

**changing spatial patterns of movement;*

In the last three decades, there has been an increased and complex movement of labour in Asia. In addition to older countries of origin such as India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand, emerging Asian countries of origin include Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, China, Burma, Bangladesh and Nepal.

While West Asian countries continue to be important countries of employment for Asian workers, newly industrialized Southeast and East Asian countries such as Singapore, Japan, Republic of Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Brunei are new countries of employment in Asia. Malaysia and Thailand are middle income countries of origin, destination and transit. From less than 6 per cent at the close of the 1970s, Asia absorbed over 40 per cent of those migrating for work over the second half of the 1990s.

Besides Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium which continue to remain important western destination points especially for Asian women workers, the USA, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and Cyprus in the Mediterranean region, are emerging new sites.

**migration management largely in the hands of a well organized private sector with strong political links;*

**official barriers to trans-national labour migration manifested in restrictive immigration and emigration policies;*

**labour migration for temporary periods, rather than for permanent settlement;*

**the growth of irregular migration, especially trafficking of women and children;*

**a positive experience for some, but gross human rights violations of many poor regular migrant workers and trafficked persons at all stages of the migration-trafficking process.*

While trade and capital flows are liberalized, deregulated and integrated globally, labour flows across national boundaries are not. Asian labour migration is marked by temporary foreign worker policies, backed by a regime of border and immigration controls, and prejudicial attitudes to immigration, particularly of the poor and unskilled. Emigration laws of some Asian countries completely or partially ban out-migration, especially of women, as a 'safeguard' against trafficking and other rights violations;

According to the U.S. State Department, there are an estimated 225,000 women and children who have been trafficked in Southeast Asia.



Women now constitute 50% or more of the migrant workers in Asia and Latin America, and growing proportions elsewhere. In some countries like the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, the number of women migrant workers outstrip men markedly.

Facts about Women's Migration for Work in Asia

who is a *migrant worker*?

According to the *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, 1990*, the term "migrant worker" refers to 'a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in remunerated activity, in a State of which he or she is not a national' (Article 1).

Migration for labour is not new. However many are still unclear about how a migrant worker is defined. Many are also unaware of changes in migration trends in the recent context of globalization and how this impacts migrant workers especially women, their families and communities. Information about labour migration in Asia, especially in relation to women is important for appropriate policy and programme formulation and implementation

**a growing magnitude and pace;*

According to ILO estimates, there are about 175 million persons residing outside their countries of origin worldwide, of whom about 120 million are migrant workers and members of their families. Around 2000, there were over 20 million Asian workers in other countries. This clearly contrasts with 1976 estimates of a total of 146,400 Asian overseas workers.

**a significant and enduring structural feature in Asian countries;*

In contrast to views that international labour migration is a passing response to temporary labour shortages and surpluses, evidence suggests that the phenomenon - its fluidity notwithstanding - is embedding itself firmly in the Asian socio-economic and political system. It is consequently an issue of significance and concern in the next few decades.

**migration for work being encouraged by governments as a development strategy;*

Migrant workers, especially women contribute significantly to national accounts and development in countries of origin, as well as to economic development in countries of employment.

Migrant remittances to developing countries in Asia rose to US\$ 80 billion in 2002 from US\$ 60 billion in 1998. In countries like the Philippines and Sri Lanka, remittances from overseas workers constitute more than 10% of the GDP.

**increasing numbers of women migrating for work, and exceeding men in certain countries;*

In 1976 women numbered about 21, 960 of the 146,400 Asian overseas workers,. By 1995 the aggregate outflow was 800,000 women migrant workers per year. Women now constitute 50% or more of the migrant workers in Asia and Latin America, and growing proportions elsewhere.

The number of women overseas migrant workers has not just increased, it has exceeded the number of males in countries like the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. While in 1995, women accounted for 52% of overseas Filipino contract workers, this increased to 69% in the first half of 2000. In Sri Lanka, in 1999, overseas women migrant workers, constituted 64% (115,610), of a total of 179,114 overseas Sri Lankan migrant workers. In 2000, this rose to 68.2% (117,192) of a total of 171,726. Overseas labour migration from Indonesia between April 1999 - March 2000 was estimated at 404,523, of which 70% (279, 901) were women.

**women recruited into skilled and unskilled woman-oriented jobs;*

Women are concentrated in the formal or informal service and manufacturing sectors in woman-specific skilled (nurses, teachers, secretaries, and to a smaller extent as doctors, managers, IT specialists etc) and unskilled jobs (domestic workers, entertainers - usually a euphemism for prostitution, restaurant and hotel workers, assembly line workers);

**women mostly concentrated in domestic work and entertainment;*

The heaviest concentration of women is at the lower end of the job hierarchy as domestic workers and entertainers, where they suffer human rights violations. In 1999, while 76% (87710) of the 115,610 Sri Lankan overseas women migrant workers went as domestic workers, in 2000 this increased to 81% of the 117,192 overseas Sri Lankan women migrant workers. In 1998, 50% of the estimated number of Filipina migrant women were service workers – nurses, domestic workers, entertainers and care givers, while in 1999-2000, about 97% of out migrating Filipinas worked as domestic workers and entertainers. There are about 46,000 Indonesian domestic workers in Hong Kong. Next to the Filipinas they comprise the largest community of foreign domestic workers, growing at an average of 50% annually from 1995.

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