3. PARTICIPANTS: COUNTRIES OF DESTINATION (ALL RESEARCH SITES)
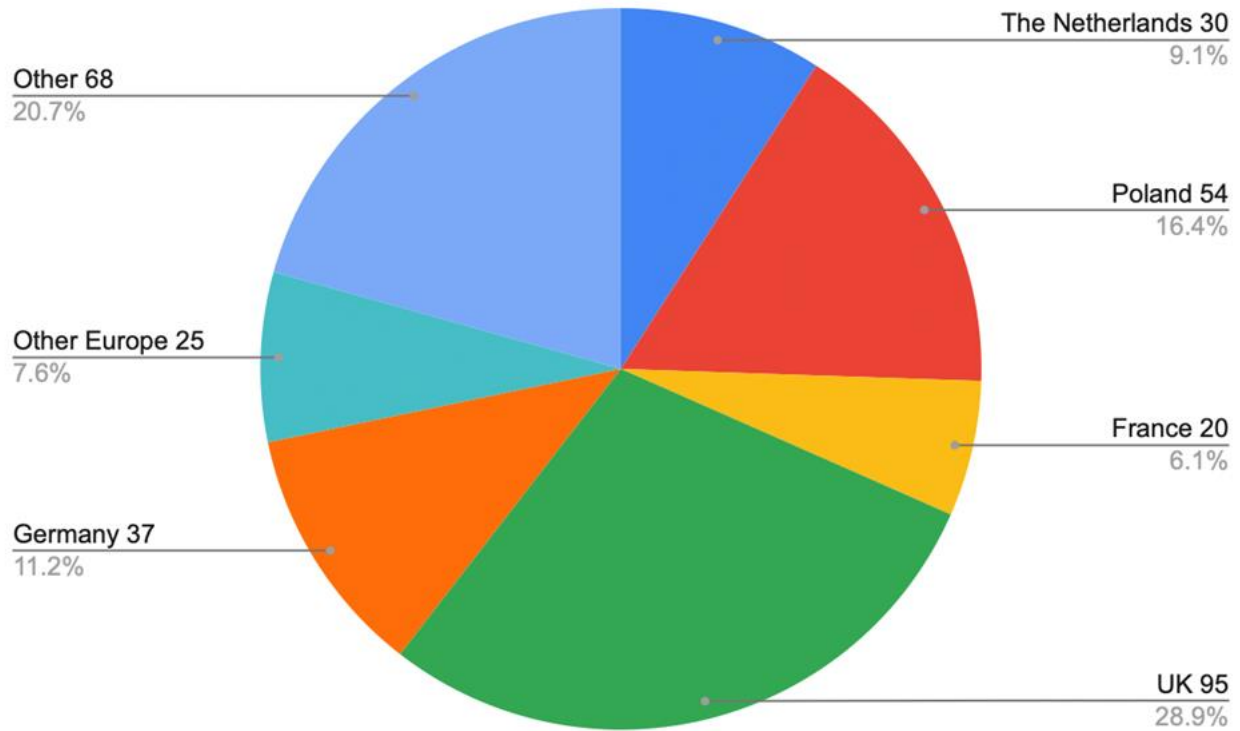
In Europe, a large majority of the research participants came from the Philippines, followed by Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, and other countries, as shown in Fig. 4. The other countries include Morocco, Ivory Coast, Algeria, Pakistan and Brazil. It should be noted that in France, all the interviewees arrived whilst in situations of trafficking in other countries, mainly in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. "None of them had chosen France", said one of the researchers. "In France, they simply had the opportunity to run away from the situation of THB - an opportunity they did not have in the main country of exploitation".

FIG. 4. PARTICIPANTS: COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN (ALL RESEARCH SITES) 14
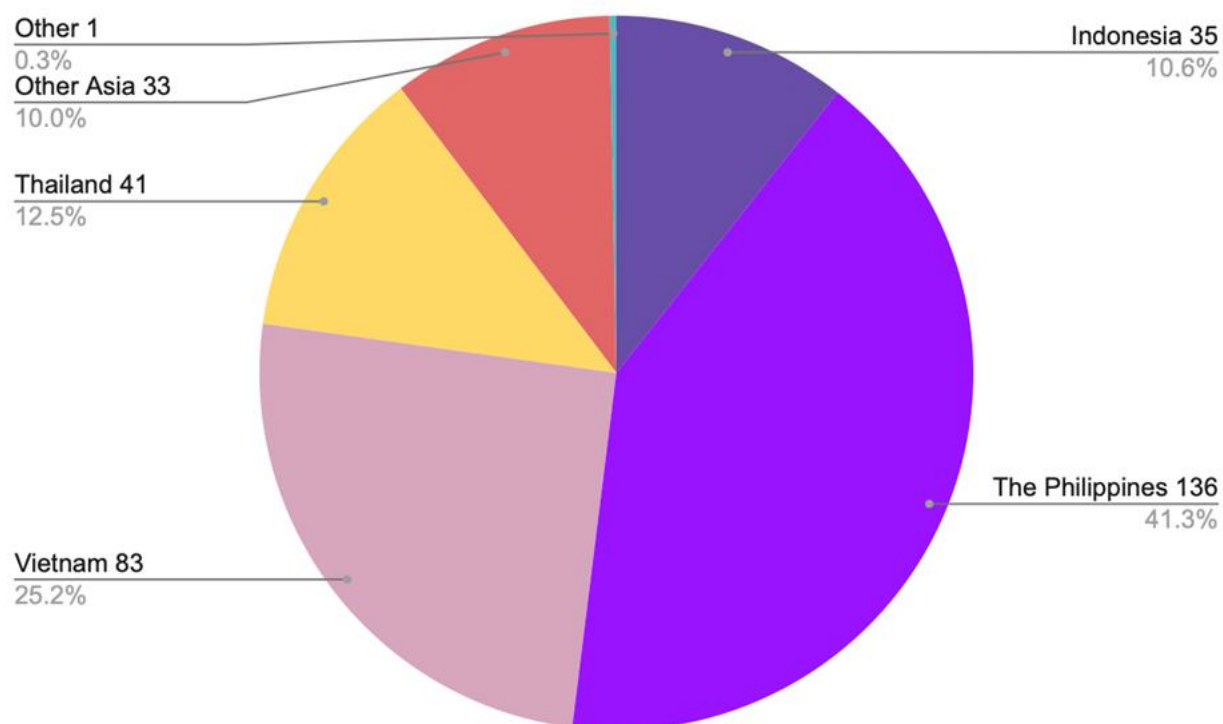
The Covid-19 lockdowns and travel restrictions had an especially negative impact on the data collection in Southeast Asia. While in Europe migrants are often concentrated in capital cities, where our partners are located too, in SEA, our partners were planning to travel to the countryside to meet returnees but could only do so after the travel restrictions were lifted, which, in some cases, began only in December 2021. Hence, the number of research participants in SEA was smaller than in Europe.

It should also be noted that in SEA, it was hard for our partners to find women who had returned from Europe. Most women they were in contact with had migrated to East or West Asia and thus some of the research participants had returned from those regions rather than Europe. Another reason may be that returnees from Europe less often need support from NGOs; our partners in the Philippines noted that women returning from Europe have a more stable life compared to those returning from elsewhere in Asia. Many returnees from Europe had received psychosocial and financial support there, which was a source of resilience in their lives upon return. However, since our research sample was small, this merits more data.

Fig. 5. participants: countries of return (SEA research sites)
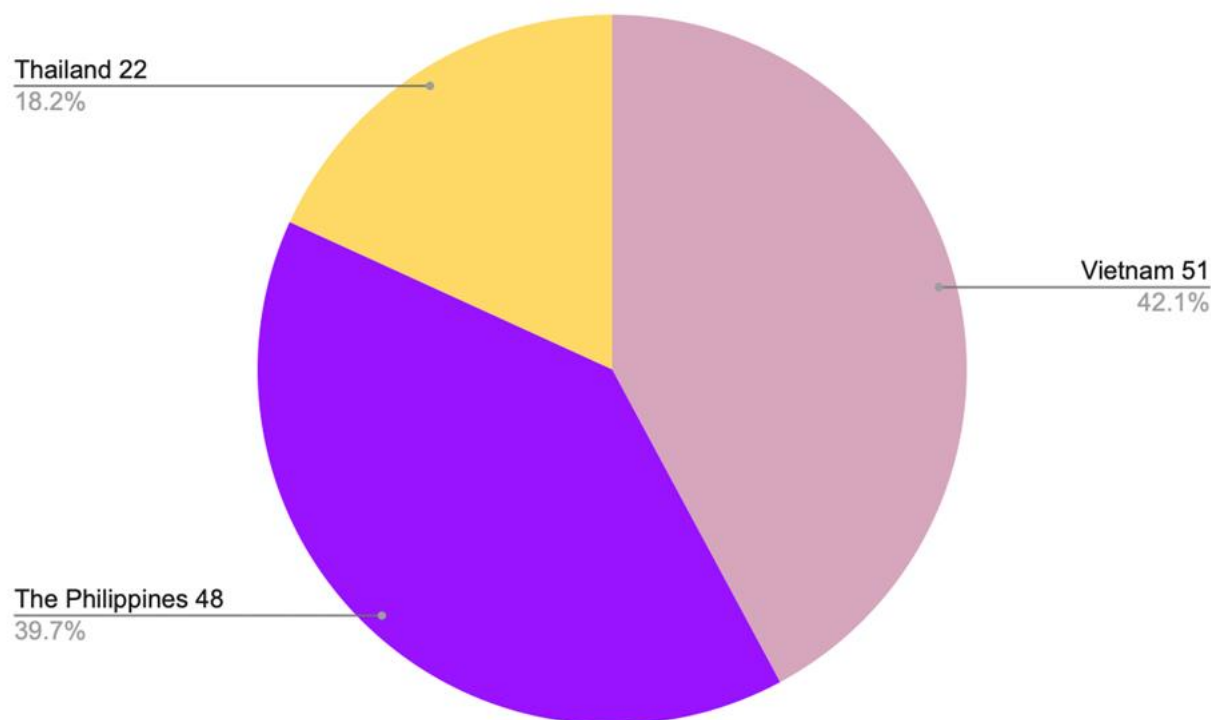
The participants' profile is very diverse. Other European countries of destination included Denmark, Switzerland, Norway and Slovakia, and non-European countries included Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Japan. The participants were all adults, many were married, with children and had usually left their families to provide for their needs. 17 were men (interviewed only in Vietnam) and 312 were women, including one trans woman (interviewed in Thailand). The women were mainly involved in feminised occupations: the vast majority were domestic and care workers; others worked in agriculture, entertainment, sex work, cafés and restaurants, and factories. Most had work visas, others had marriage, domestic worker or tourist visas, and others were asylum seekers or undocumented. Some were officially identified as victims of trafficking, especially in the UK and France.

It should be noted that while Western Europe remains a desirable destination, Central Europe has also recently become a destination, not just a transit region. The other European countries in the study have a long history of policies, programmes, and services for migrants. In Poland, like in other Central and Eastern European countries, there is less institutional and policy attention to the integration of migrants. This affected the study as there are fewer organisations working with migrant women in Poland, so it was harder to identify Southeast Asian women participants there. The researchers often resorted to the "snowball method" using their private contacts.

Most of the women were interviewed individually, in their homes, at the workplace, or in the partners' office. A significant number (**80** women) were interviewed in focus group discussions (FGDs). Some were initially

engaged through interviews and later participated in validating FGDs. Many research participants continue their involvement with the project in the current phases of advocacy and intermovement dialogue.

Photo: FGD in The Netherlands organised by FairWork

All teams in Europe had Southeast Asian women in their staff and they were involved in various roles in the research. The team reflections were ensured through discussions within each organisation, one-on-one with the researchers at GAATW-IS, as a consortium in monthly Action Learning Sets, as well as through one three-day in-person meeting in Bangkok at the end of the research phase.

THE SOUTHEAST ASIA-EUROPE ROUTE

General trends

Labour migration between SEA and Europe

In 2019, globally there were an estimated 20.2 million migrants originating from ASEAN countries, nearly 6.9 million of whom had migrated within the region.[14] Women comprise almost 50% of the total migrants from Southeast Asia, which is above the global average, and in some destinations they comprise more than 60 per cent.[15] Most of this is circular migration, with many migrants eventually returning home.[16]

Beyond sensationalist stories of triumphant successes, or of (often dramatic) victimhood and trafficking, not much is known about migration on the SEA-Europe corridor. Marriage has allowed many Southeast Asian women to migrate and settle in Europe but, as we highlight later in the report, this too now faces many legal restrictions. Likewise, there is increased competition for work from migrants from other regions. Towards the end of the research period, our partners observed that with the war in Ukraine, there seems to be again a turn towards Southeast Asian workers.[17] However, the SEA-Europe migration corridor remains under-developed and, as our research and others like it point out, highly exploitative.

All partners noted that many women face abuse in the hands of recruiters, at home and workplaces,[18] racial discrimination, sometimes involvement in criminal activities and eventual deportation and sometimes imprisonment, as well as stigmatisation. The official migration routes from SEA countries often have strict requirements, for example, skills, language, and education. Those who are most desperate to migrate for work are typically those who cannot meet these requirements. A study by ISDS in Vietnam shows that even after the tragedy with 39 Vietnamese migrants found dead in a freezer truck in the UK, the people from this area still planned to migrate and perceived this outcome as one of the risks that they are ready to take.[19]

Human trafficking between SEA and Europe

It is also difficult to find data on human trafficking between the two regions due to the "illicit nature of human trafficking, victims' social 'invisibility' and reluctance to speak to authorities and service providers, and the conflation of trafficking with other crimes".[20] Within the 2020 UNODC *Global Report on Trafficking in*

[14] Wickramasekara, P. (2019) Effective return and reintegration of migrant workers with special focus on ASEAN Member States, ILO, Thailand, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_733917.pdf, p. iii.

[15] See Migration Data Portal, available online at: https://www.migrationdataportal.org/regional-data-overview/south-eastern-asia#recent-trends (accessed March 2022).

[16] Wickramasekara. See also UNASC (2017) Trends and drivers of international migration in Asia and the Pacific, https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/GCMPREP_1E.pdf.

[17] "Protecting Asian migrants in Europe," 7 October 2022, webinar. Available at: https://freedomcollaborative.org/webinar-library/protecting-asian-migrants-in-europe (accessed December 2022).

[18] CCEM in France works predominantly with victims of trafficking.

[19] "Vietnamese Women Migrating for Work to Europe," 31 October 2022, webinar, https://www.facebook.com/100064520119499/videos/647666636921331/ (accessed December 2022).

[20] Jovanovic, M. (2018) Comparison of Anti-Trafficking Legal Regimes and Actions in the Council of Europe and ASEAN: Realities, Frameworks and Possibilities for Collaboration, Secretariat of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA and Committee of the Parties) Council of Europe. Available at https://rm.coe.int/coe-asean-study-thb/16808c1b91 (accessed September 2022), p. 13.

Persons,[21] the SEA - Europe corridor does not appear as a significant route. The report, however, reveals some interesting trends. The overwhelming majority of detected trafficking victims in East and Southeast Asia were trafficked within the region, mirroring the trends in migration. The data suggests that the flow to Western and Southern Europe from South and East Asia is at 9% with a slight increase in the years before the pandemic.[22] The report also emphasises that trafficked persons from East Asia[23] have been detected in almost every Western and Southern European country, although as a relatively low share compared to the total detected victims. In addition, the largest share of identified foreign victims (24%) in Central and Eastern Europe come from East Asia and the Pacific.[24] We therefore sought opportunities to triangulate our findings with the observations of other organisations in Europe.

Policymakers use labels to distinguish between trafficked persons, labour migrants, and irregular/smuggled migrants. Often, however, the experiences overlap[25] and it may be difficult to determine where smuggling or labour abuse end and where trafficking begins.[26] Recognising this overlap and that the victim identification process is fraught with challenges, we framed our research target group as "migrant and trafficked women", allowing our partners the freedom to focus on the people they work with. Moreover, the study approaches migration and trafficking as a nuanced spectrum in which the focus is on the richness of experiences that cannot be easily forced into policy boxes.

Motivations for migration: women's aspirations

The women in our study migrated out of a desire to improve their socio-economic situation. They were looking for a better life - to achieve a life dream or a higher standard of living for themselves and their families, especially children. In most cases, the driving force behind the decision was financial hardship – poverty,

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21   UNODC (2020). *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020,* United Nations publications, p. 11.

22   Ibid., pp. 136-137.

23   The report considers SEA a part of the East Asia sub-region.

24   Ibid., p. 142

     25Meyer, C. K., & Boll, S. (2018). Editorial: Categorising Migrants: Standards, complexities, and politics. *Anti-Trafficking Review*, (11). https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.201218111.

26   Napier-Moore, R. (2011). FAQ 2: Smuggling and Trafficking Intersections, GAATW: Bangkok. Available online at: https://www.gaatw.org/publications/Working_Papers_Smuggling/FAQ2_TraffickingandSmugglingIntersections.pdf.

unemployment, debt – and the increasing expectation of women across Asia to take up the role of family breadwinners.[27] While escaping financial hardship is a common motivation for migration across regions, in our research, the French partner observed that while Filipinas had migrated exclusively for economic reasons, the migrants from African countries that they spoke to had more diverse motivations, including to escape political turmoil, gender-based violence, and lack of physical safety.

Most of the study participants migrated with the expectation of higher income. Even the lowest salaries in Europe are much higher than what many women with lower education can earn in their home country. One returnee in Thailand said, "[In Europe] I could save a large amount of money compared to what I was earning in Thailand. Here, I couldn't save any money after all the expenses". Similarly, another woman explained: "I had worked in Thailand until I was 38 years old. I worked in a food shop, I had experience selling clothes. [These businesses] were up and down. I had never seen 100,000 to one million baht until my cousin asked if I would like to visit Denmark". A Filipina in Germany had a similar experience: "[I]n my country it`s really hard to find a job. Even if you are working very hard you cannot earn a lot of money that easily like here. [Here] in one hour you earn ten euros and that's equivalent to …in the Philippines… maybe one day of work".

Many women migrated out of familial duty and to pay off family debts. One Indonesian woman in the Netherlands explained: "I came for economic reasons. My family has debts. I am the eldest". Some of the Vietnamese women too felt forced to migrate to help their families. As the researchers explain, women in fishing communities tend to have more transferrable skills than the men who work solely in fishing. This means that when the family needs someone to migrate to earn money, it is the woman who is more likely to have a wider range of skills and experience than her fisherman husband. For others, it was a duty to the extended family, too: "My cousin had helped our whole family for so many years. I told her: now it is my turn", explained an interviewee in the Netherlands. Women are often expected to support not only their nuclear family but also their extended families. As one of the researchers in Vietnam summarised, "[They are] looking for a job, any kind of job that earns money. Earning money, and sending it home to care for the family, to build a solid house, for children schooling, for a better future when the time comes to return home".[28]

Debt was common for both regular and irregular migrants. One Vietnamese woman who migrated using regular channels explained: "I had to pay a foreign language training fee, a living fee, a brokerage fee of 10 million dong, and to prepare documents: judicial record, passport, notarized ID card, birth certificate, health certificate, photo, etc. Generally, it takes a long time". Another woman, an irregular migrant, said "When I went to the UK, my parents had to deposit their Land Owner Certificate to borrow from a bank an amount of USD 23,000 to pay the brokerage fee". Starting their journey with a significant debt puts women in desperate situations in which they tend to take greater risks. It is not uncommon for women to agree to

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27   GAATW (2019). "Reclaiming Migrant Women's Narratives: A Feminist Participatory Action Research project on 'Safe and Fair' Migration in Asia", GAATW, Bangkok, p. 16,
     https://www.gaatw.org/publications/Reclaiming%20Migrant%20Women's%20Narratives.pdf.
28   In "Socio-economic Inclusion of Migrant and Trafficked Women from SEA to Europe", 23 March 2022, webinar.
     https://www.facebook.com/GlobalAllianceAgainstTrafficInWomen/videos/667613694361227.

extremely dangerous travel arrangements or engage in occupations linked to organised crime or within the informal economy. These circumstances make it more difficult for them to seek support from law enforcement and NGOs.

While deception was not as common, or at least not all partners probed for it, the partners in Vietnam pointed out that migrants going to Europe are often deceived about the amount of money they could make there. As one woman from Vietnam recalled: "[The brokers] promised me to go to Germany to earn 45 million dong (USD 2,000) per month. They said it takes one year to pay for the brokerage fee and then I can make a profit and save. If I want to go back to Vietnam after a few years, I could go back with big money in my pocket […] When we arrived in Berlin, they dropped me at the gate of Dong Xuan market without any instructions or job application, I did not know the language and had no money."

With the shrinking legal pathways for labour migration, some women choose marriage as a way to settle and work in Europe. Marriage migration has a long history in the region, especially in Thailand and the Philippines, and scholars have pointed out the combination of love, family obligations, and desire for economic security that influences Thai women's decision to marry western men.[29] This was exemplified by one Thai woman in our research who said: "If we got a foreign husband, we would get rich and our family too". Another Thai woman added: "I used to think that I would try to migrate to work, but this wouldn't suit me as I have no knowledge, I got [basic] education".

While economic need was the primary motivation for most women's migration, it was not the only one. Even among women with low education or socioeconomic status, the desire for adventure, to see the world, and to achieve personal and professional growth was a powerful motivating factor. As one research participant in the Netherlands shared: "[Ever] since I was a kid, I always dreamed of living and working outside the country (in Europe), and to travel. I told myself that I was done here and that there was nothing more I could do and achieve in Indonesia".

The impact of crises: Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine

a) The Covid-19 pandemic

The research was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, which featured prominently in the conversations with the interviewed women. Some shared neutral and even positive impacts, but overall, the effects were negative. We learnt that during lockdowns many women lost their jobs and this was one of the key reasons for their return to the country of origin. Those who stayed struggled to maintain financial stability, and abuse and exploitation increased for many. Women were often exposed to the virus and those who fell sick did not always receive appropriate care or even days off. Some could not access vaccines when they became available.

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[29] Lapanun, P. (2019). "Love, Money and Obligation: Transnational Marriage in a Northeastern Thai Village". Singapore: NUS Press.

Particularly difficult was the situation of undocumented workers as they did not have any protection and were often unable to refuse work. The situation of many domestic workers was similar as they lack labour rights and, in addition, their workload increased. As one of the women in the UK said, ""Being in lockdown resulted in more work and even lack of rest because of mostly staying in the house". Another one caught the virus from her employer but was forced to keep working while sick: "When my boss got infected with COVID, they let me clean their house. That's why I get infected too. I don't have a proper PPE. I just improvised my own PPE which is I used a plastic bag or a bin bag. When I got infected with COVID, for two days they still let me work from day to night. My body was trembling."

Mostly, women were worried about the loss of income. Two women in the Netherlands shared that they had lost employers: "Lots of clients stopped having me, especially the old ones - because of the risk", said one. Another added that "[losing three employers means losing nine hours of work. I was not able to work again for these three employers". A participant in Germany shared similar concerns: "Because of Covid-19, I became anxious because I can't go to another country to continue my au-pair work or the nanny job that I applied for in Spain". A participant in France was worried about the future: "It's difficult to go to work and how can we help the family from afar. I'm afraid that eventually, my employer will not be able to pay my salary. I didn't work during the lockdown for 3 months".

Photo by VODW: VODW member Jenny with her daughter

There were also some positive experiences. For one interviewee in the UK, "the good thing was that I was able to look for new employers. During Corona, I had an employer who paid for my 5 weeks' worth of salary even if I didn't work for them". Some of the participants in France, who are officially identified as victims of trafficking and received support during the lockdown, said the pandemic did not change their social life much: "I don't have a lot of friends and don't go out often so I didn't see a change especially when I have my phone. I am used to staying at home", said one of the women.

Beyond loss of income, the interviewed women worried that they or their family members might catch the virus and become sick or that their children were missing out on childhood by not being able to play outside and meet with friends or by having to study online. While these worries were experienced by many people, for migrants, they exacerbate the "everyday" challenges of making ends meet and their already restricted social life in another country. The research teams in France and Germany told us that some of the research interviews went well beyond the one hour planned as women were eager to speak to someone in person after months of lockdowns.

b)   Ukraine war

The war in Ukraine broke out after the research phase was complete but through the regular action learning sets (ALSs), we had access to observations about its impact on Southeast Asian women both in countries of destination and upon return. In Europe, partners were approached by Southeast Asian women who had been working or studying in Ukraine and were now fleeing the war. News reports indicated that Southeast Asian and other migrants trying to escape the war were treated differently in terms of refugee status.[30] Non-Ukrainian nationals were often not considered asylum seekers and many embassies had to organise a safe channel for them to return home. It was only due to the intervention of NGOs like our partners that individual clients were considered eligible to stay in Europe in search of international protection. In countries of origin, partners shared that some women changed their plans for re-migration and were no longer trying to find work in Europe, but other regions. The increase in fuel and food prices globally, which was exacerbated by the war, is also likely to have had significant impact on migrants' and returnees' lives but did not come up in our discussions.

In Europe, the war and the resulting distress migration of women and children from Ukraine had another negative impact on civil society. Colleagues in this project as well as other GAATW members shared that there were suddenly many new actors, including international organisations and religious groups, who entered the migration, asylum, and human trafficking spaces. While this is not necessarily a bad development given the gravity and scale of the crisis, it also led to some competition for funds and pressure to be noticed in an overcrowded field.

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[30]   See, for example, Amnesty International (2022). 'Poland: Authorities must act to protect people fleeing Ukraine from further suffering', AI. Available online at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/03/poland-authorities-must-act-to-protect-people-fleeing-ukraine-from-further-suffering/; Howard, P.S.S.., Johnson, B.S.Y., and Ah-Sen, K. (2022). 'Ukraine refugee crisis exposes racism and contradictions in the definition of human', *The Conversation.* Available online at: https://theconversation.com/ukraine-refugee-crisis-exposes-racism-and-contradictions-in-the-definition-of-human-179150

THE LEVEL OF SOCIAL PROTECTION AND SUPPORT

Photo by VODW: A member of VODW lobbying for the amendment of 2 legislative bills to include the rights of domestic workers.

Countries of destinations

Southeast Asian migrants in Europe face the same challenges with integration as those from other regions: lack of decent work opportunities, especially for women; lack of recognition of educational qualifications or work experience; increasing risks of social exclusion; gaps in educational achievement; and public concern about the lack of integration of migrants.[31] The stories of the women in our study have confirmed all these observations.

The EU has recommended that member states' actions focus on three main areas when addressing the receipt of migrants: integration through participation (in the labour market or education and training); actions focused on the local level (targeted particularly to disadvantaged urban areas and aimed at improving multi-level cooperation between different levels of governance); and the involvement of the countries of origin (to prepare migrants for integration before their departure, to support contacts between diaspora communities and countries of origin, to promote circular migration, and to enable migrants' temporary or definitive return process).[32] There are initiatives to improve migrants' integration in the labour market, but studies show that migrants still fall behind in accessing employment, education and social inclusion.[33] As noted by the Fundamental Rights Agency, many EU Member States lack gender-responsive policies that can address the intersectional discrimination faced by migrant women.[34]

While services for victims of trafficking are relatively well-developed in Europe, there are fewer initiatives to improve migrants' integration in the labour market. At the start of the project we already knew that budget cuts to migrant services, lack of implementation of existing programmes and even rising xenophobia make it difficult for migrants to report exploitation, especially for those with irregular legal status. Furthermore, the narrow manner in which anti-trafficking strategies are implemented often ends up excluding women who have experienced trafficking for labour exploitation. The policy response has been overall gender-blind, failing to take into account how a person's gender can affect their experience of migration. Our study confirmed these observations, but also makes a strong case for targeted efforts at developing key policies and regulations that minimise the risks for migrant women by providing socioeconomic opportunities.

This section presents the reality of being and not being able to negotiate while settling in Europe and how detrimental the latter is to the women's sense of *agency* - feeling confident, assertive and in control of their lives. Both demonstrate how important it is for women to be active participants in the decisions that affect them and not passive recipients of support and intervention. The study reveals that a greater challenge for integration is often the negative experiences with the authorities and the regulations in countries of

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[31] See Kaczmarczyk, Lesińska and Okólski (2015)." Shifting migration flows and integration policies in Europe", p. 41 in Pietsch and Clark (eds.) Migration and Integration in Europe, Southeast Asia, and Australia, Amsterdam University Press.
[32] European Commission (2011), European agenda for the integration of third-country nationals, COM/2011/455. Available at https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=celex%3A52011DC0455.
[33] Cf. ECA (2018). The integration of migrants from outside the EU. Available at: https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/Briefing_paper_Integration_migrants/Briefing_paper_Integration_migrants_EN.pdf.
[34] FRA (2017). "Together in the EU: Promoting the participation of migrants and their descendants". Available at: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2017-together-in-the-eu_en.pdf.

destination. While the reality of migration includes the risks of trafficking, violence and exploitation, paramount for successful migration is women's access to legal opportunities for work, inclusion policies and the social and health systems at destination.

Lack of residence and work permits

Across all research sites, the study participants expressed the wish to have a decent job that pays well and where employers treat them with respect. However, they all encountered legal barriers to achieve this, specifically barriers to obtaining a residence and/or work permit.

Some of the participants in the UK and in France were seeking asylum due as survivors of trafficking. Many of the women in the UK, whose asylum claim or application for a temporary permission to remain after exiting the NRM had recently been rejected, were not allowed to work and felt excluded from British society. "Sometimes I feel useless", shared one e woman, "I don't have permission to do anything." Another UK participant elaborated:

> I think even if the Home Office is unable to accept our asylum application at the moment, they should allow us to work. No matter which job it is, going to work gives us chances to interact with British people and integrate into society. This will help us improve our English competency and develop our knowledge of the local life such as culture, lifestyles and social norms. This is much more beneficial than giving us 35-40 pounds a week and forcing us to just stay at home.

Such unregulated existence can last for decades. In France, R. had exited a trafficking situation 20 years ago. She said she was happy to be in France, but "I will be happy if I have papers, I cannot work, it's very difficult. You can't move on ". It's important to emphasise that all the women in the research were highly motivated to work and to contribute both to their families in the country of origin and to society in the country of destination. An Ivorian woman in France said "If irregular migrants living in France had papers, they could bring a lot to this country!" When states deny migrants residence and work permits, they not only increase migrants' precarity and risks of exploitation but also miss out on the economic and social benefits of migration.

Across Europe, women with small children, who were waiting for permission to stay and work, faced additional barriers. Whilst many expressed a desire to study English or to attend other skills training ("to prepare for the future work"), to enjoy social activities or look for part-time jobs, they were prevented from doing so by their childcare responsibilities and limited mobility. As one woman said, "Having a young kid means that I don't have time for myself. No one helps me look after the kid. I really want to work. Going to work means I can interact with other people. I want to work in restaurants, maybe in the local ones." In addition to the need for easier access to residence and work permits, this demonstrates the need for gender-sensitive integration policies.

Even for those women with a legal status, the requirement to keep renewing their visas and keep paying high fees made some women feel not fully included in society. For example, in the UK, some migrants have to renew their visas every 2.5 years for over ten years to be able to apply for an indefinite residence permit. As K., who has lived in the UK for almost 15 years, put it: "I don't know if I'm integrated. I had to pay for my visa and all that. Paying for my visa every 2.5 years, thousands and thousands of pounds make me feel not integrated".

Challenges with socioeconomic inclusion

Across Europe, the interviewed women shared challenges related to language, bureaucracy, psychological, social and cultural isolation, discrimination, de-skilling and spiralling downward social mobility, caused by lack of access to services for socioeconomic inclusion.

a. Language skills and translation services
Nearly all women knew they would need to learn the local language in order to have more control over their working conditions, social life, and dealings with state administration. Most of the women in Poland did not feel "integrated" due to insufficient knowledge of the Polish language. "I do not feel integrated", said one Vietnamese woman, "because I do not know Poles, I have no way of establishing more lasting relationships with them." "Polish language is very difficult", said another and added "cultural entertainment is incomprehensible or unavailable to me because of poor language skills".

Language skills are important not only for social life and the sense of belonging to the host country but also to deal with state institutions. The interviewed women had mixed experiences. In France, one of the women

observed that "French don't speak English very well, and when we are not speaking French, we can be or feel rejected by the medical services and also by the state and the administrative services". In Germany, one Filipina shared that at the *ausländerbehörde* (immigration office) she was speaking English and the officer seemed to understand her but always replied in German, making it impossible for her to know what she was being told. On the other hand, another woman said that "Even my Deutsch is bad, they understand what I mean. Good people", while a third one said that she has received different treatment (good or bad) from different civil servants.

In Poland, too, one woman said that was completely confused by Polish institutions and relied on forum posts by other Vietnamese to understand administrative requirements. However, another said that "[Civil servants] are nice and I didn't need a translator, everything was clear." Thus, it seemed that women's experience with state institutions depended on the individual civil servant who was handling their requests. To facilitate migrant women's inclusion, states institutions should hire interpreters and provide clear guidelines to all civil servants what to do when migrants do not speak the language.

Whilst accessible and affordable language courses, as well as translation and interpretation services, are key to social inclusion, the pressure to work leaves women with little time for language lessons. As one of the women in France said, "I would like to go to more classes, but I have to work".

b. Social life and community

Migrant women are often dependent on their national communities for work, advice, and emotional support due to the linguistic and cultural barriers or lack of legal documents. In France and the UK, Filipinas were an enormous source of emotional support to other Filipinas. The lack of social life and contact with local people was a challenge for many women. Undocumented women in particular feared law enforcement and tended to socialise only with a very limited number of trusted people. Returnees in Vietnam shared that while they were in Europe, they avoided going out of the employer's workshop/house. They would gather with the other Vietnamese only, mostly to exchange information on new employers and workplaces. This was confirmed by the Vietnamese women interviewed in Poland. They were regular migrants but spent most of their time working and had no time for social life. They said they lived the life of a typical migrant worker – they work, do household chores and, in their little free time, they stay at home or call their family. The reason was the pressure to save as much money as possible to send to their family. As one woman said, "I noticed that going to a cafe is a luxury for the Vietnamese in Poland. In Vietnam, people work a lot, but also have time for a cafe life. In Poland only a few Vietnamese can afford it". Settling and achieving more stable income allowed some women do start to socialise more: the researchers noted that women who have been in Poland for longer spent more time meeting friends or going out.

For survivors of trafficking, there was an added layer of fear. Several women in the UK who had experienced trafficking avoided going outside out fear of being found by their traffickers. Others mentioned that hearing certain foreign languages in the street would cause them to panic as it reminded them of their abusive ex-employers.

c. Separation from families

Many women said they had missed out on important life events in their families back home. Although most maintain relationships with their family and relatives, marriage breakdowns were common while they were abroad. Some Vietnamese asylum seekers expressed that they do not maintain any communication or relationships with their families back home due to the fears of traffickers or religious/political persecutions. Wanting to visit the country of origin, missing their family, and trying to stay in touch with them online were all mentioned by women in Germany and Poland. For many women a crucial facet of support and comfort - the family - is missing in their lives as migrants. In the UK, some women also reported that the biggest challenge of being away from their families was that their children were being mistreated and abused at home and they could do nothing about it. The hardships of being away from their families also suggest that states need to strengthen measures for family reunification.
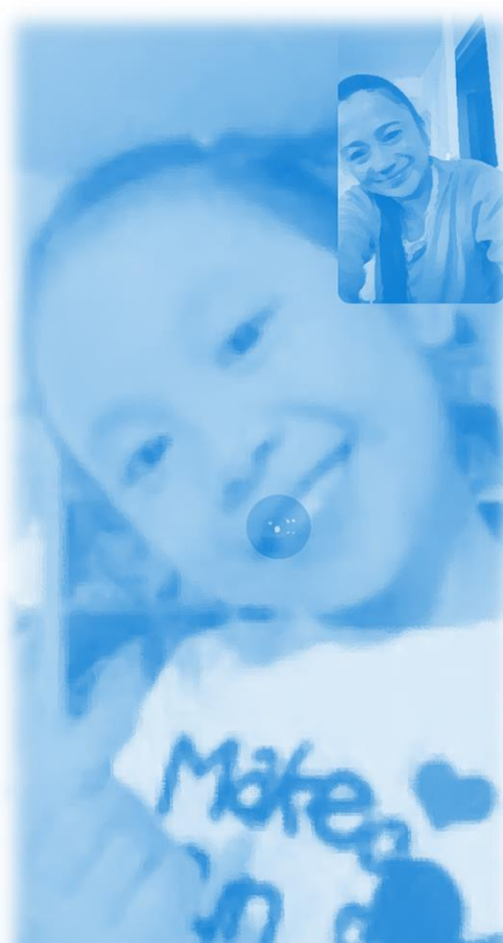

Photo by VODW: VODW member Wendy with her daughter

d. Discrimination and racism

The question of social attitudes towards Southeast Asian women was not explored by all partners, but we documented some disturbing accounts. Some of the women in the UK said that they experienced racism and discrimination, especially because of COVID. One shared that she "received racism because Covid was discovered in China. So some people said, 'You're an Asian and you are the reason why we have a pandemic'". This happened to a Filipina in Germany too who added that in general, she was treated differently at work from her (white) German colleagues. Other women in Germany said that they sometimes feel judged as "gold-diggers" who are in the country only because they married a German man.

One Indonesian woman in Germany recounted a story that illustrates the insidious ways in which intolerance can work. Her neighbour complained that the woman cooks Indonesian food with strong spices and the smell reaches the neighbour's apartment. The woman told her that this is how she cooks and how she likes her food, which led to the neighbour lodging a complaint with the *hausverwaltung* [housing association], who, in turn, threatened to increase the Indonesian woman's rent to compensate the neighbour. She was rattled and, because "I don't know the regels [rules]", she consulted with a lawyer who told her that she has the right to cook whatever food she wants. Although the "regels" were not broken, the woman wanted to have a good relationship with her neighbour, and so "I sent some [Indonesian] food and she started to be very friendly [laughs], like oh yeah, your food is very good… And she started to send us chocolates." This demonstrates the value of a multicultural society: it was her Indonesian culture that led to a friendly resolution to what could have turned into an unpleasant conflict. As the woman told the researcher, "for us [Indonesians], it's important to be in harmony with each other, to know each other, and sending food is a way to say 'don't be afraid of me, I'm a normal person'."

e. Recognition of skills and qualifications

The jobs women had access to in Europe were sometimes below their education and qualifications. As one Vietnamese woman in Poland said, "[This job] is not related to my education. This is my first experience working in a sardine factory […] My dream job is to be a successful entrepreneur". Another was even more explicit: "It's not my dream job to be a manicurist. I only work in this profession because there is no other position for a person like me. I am an economist, but my knowledge is useless here. I do not like this job, but […] I have to do it." The researchers in Germany also emphasised the need for qualification recognition for third-country nationals more widely.

f. Limited access to the social and healthcare system

Many of the interviewed women did not have access to the national healthcare system and when faced with health issues, received help from their employers and other migrants or used their own earnings to cover healthcare expenses. One of the key reasons for return was ill health, including severe conditions such as cancer, that the women could not treat while in the destination country. On the other hand, those with legal status reported a sense of belonging partly because of the benefits of the social and healthcare system. One Filipina said that one of the reasons for staying in Germany is "because the social amt is paying money in health insurance. … But in the Philippines, if you have no money, you can't go to the doctor." Thus it is clear that for migrant women to feel included in European society and continue contributing to the European economy, they need access to the social and healthcare system in the destination country.

g. Work and relationships with employers

For many women, the main engagement with their host communities was through their work. Given the multi-cultural landscape in Western Europe, many work for employers who are settled migrants from their own countries and this work is sometimes unregulated. The research participants shared both positive and negative experiences with employers. One woman interviewed in the UK explained: "I found [my current] job from an agent. I live together with my employer, a Vietnamese family. They are perfect. [...] This family is very nice." Some women said that their employers, agents or communities were helpful upon arrival, when they were usually desperate or even in danger. Some received financial support in difficult times such as during COVID-19, when they had no access to public support or job retention schemes due to their immigration status. More than half of the women interviewed by SEEAC described referrals from friends, previous employers, or agencies as effective means to find new and more favourable employment opportunities.

At the same time, many women reported suffering from physical, emotional and sexual abuse at work. A Thai woman who worked in the Danish agriculture recalled: "We were like chickens in their hands. They could do anything or order whatever they wanted. We had to follow what they told us". Migrant domestic workers' employers often withhold their passports and they cannot leave or seek help. As a result, some shared feelings of anxiety and depression:

> My employer threatened to kill us. We are working for 24 hours, 7 days. We're sleeping on the floor with the kids. She always tells us that we don't have a mind of our own and that we are animals. She cut the salary off and we don't have food. My employer beats me, and also his mother beats me with a bamboo stick. I'm depressed, I always feel like I want to kill myself. I keep a blade ready. I feel like I'm crazy, I often bang my head on the wall.

Because of control, isolation and shame, the women found it difficult to ask for help or stop the abuse. A trend over the recent years is the problem when the abuse comes from employers protected by diplomatic immunity, which leaves women unable to receive redress. One woman, who used to work for a Saudi diplomat shared:

> I ran away because I was stressed out, after five months in which my salary was nothing. Every day I prayed at night. I said, "Oh, please God, just help me out! Just let her [the employer] give me one day of not shouting at me!

While women reported different relationships with employers, some also demonstrated the ability to improve their situations through negotiations. This is evidence not only of their agency, but also of the importance of developing "soft" skills. Not least, it shows that employers are not always purposefully abusive and can be reasoned with. One of the women interviewed in the Netherlands shared that, "I completed a certain task and asked for a salary raise. After three years of discussions, I finally got it". Others pointed out the extra work they are doing: "I informed [my employers] that because they are kind to me and we had good communication, I am repaying them by working extra hard". The negotiations were for both more money and more manageable workload: "I told them that I could not do it alone, that I can also look for another domestic worker in the house". It takes time to be able to negotiate better working conditions and participants said that first they worked hard and only then negotiated. Our partner FairWork is now focusing on developing such negotiation skills in the women they support. While socioeconomic inclusion and good working conditions are first and foremost the responsibility of the state and the employer, it is also important to enhance individual women's capacity for negotiation.

Despite these challenges, women generally perceived Europe as an attractive destination. They appreciated not only the opportunity to earn higher income and support their families back home, but so much more. One survivor of trafficking in France said, "I feel that France integrated me as a human and it showed me that everyone is equal". The German partner asked the research participants if they like living in Germany and, if yes, why. Several women said that they liked the weather – one had high blood pressure and felt better in cooler weather while others simply did not have to worry about typhoons destroying their livelihoods. Two spoke about the good German public transport system, which gave them freedom to travel easily anywhere ("If you want to go to the nearby towns, as long you have the ticket and the money you can do it"; "You want to go downtown, there's bus, there's U-bahn… In the Philippines, you can't go around."). Two mentioned the feeling of safety in public spaces ("I can read the newspaper while I cross the street"; "You can go anywhere, even if you're alone"). Two said they liked German punctuality ("The punctuality of the German, I love it. Filipinos - when you have to meet at two o'clock, you can expect them at 2:30"; "I don`t

like Philippine time - 30 minutes late, one hour late."). Several appreciated the well-functioning German institutions.

Support available upon return

The experience of returning to the country of origin has been neglected in migrant research as the assumption is that "going home" is a positive experience. Our study found that this is far from being the case. On the contrary, most of the factors that had prompted women to migrate remained the main challenges they have to cope with upon return: limited socioeconomic opportunities (including jobs, income, social benefits) as well as family responsibilities, debts and aspirations for social mobility. As the researchers from VoDW observed, "migration was linked to poverty back home and the needed reintegration support should cover primarily financial and employment support." In addition, many women have suffered trauma or ill physical health, a reversed cultural shock from the return and have rarely managed to accumulate savings to provide for basic survival needs, let alone rest and time for recovery.

In the origin countries, reintegration involves specific challenges[35] including loss of face for "failed migration" or the need to repay debt and find employment. Sometimes assistance is provided to documented migrants who were repatriated through official channels or to victims of trafficking with conditions that they cooperate with law enforcement. Given the stigma and misconceptions surrounding trafficking, some returnees stay away from assistance to avoid labelling.[36]

Re/integration in both SEA and Europe usually takes the form of service provision by non-state actors and has been relatively ignored by policymakers and consequently underfunded. Moreover, while immediate and short-term services, such as shelters, legal, psychological and medical aid, are widely available, long-term

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[35] ILO website, section "Economic and social empowerment of returned victims of trafficking in Thailand and the Philippines".
    Available at: https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/WCMS_082047/lang--en/index.htm.
[36] Wickramasekara, P. (2019). "Effective return and reintegration of migrant workers with special focus on ASEAN Member
    States", ILO. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sro-
    bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_733917.pdf.

services, in particular for economic inclusion, are lacking.[37] Where long-term assistance focused on economic re/integration exists, it is generally not reflective of the labour market needs or women's aspirations.[38]

In 2019, the UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking recognised this situation in her thematic report on social inclusion for victims of trafficking and called on states to ensure "viable employment opportunities to survivors", and that these should be designed, implemented and monitored with the participation of trafficked persons.[39] The routine exclusion of trafficked and migrant women from policy design and evaluation means that those who are best placed to comment on re/integration measures are the ones never consulted. By opening a space for the women's voices regardless of whether they fall into the category of migrants or victims of trafficking, we found that the women's struggle continues and is often made more difficult by a system at home that has "forgotten" them while being away - the state, the community, and even the family.

The key theme that is emerging regarding the women's situation upon return is that there is insufficient support, especially for receive socio-economic opportunities to rebuild or resume their lives. What we learnt is that women are strong, entrepreneurial, and highly motivated to support their families and communities. In many cases, they have saved money, learnt new languages, and developed new skills and competencies while living in Europe and just need some tangible support from the state or NGOs to put them into practice.

Re/integration in SEA

IOM applies mostly the term *reintegration* with regards to its voluntary return programmes to denote the support needed for returning migrants.[40] It describes economic, social and psychosocial reintegration, which suggests that migrants had been integrated prior to departure which is not necessarily the case. GAATW prefers to use *re/integration* which simultaneously covers integration and reintegration - that is, the situation of both those who have been pushed to the margins of society, or otherwise made incapable of participating in it after the migration experience (e.g. by stigma or by inflicting on them debilitating physical or mental trauma), and those who have always been on the fringes of society (raised as or by representatives of severely disadvantaged groups or simply affected adversely by poverty).

Surtees defines *re/integration* as involving settlement in a stable and safe environment, access to a reasonable standard of living, mental and physical wellbeing, opportunities for personal, social and economic development and access to social and emotional support.[41] Successful re/integration centres around empowerment, assisting trafficked persons to become independent and self-sufficient. The term also accommodates both reintegration into a familiar community and integration into a new community or country. Surtees emphasises

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[37] This point is made in a paper linking to the policies and practices in Azerbaijan but is likely the case in many countries of origin: McCarthy, L. (2018) "Life after Trafficking in Azerbaijan: Reintegration experiences of survivors", *Anti-trafficking review*, issue 10, https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.201218107.

[38] Bose, D. (2018). 'There are no Victims Here': Ethnography of a reintegration shelter for survivors of trafficking in Bangladesh, *Anti-trafficking review*, issue 10, https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.201218109.

[39] Special Raporteur (2019). Report of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Human Rights Council. Available at: https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/41/46.

[40] IOM (2015) "Reintegration: Effective approaches". Available at: https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl486/files/migrated_files/What-We-Do/docs/Reintegration-Position-Paper-final.pdf.

[41] Surtees, R. (2006). "Re/integration programmes in SE Europe", A background paper for the King Baudouin Foundation, KBF and NEXUS Institute, Brussels and Vienna.

that "this work is complex, constrained by the impacts of trafficking as well as <u>the difficult socio-economic environments to which most trafficked persons return</u>".[42] Not surprisingly, both migrants and victims of trafficking are at constant risk of (re)trafficking or (re)victimisation.

In recent years the topic of returning migrants has shifted more into the public domain in the SEA region with several publications on returning migrants that show the vicious circle of psychosocial challenges interacting with the socio-economic obstacles. This culminated in a 2020 breakthrough with ASEAN adopting *Guidelines on effective return and reintegration*.[43] The guidelines build on a number of successful explorations on what successful re/integration for victims of trafficking mean[44] that can be extended to returnees more widely. They set the standards for re/integration frameworks as based on principles of human rights, fair treatment, and the recognition of different categories of returnee migrants and their needs. It emphasises the need for targeted support for vulnerable groups and gender-sensitive and gender-responsive provisions. Community focus, transparency and integrity, incorporation of migrants' voices, multi-stakeholder participation, and evidence are highlighted as paramount. The guidelines present a needs assessment that covers economic integration, social and cultural reintegration as well as social protection of returning migrants, emphasising the overall economic, political and social environment as the prerequisite for a successful reintegration.

ASEAN countries have, to varying degrees, re/integration provisions already incorporated in national migration legislation and policy frameworks. The Philippines is often cited as a good practice internationally with its comprehensive legislative and institutional framework.[45]

The implementation of such standards however is patchy. A 2019 ILO report on returning migrants, covering the ASEAN countries, observed numerous issues that hinder the successful re/integration upon return.[46] It noted a lack of data on returnees and their patterns of reintegration; lack of proper laws, policies, and institutions regarding return and reintegration; and lack of coordination and awareness among different ministries, agencies and key stakeholders. Importantly, it also emphasises the stagnant economic situations in the countries of origin. They pair badly with inadequate and ineffective employment services, the lack of information on available services and programmes and poor social protection coverage. Furthermore, there is absence of provisions for skills certification and skills recognition as well as more broadly resource constraints upon the return and reintegration activities.

Our research findings confirm these shortcomings and illustrate the day-to-day challenges women experience. This section presents the main gaps in service provision that returnees face.

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[42] Surtees, R. (2014). "Who Funds Re/integration? Ensuring sustainable services for trafficking victims", *Anti-Trafficking Review*, issue 3, p. 5, https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.20121434, emphasis added,

[43] ASEAN (2020) "ASEAN guidelines on effective return and reintegration", ASEAN Secretariat Jakarta. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/asia/publications/WCMS_820380/lang--en/index.htm.

[44] DATIP and JICA (2018) "The eight MEKONG Regional workshop on assisting victims of trafficking in building new lives: exploring "successful" social reintegration for victims of trafficking and good initiatives to promote it". Available at: https://www.jica.go.jp/project/thailand/016/materials/ku57pq00001yw2db-att/8th_mekong_rws_main_text.pdf.

[45] Wickramasekara (2019), p. 16

[46] Ibid.

Socioeconomic support

Socioeconomic support was the main need identified by the research participants upon return - they had to find work or set up their own business to support themselves or their families. Some had accumulated financial and other resources and managed to build, repair or re-construct their houses, find a job or start a small business. The trans woman interviewed in Thailand shared that "When I returned, I was 47. I didn't face any particular challenges. I had some savings from Denmark and I still have a share from my parents' business. Now I run a shop at ICON SIAM in Bangkok, where I make clothes to order and also sell readymade clothes." Likewise, one of the interviewees in Vietnam said she returned with savings and was now working in a garment factory where she saves 30-40% of her monthly salary.

However, others struggled. From the 29 interviewees in one of the research sites in Vietnam, 20 said they had difficulties findings a job and eight did not (one did not answer). One of the women explained "When I returned, my economic conditions were difficult and my parents are retired. My father is [disabled] and my mother is a housewife without salary. Our monthly expenses for a family of 3 are about 10,000,000 VND but I have no income yet".

One of our partners in the Philippines emphasised that, "[Returnee women] need stability, to be economically adaptive and to continue to support their families and themselves".[47] Returnees need to be recognised as people who have been, who are, and who will *contribute to society*. "At the age of 40 women are often stuck in the Philippines, but we know that at the age of even 60 women can still contribute. The question is what is at stake for the women who want to go back, what can the government offer".[48] One of our partners in the Philippines advised, for example, that the government cooperates with businesses, especially in the creative industry and the digital industry to provide jobs after the women return.

Two of the women interviewed in the Philippines had received reintegration assistance from the German NGO SOLWODI and training for starting a small business by Batis Center. Maria Teresa explained: "I was very happy because finally I could see a bright future ahead of me. My soft ice cream was a blockbuster in my community. I learnt how to make hamburgers and siomai. My daughters were helping me run the business. It was very successful." Although several years later she had to close the shop due to an accident, this example shows the difference that economic assistance, coupled with mentoring and advice, can make in a woman's life.

Psychosocial services

While not all women in our research had returned because of negative experiences in Europe, many were experiencing stress and sometimes trauma from violence and abuse, which now combined with the burden of financial expectations from their families and communities. Rebuilding their lives is not easy and they need

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47 In "Socio-economic Inclusion of Migrant and Trafficked Women from SEA to Europe", 23 March 2022, webinar, https://www.facebook.com/GlobalAllianceAgainstTrafficInWomen/videos/667613694361227 (accessed December 2022).
48 Ibid.

psychological support to accompany their reintegration. It is often specialised NGOs in the home country like our project partners that are the only places where women can receive such support.

It is not only mental health that needs to be addressed in counselling. The researchers reported that some women understand the need to plan their return, but they lack the skills to execute such plans. For most, even when the return is planned, the need for reintegration comes as a surprise. Women are often not aware that there is a difference in reintegration services of the government and NGOs. NGOs offer more personalised mentoring and support with soft skills and competences. Governmental assistance is more linked to socioeconomic opportunities but there are bureaucratic challenges. In addition, women have limited knowledge about governmental assistance and it may also come with onerous paperwork and documentation requirements.

The support at destination is also very important. The researcher in Thailand concluded that women who did not receive any support in the destination country experienced greater distress upon return. As described by one of the women, **"**It took 3-4 months to be able to sleep properly again. It was so stressful. I couldn't eat during the day. I also got a migraine later on, which [was so severe] I had to see a doctor". On the other hand, some of the women who were identified as victims of trafficking received reintegration support. One of the women in Thailand had attended a free training at Mahidol University to be a childcare worker. NGO colleagues in Thailand, however, shared that the official identification of victims of trafficking is a cumbersome and opaque process performed only by the government. They gave examples of women who were identified as victims in Denmark and other European countries but were not identified as such in Thailand and could not access the dedicated victim assistance fund.

Community interventions

Our partners observed that women often returned to a changed environment and "suffered reverse culture shock". As one of the women said, her time working abroad was a "life-changing experience". Especially those who had been away for a long time, were, in a way, now migrants in their own country. The researchers in Vietnam noted that most of the research participants did not report different treatment by the community but a small number did. One of the women said "When I first returned to my hometown, people whispered about the fact that I was tricked to Russia. It took me six months to get used to my new life in my homeland." They also noted that while in Europe, some migrants had acquired what they called "civilised" behaviours (such as queuing and patiently waiting for their turn) and appeared odd once they were back home. They observed that one group of 11 research participants were spending their free time together due to commonalities and to overcome their feelings of alienation.

However, regardless of these difficulties, some of the women found some social stability in the community when they returned. In several instances, the local communities helped the women obtain legal papers confirming their marital and residential status.

The need for family services

Most of the women found an overall welcoming environment in their families. However, some returned to strained relationships with their husbands and instances of domestic violence, leading to marriage breakdown and separation or divorce. As one of the partners in Vietnam explained, "When they go home [there are] problems with their husbands and their children because of the long separation". Some of the separated and divorced women could not find work, and thus had unstable incomes. Having to repay migration-related debts was a major problem for many families. For others, the migration experience had given them courage to leave violent or abusive husbands, despite the prospect of a difficult financial situation following separation.

In our research, only one of the women, in Vietnam, was going through a divorce with a husband in the destination country (Malaysia) and related procedures for a certification in Vietnam of her two children from that marriage. However, informally, we know that issues with foreign husbands and foreign-born children also affect many returnee migrants in the Philippines where divorce is illegal. An essential aspect of gender-sensitive migration and reintegration policy is to facilitate the dissolution of marriage and the recognition of children that returnee migrant women may have from the destination country.

The importance of long-term and consistent support

The women's reintegration begins at the moment they decide to return and this should be reflected in the types of assistance in the country of destination prior to the return. Services at destination provide space for women to think about rebuilding their lives and re-adjusting to their home societies and communities. As one of our partners in the Philippines said, "The empowerment and emancipation [achieved in] the host countries need to be followed up in home countries". The partners in Thailand also pointed out that those who had received financial compensation for their trafficking experience, whether abroad or in Thailand, were doing better as it gives them a sense of justice and could also alleviate their financial situation.

Despite the hardships, many women felt they had achieved their socioeconomic goals - they managed to earn money and felt integrated in the host country. Socioeconomic inclusion is, as one social worker from a partner organisation explained, the primary factor in the recovery of those who had suffered severe abuses in other countries before migrating to Europe:

> Most women have experience in other countries where they were treated 'like animals'. [In Germany] for the first time they felt treated 'like humans' - they get benefits, time off, and rights as citizens. They felt empowered to defend and fight for their rights. Employers respect their boundaries – what is work time and what is rest time. Some felt they had found their second home […].

Returning to the country of origin, where they may not feel the same way, can be traumatic and frustrating. This often leads to challenges with reintegration and many women were simply looking for another way to go back to Europe. The researcher in Thailand had joined several Facebook groups where returnees exchange

information about their migration experience. She shared informally that the most common discussions among the women were about ways to return to Europe.

Ensuring consistent long-term support builds resilience and helps women overcome the challenges that might await them upon return. The case vignette below is an example of how services both in the country of origin and destination have provided a supportive net in difficult circumstances.

CASE VIGNETTE 1: THE IMPORTANCE OF LONG-TERM CONSISTENT SUPPORT

L. worked in Berlin, Germany between June and December 2011. She decided to return mainly because of her child who was in the Philippines. But it was also that her employer violated the contract by sending her to Germany, not the country she was initially promised to go to. SOLWODI, a German NGO providing support to migrants in distress referred to Batis Centre when she arrived in the Philippines.

As a part of her reintegration plan with SOLWODI, she was given various options to choose from: support for employment, educational assistance to boost her employability, or a small business loan and training. She chose to kickstart a small sarisari (grocery) store and received business training in Germany. SOLWODI also funded her business plan.

L. was very frustrated as this was her first attempt at developing a business. She said it was a challenge for her but she was doing it for her family. She also experienced some challenges with the contract for her store. The landlord decided to change the conditions of the contract at the last moment. Consequently, she decided to move the business to her hometown because there was an opportunity for free space.

The next challenge she faced was Typhoon Yolanda which hit the Philippines in 2013. It severely affected her living conditions, as she "went back to zero". All her property and belongings were destroyed and she lost her business. Batis Centre and SOLWODI stayed by her side and provided help for her to start again. Having their support, she went back to Manila and started a job. As she said, "No matter how hard life is, I will still go on".

Reflecting on this case, key to the physical and economic survival of this woman was that there was a continuation of the support as well as good cooperation between NGOs in Germany and the Philippines.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

Photo: FGD organised by FairWork

Socioeconomic inclusion vs re/integration

At the beginning of the project, we spent some time discussing with the research partners if we should use the term "re/integration" or "(socioeconomic) inclusion". The GAATW Secretariat had consciously chosen to use "socioeconomic inclusion", influenced by Surtees who, as we noted in the previous chapter, points out several limitations of the term "re/integration" and prefers the term "inclusion". Among our partners, those who work with women identified as trafficked preferred "re/integration" as it is commonly used in laws and policies relating to trafficking. As one of the partners noted, "Integration and reintegration are established areas of intervention within socio-legal work with vulnerable populations such as THB victims, migrants and asylum seekers, etc., which is usually seen as a set of services (shelters, legal, psychological, medical assistance, etc.)". However, others pointed out the often-stringent criteria and conditions placed on people to meet the definition of "victim of trafficking" and thus make use of "re/integration" assistance. For this reason, some of the partners found the term "inclusion" more useful. To them, "re/integration" was limited to anti-trafficking and migration policies, whereas "inclusion" extended to labour rights too – a core demand of migrant workers. Furthermore, our partners in the UK, Germany and the Netherlands were also critical of the term "integration" because it is used in right-wing, xenophobic discourse to disparage migrants for supposedly not "integrating" in the host society. Thus, to them, the meaning of "integration" was loaded with conservative and nationalistic values, which, as one colleague noted, are both "normative and subject to interpretation depending on the political and media climate". A further critique of "re/integration" that emerged through the research was the way in which the term suggests that there is an end at which women are considered sufficiently "integrated", hence no longer eligible for assistance. In countries of origin, the meaning of "re/integration" was felt by the partners to involve unrealistic standards and achievements.

At the same time, we recognised that the terms we use are a matter of semantics and in the interviews with women, partners asked about what makes them feel like they belong or feel "at home". Here is how one of the women spoke about what makes her feel "at home" in Germany:

> Well, first, the earnings. The earnings are very important, so like if we will work for one hour, at the moment we will earn like 15 Euros and we can afford to buy what we want to eat. That's one big thing which make me feel at home. The kind of life which is essential - that you can eat and you can cook and you can buy this and that with the things you have. Then you don't have this kind of feeling of loneliness and miss home and miss my family and I miss to eat because we have everything here. Except, from time to time, during holiday season like Christmas, it's a very big family day also in [the Philippines] it's a lot of celebrations. [….] Another thing of feeling at home is we have a church and we can meet some friends and we can hear our language. Another thing here is not [worrying about] how to reach places. If you want to go to a movie, it's just a matter of your time. [...] It`s higher standard, but it`s kind of a simple life and that's what we have. As long you are not lazy, as long as you are helping yourself, so you can enjoy things. I mean another part of the culture is being fair. I always think that the Philippines are something sample, because you really can say who is rich and who is poor. From food to clothing to the way of life, to the way they look, you can realise who can afford and that makes a kind of sad feeling. Here, we, the simple ones, can buy what we saw from the rich. And that's why I started to feel at home here, because at least this thing of enjoying life is for me being at home.

The researchers found that almost all the women described working legally in the host country as their goal. As one Ivorian survivor of trafficking in France said, "[To feel integrated], I would need papers and a legal job on which I pay taxes. This for me would be true integration. […] When I have my papers and I'm working legally, I plan to go to La Chappelle [poor area in North of Paris] twice a week to bring meals". Some also wanted to learn the local language in order to socialise and find better jobs, learn computer skills, or taking vocational courses. The majority wanted to eventually unite with their families in their countries of origin although some hoped to make the destination country a permanent home. Although most of the women tend to socialise with people from the same nationality groups, some expressed interest in knowing about the situations of women from other Southeast Asian countries and women working in other sectors.

As women felt they are welcome, they belong, and they have financial stability, they also found that their voice is stronger and they can stand up for themselves and their rights. One Indonesian woman in Germany explained the "journey" of becoming more confident:

> when I moved, I was an ausländer [foreigner], and I felt afraid of people, you know, like Asian culture, we're shy, we try to always look down when we walk… And Europeans are … very straightforward… and I felt like I'm sinking and sinking… You know what I mean? I felt like if I don't shout, people won't look at me. Maybe they think I'm stupid. … it's just a different culture. You have to speak up, you have to show yourself. Because if I don't speak up, no one will notice me. In Asia, when you don't speak up, they'll go and ask you. But here, not really – you have to show yourself, what is your ability, what do you want, what you don't like… That's why I also changed – if people don't notice me, how can they know I can do something…

Ultimately, our partners in Europe summarised that for the women, feeling "included", "integrated", or "at home" was connected to the feeling of general wellbeing, of having work, rights, their family with them, and knowing the laws and rules. In countries of origin, partners said that women's feeling of "inclusion" or "integration" came from being welcomed by the families, the communities, and the wider society as well as having decent income and access to services.

Agency and vulnerability, victimhood and courage

We had a section of the research devoted to women's agency but the term "agency" remains overly academic and vague when it comes to actual life experiences. In general, "agency" is the sense of taking control of one's life and the ability to act and make choices even in constrained circumstances. In migration discourse and policy, it is common to treat women as located along a continuum from, on one extreme, "slaves" (as they

are often referred to in the UK), through victims, survivors, and "agents of change",[49] to "modern heroes" (as migrant workers are referred to in the Philippines),[50] at the other extreme.

The women in our study could not fit neatly into any of these labels, or fit different labels at different stages or their lives, or more than one at the same time. Most of them came from disadvantaged backgrounds and low socioeconomic status, little formal education, violence in the family, or limited resources. All this made them vulnerable to traffickers and deceitful brokers. At the same time, the decision to travel thousands of kilometres away in the hopes of achieving a better life for themselves and their families is clearly a manifestation of agency and resourcefulness. At the destination, the lack of documents, support system or knowledge of the local language and culture made women vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous employers. However, they found ways to negotiate with them or to escape, to find another employer (and another and another, if necessary), to seek help from local people, or other migrants, or NGOs, and return on the journey to their goal of a better life – actions that are, again, a clear manifestation of agency.

Labels, categories and identities are imposed on women by bureaucrats for administrative purposes. And while some administrative categories (e.g. victim, slave) may come with some rights and entitlements, they also come with stigma. The focus on victimhood, suffering, and helplessness prevents some women from seeking help because they do not recognise themselves in these labels. As one of the women interviewed by our partner Voice of Domestic Workers said: "I should be recognised as a worker and not a victim. Domestic work is decent work. We are a profession and we are looking after the elder people and families. We are workers, not slaves." However, as we emphasise women's agency – their strength and ability to make decisions even under constrained circumstances – we also caution of the potential pitfalls of focusing on women's agency, such as victim-blaming and denial of assistance or placing them under undue pressure to rebuild their lives. It is important to recognise that vulnerability and agency overlap in a person and provide support to overcome vulnerabilities while strengthening agency.

[49] Blanchette, T. et al., (2022). "Rebels, victims, agents of change: The singular histories of women migrant workers". International Labour Organization, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-dhaka/documents/publication/wcms_859757.pdf.
[50] Parry-Davies, E. (2020). "Modern Heroes, Modern Slaves? Listening to migrant domestic workers' everyday temporalities". *Anti-Trafficking Review*, (15), 63–81, https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.201220154.

CONCLUSIONS

The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) reflects on several distinct regimes for integration and social cohesion defined as *multiculturalism* (*social inclusion*), *social cohesion*, *social capital*, *tolerance* and *human rights*[51]. It emphasises that the choice of the regime by a given country would determine the quality of support that is offered to disenfranchised groups, migrants in particular. Within these regimes, it is important to review the concept of social inclusion, which is underexplored and under-conceptualised at the expense of research on its opposite - social exclusion.[52] One reason may be that the very idea of inclusion, for example as promoted within the multiculturalism approach, has never been fully realised. It was indeed prematurely aborted with the demise of the Left under growing and all-pervading capitalism and the capitalism extremes within the currently reigning neoliberal political and economic order. Looking into social inclusion, however, inevitably confronts us with the socio-economic aspects of how individuals and communities are interpreted, empowered and ultimately emancipated to realise their full potential in terms of both well-being and contribution to their host societies.

With this study we have set ourselves the task to explore socio-economic inclusion which is defined in the ISD report as *Inequality and Opportunity approach.* It stems from the critique of the above approaches that they ignore the socioeconomic dimension and the structural and socioeconomic causes of community tensions and integration problems. Gidley and Hampson help to locate the above approaches within a framework that blends the theoretical, the policy and the practical aspects within the context of socioeconomic inclusion.[53] In their work, social inclusion can be understood as "pertaining to a nested schema regarding degrees of inclusion": the narrowest interpretation starts from the neoliberal notion of *social inclusion as access*; a broader interpretation regards the social justice idea of *social inclusion as participation*; whilst the widest interpretation involves the human potential lens of *social inclusion as empowerment.* The authors emphasise that it is through slogans such as "work first", "economic growth", "skills shortage" and "social capital" that neoliberalism for decades has been allowing and even encouraging degrees of empowerment based on social justice discourses. They trace how such theories, their awkward co-existence and their underpinnings, have brought about a set of particular interventions that have formed the policy and practice landscape in the last decades.

While such interventions are most welcome and provide positive experiences, the findings from our research show that the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed long-term structural flaws in public services and social protection measures that have been left unaddressed for way too long. These have a direct impact on trafficked and migrant women (e.g. healthcare, childcare, accommodation, financial support). The looming post-pandemic economic crisis, worsened by the high inflation and rising interest rates, is likely to exacerbate these flaws.

The collapse of socialist statism at the end of the 1980s, either in the form of "actually existing socialism" in the East or in the form of social democracy in the West, followed by the 2008 economic crisis that legitimised severe austerity measures, in the social area in particular, has interrupted the development of the idea of

[51]   Johnson, Nick (2012) Integration and cohesion in Europe: an overview, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, April 2012.
[52]   See for example http://www.incluso.org/manual/social-inclusion-and-social-exclusion-explained.
[53]   Gidley, J, Hampson, G, Wheeler, L and Bereded-Samuel, E 2010, 'Social inclusion: Context, theory and practice', The Australasian Journal of University-Community Engagement, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 6-36.

socioeconomic inclusion, and indeed the very idea of inclusion as a whole. The austerity measures significantly affected the capacity of service providers, especially NGOs, and increased the levels of stress for the staff struggling to provide the needed services for the most disadvantaged, including migrants. Socioeconomic inclusion is now mostly used to denote class mobility in the labour market and improved access to the workplace for poor people. It features mostly internal diversity policies and not as an aspect of an overall re/integration of migrants, returnees, and victims of trafficking.

IOM, for example, explicitly separates economic and social inclusion.[54] Regarding economic inclusion, it emphasises that "while individual interventions and support are of fundamental importance, it should be linked to broader programmes facilitating the access to credit among returnees and link individual returnees with existing national or local development or migration management plans, as these can provide opportunities for returnees to reintegrate economically". As our research shows, however, such programmes for either newly arriving migrants in countries of destination or for returnees are lacking or ineffective.

The trends above are a generalisation based on theory to devise an ideal model and to introduce the reader to the environment in which the study has taken place. Many of the research questions and focus, observations and experiences are unique even to the individual researchers/participants, let alone be generalisable to a whole organisation, municipality, city, country and region. What is valuable are the rich descriptions, the critique, the new questions raised and most importantly - the change for individuals, communities, and organisations; and from there - the implications for policy and practice. Our findings demonstrate that whilst support and protection for migrant and trafficked women do exist to some extent, implementation can be improved, especially when it comes to socio-economic opportunities and the conditions that make it possible to benefit from them.

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54   IOM (2015).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Photo by VODW: Domestic workers preparing leaflets for lobbying during the Labour Party Conference in Sept. 2022. They are demanding to the Labour MPs to keep the rights of domestic workers in the manifesto of Labour.

As one of our partners said, "While in Southeast Asia, there have never existed effective re/integration programmes, in Europe, there is a regressive trend towards cancelling achievements and shrinking and conditionalising human rights". Even where policies exist and are sufficiently developed, their implementation is often patchy and this is revealed primarily in the day-to-day experiences of women and how they perceive the support offered to them. The partners and the women who participated in the research, therefore, made recommendations about policy changes that would impact their lives. These recommendations have been noted by our project partners and will form the basis for their advocacy at the national level.

As we pointed out earlier in the report, this was the fourth and, at this point, last research on the broadly defined theme of socioeconomic inclusion of migrant and trafficked women. The previous three researches focused on: South Asian women (from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka) who had returned after migration to West Asia; migrant women from Asia and Latin America in Vancouver, Canada; and migrant and trafficked women from different Latin American countries in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, and Uruguay.

Together with the current research, we worked with 30 partners in 18 countries across five regions of both origin and destination for migration and trafficking who interviewed a total of 970 migrants (953 women and 17 men). Despite the diversity of countries and regions, many of the experiences we documented, the challenges women face, and the weaknesses in state responses to these challenges, were strikingly similar. In this chapter, we summarise some of these challenges and make some broad recommendations to address the gaps in the provision of assistance.

Ultimately, the stories of the almost one thousand women who provided input for our research confirmed what previous migration research has shown too: migration is a natural part of human life and it is only recently that states have begun to excessively control, restrict and militarise the free movement of people. What is unnatural are borders, passports, and immigration controls. Migration offers numerous benefits to every country's socioeconomic development. Migrants must be the ones who benefit the most.

1. Establish more regular migration pathways

One major challenge that repeatedly came up was the lack of regular migration pathways. This meant that women had to rely on brokers, smugglers, and traffickers, to help them reach their destination, usually borrowing loans at exorbitant interest rates, selling land or assets or putting them collateral. The pressure to repay these loans meant that women agreed to take any kind of work, under any conditions, and for any amount of money, which made them extremely vulnerable to exploitation and unable or unwilling to leave. It is clear from our research and a plethora of other evidence that migration restrictions do not prevent people from migrating but only make their journeys more dangerous. Therefore, destination countries need to create more regular pathways for migrant workers to fill shortages in their labour markets. They also need to create firewalls between, on the one hand, law enforcement, healthcare, labour inspections and other public services and, on the other hand, immigration authorities. This would allow migrants to report situations or abuse and exploitation without fear of detention and deportation. Origin countries need to facilitate the

recruitment of workers for overseas work, regulate recruitment agencies, eliminate recruitment fees, and curtail or ban the activities of informal migration brokers.

2. Improve labour standards in the informal economy and strengthen labour inspections

At the same time, it also became clear that regular migration does not guarantee a good migration experience. Destination countries need to introduce labour standards in the informal economy, especially domestic work. Those who have not done so yet, need to ratify ILO Convention C189 on decent work for domestic workers and monitor the working conditions of domestic workers. More broadly, states need to strengthen labour rights and the role of labour inspections in economic sectors where large numbers of migrants work, such as manufacturing, agriculture, hospitality, sex work, and entertainment. Origin countries need to create more decent work opportunities at home and introduce labour standards and increase inspections in sectors known for exploitative working conditions.

3. Remove legal and procedural obstacles to trafficking survivors accessing assistance and support

Survivors of trafficking face specific challenges in accessing the assistance they are entitled to under anti-trafficking legislation. In both origin and destination countries, survivors and service providers described overly rigid and bureaucratic procedures for identification, psychosocial and financial support, or compensation for material and immaterial damages. Both origin and destination states need to ensure that their anti-trafficking measures adhere closely to the UN Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking. This includes providing support as soon as there are indicators that a person may be a victim and regardless of whether an investigation against a trafficker has been initiated. Identification procedures and court proceedings for compensation must be much shorter and sparing for the survivor and states need to provide flexible and long-term (re)integration assistance.

4. Simplify the process for recognition of qualifications held by migrants from other jurisdictions

Many women told us that they took up jobs that were below their education and work experience because their qualifications were not recognised in the destination countries. Despite having university degrees and years of professional experience, many women were working on construction sites, factories, farms, or as domestic workers. Likewise, upon return to the origin countries, some women felt that the skills they had acquired during migration were not put to good use. They had learnt a foreign language, how to use modern appliances, or the bureaucracy of destination countries but had no way of applying these new competencies. Destination countries need to simplify the process of recognising educational certificates and work experience from the home country; when such documents are lost, their re-issuing must be easier and cheaper. Origin countries should provide opportunities for returnee migrants to provide pre-departure orientation and training to prospective migrants, as well as opportunities to put their skills to use in similar industries (for example, many the skills acquired through domestic work are directly applicable to tourism and hospitality work).

5. Establish comprehensive reintegration programmes for returnee migrant and trafficked women

Upon return to their home countries, women often found the same dire socioeconomic situation that had prompted their migration in the first place. In all countries of origin, returnee migrant and trafficked women told us that they were struggling to find work that would enable them to support themselves and their families. Those who had taken loans struggled to repay them. In many cases, women felt they had no other choice but to try and migrate again. While some countries have various programmes and loan schemes to support migrants' reintegration, many women did not know about them, found them burdensome to access, or did not feel they meet their needs. Countries of origin need to establish reintegration programmes and provide low-interest loans, where they do not already exist, or, where they exist, make them more accessible and popularise their availability. Reintegration programmes need to be embedded in their development framework plans as one critical way of addressing the challenges in employment opportunities, and services. Countries of destination need to provide financial support to returning migrants, for example, as voluntary return and reintegration assistance, as compensation for damages caused by traffickers and for contracts terminated by employers, or for contributions made to the social security system.

6. Offer accessible, long-term language classes to migrants

Language was another barrier preventing migrant women from obtaining decent jobs and participating in the social and economic life of their new countries. Many women reported difficulties with finding jobs, negotiating working conditions with employers, dealing with documents and other administrative requirements, or knowing where to complain in case of problems at work due to limited language skills or lack of interpreters. Even when women had taken state-provided language classes, these were not sufficient for meaningful inclusion and participation in society. In many cases, women had to rely on other migrants from their home countries for work, housing, and socialisation, leading to limited job prospects. Destination countries need to provide more accessible and long-term language classes to migrants.

7. Combat racism and xenophobia towards migrants

Beyond migration and anti-trafficking policy, there were a number of social factors that impacted on women's experiences with socioeconomic inclusion in the destination countries or upon return. Migrant women reported racism and discrimination based on their nationality, ethnicity, or race, which meant that they were offered only work in '3D' jobs (dirty, dangerous, and difficult). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated racism against Asian migrants who were blamed for starting the pandemic. Destination countries need to combat racism, xenophobia, and negative social attitudes towards migrants by, for example, facilitating interactions between local and migrant communities, promoting evidence-based information about migration, and punishing xenophobic speech in the media and policy discourse.

8. Combat the stigma and stereotypes about women who migrate overseas for work

Returning women often spoke about the stigma they experienced from their family and community. Many were seen as 'bad women' for having left their families to work in another country - even though they had migrated precisely for their families' wellbeing. Those who could not remit money during their migration (for

various reasons, including because they were trafficked) were blamed for their 'failed migration' and for the loans their family had taken to finance their work abroad. Conversely, those who were able to send substantial sums of money were suspected of having engaged in "immoral work". Countries of origin must recognise that migrant women make vital contributions to their families, communities, and the country's economy and communicate this publicly.

9. Compensate women for the unpaid care work they take a disproportionate responsibility for

In both destination and origin countries, women bear disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care work such as cooking, cleaning, and care for the children and elderly. They shared that they have little time for rest, socialisation, fun, professional development, or participation in the social and political life in their country. Countries of origin and destination need to value and redistribute unpaid care work and promote gender equality in the public and private sphere.

10. Recognise the integral role of civil society organisations and provide them with the necessary resources to continue their work

In both origin and destination countries, civil society organisations like our partners work tirelessly to provide psychosocial, legal, financial, and other assistance to migrant and trafficked women. Given many migrant and trafficked women's distrust of state officials – because of immigration status or perceived corruption, among others – civil society is often *the only* source of support they can turn to. Governments must recognise civil society's immense expertise and support their work financially and involve them meaningfully in the development, implementation, and monitoring of migration and anti-trafficking legislation. For their part, civil society organisations need to recognise migrant and trafficked women's intersectional needs – as women, migrants, workers, and so on – and engage in dialogue and cooperation with other movements for equality and social justice.

11. Facilitate the self-organisation and collectivisation of migrant and trafficked women

In destination countries, migrant women– especially if they were undocumented or did not speak the language – often relied on other migrants from their home countries for work, accommodation, friendship or other support. These local communities of settled migrants proved lifesaving for newly arriving migrants. Governments and civil society organisations in destination countries should facilitate the formation of and strengthen existing diaspora communities and self-organised groups of migrants so that they can provide assistance to co-nationals in need. In countries of origin, returning migrants also shared that they found comfort in getting together with other returnees – to share experience but also make collective demands to the decision-makers at the community, local, or national level. Governments and civil society organisations in origin countries should facilitate the formation of formal or informal groups of returnees and involve them in decision-making.