

# Economic Drivers of Climate Migrant Settlement: Insights from ASEAN

Khanh-Linh Ta<sup>1\*</sup>, Thu-Ha Ly<sup>^</sup>

\*University of Bristol, United Kingdom, ^Hanoi Law University, Vietnam

takhanhlinh26112000@gmail.com

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## Abstract

Migration patterns among ASEAN Member States (AMS) are diverse and complex, with nations like Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand serving as net immigration countries. Conversely, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam are among the world's largest emigration nations. Most migration within AMS is temporary and primarily consists of low-skilled workers, while many skilled workers from the region seek permanent migration opportunities in OECD countries. Economic factors serve as the primary drivers of migration; however, these are often intertwined with environmental, social, and economic influences. By examining the intersection of economic motivations and environmental pressures, this research focuses on economically driven migration (labor migration) in the context of economically driven climate migration. The study aims to understand climate-induced migration in ASEAN and investigates the role of OECD countries, which have become key destinations for ASEAN migrants. The research explores how migration patterns are affected by climate change's economic and environmental challenges and how these pressures shape migration flows within and beyond the region. Lastly, the research analyzes how ASEAN countries have recognized and responded to the economic challenges related to climate-induced migration, particularly amid rapid regional growth. Moreover, this article argues that the current migration frameworks in these countries of origin might require improvement, mainly to protect climate migrants better and enhance the understanding of ASEAN's stance on this issue. Ultimately, this research promotes strategies for managing climate-induced migration within ASEAN and in collaboration with OECD countries, contributing to a global dialogue on climate migration.

Keywords: climate migration, labour migration, Southeast Asia, ASEAN, OECD



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<sup>1</sup> Corresponden Author

## I. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of migration within the ASEAN region is marked by striking diversity, reflecting a complex interplay of economic, social, and environmental factors. This dynamic landscape is shaped by both historical migration patterns and contemporary global trends, which together contribute to the fluid movement of people across borders. While some ASEAN Member States (AMS), such as Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, serve as net immigration hubs, others, including Indonesia, the Philippines, and Viet Nam, rank among the world's leading emigration countries.

Traditionally, the migration patterns are mainly economic drivers, exemplified by the situation that labour migration involves low-skilled workers seeking opportunities within and beyond ASEAN, driven by disparities in income levels, employment opportunities, and demographic trends. The region has witnessed large-scale movements of low-skilled workers seeking employment opportunities, particularly in East Asian and Middle Eastern countries. These workers, employed primarily in construction, domestic work, manufacturing, and agriculture, constitute a vital labour force that supports the economies of both sending and receiving nations. At the same time, skilled-workers from ASEAN countries frequently migrate to OECD nations, where they pursue higher wages and career advancements, often leading to brain drain in their home countries. The economic motivations behind migration are further reinforced by regional economic integration initiatives, such as the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), which aims to facilitate labour mobility across member states, albeit with significant limitations in its implementation.

However, in recent years, the intensifying impact of climate change has introduced a new dimension to migration trends within ASEAN, complicating the traditional economic narratives toward OECD countries. Climate-induced migration, which refers to population movements driven by environmental changes such as rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and declining agricultural productivity, is becoming an increasingly urgent challenge for policymakers in the region. Given that several AMS, particularly those with extensive coastal areas and low-lying regions, are highly vulnerable to climate change, the intersection between environmental stressors and economic imperatives requires closer scrutiny. Countries such as the Philippines, Viet Nam, Myanmar, and Indonesia are particularly susceptible to climate-induced displacement due to their exposure to typhoons, flooding, and rising temperatures, which threaten both livelihoods and food security. As a result, affected populations often rely on migration as a safer and more economically stable solution for the changing environments.

This article investigates the economic drivers of climate migration between AMS and OECD, emphasizing the role of regional bodies and intra-regional destinations in addressing this emerging challenge. By exploring the intersection of economic imperatives and environmental stressors, the research provides a comprehensive

understanding of how ASEAN and OECD adapts to the dual pressures of climate change and labour migration. In doing so, it highlights the patterns and characteristics of climate-induced migration between these destinations. Furthermore, the research examines the capacity of ASEAN and OECD and its individual nations to absorb and integrate climate migrants, assessing the economic opportunities available to displaced populations and the challenges they face in accessing employment, housing, and social protection in host communities.

A key component of this investigation involves a critical analysis of existing policies and frameworks developed by ASEAN and its member states to address climate mobility. While ASEAN has recognized the importance of climate resilience and disaster preparedness, migration has yet to be fully integrated into regional climate adaptation strategies. National policies on migration and labour mobility also vary significantly across AMS, with some countries implementing more structured approaches to managing migrant workers and displaced populations than others. The research assesses the effectiveness of current initiatives, such as multilateral labour frameworks, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies, identifying both best developments and areas that require improvement. Additionally, it considers the role of international organisations and regional cooperation in shaping migration governance within ASEAN and/ or toward OECD nations.

By addressing these issues, the research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of ASEAN's capacity to manage climate migration, ultimately offering insights to guide future strategies for more sustainable and inclusive regional growth. Given the increasing frequency and severity of climate-related disasters, proactive policy interventions are essential to ensure that climate migrants are not merely displaced but are provided with viable opportunities for economic integration and long-term resilience. This necessitates a holistic approach that combines economic development, climate adaptation, and migration governance, fostering greater regional cooperation to tackle one of ASEAN's most pressing contemporary challenges.

## II. THE NEW MIGRATION IN ASEAN-OECD

ASEAN countries are home to 8.6% of the world's population.<sup>2</sup> According to Hugo, citing United Nations data, Southeast Asia has one of the fastest-growing international migrant populations of any region.<sup>3</sup> In 2000, fewer than 10 million of the world's immigrants originated from ASEAN countries, but this number increased to 12.5 million by 2010 and surged to 21.5 million in 2017.<sup>4</sup> Notably, the Philippines, Myanmar, and Vietnam ranked among the top 10 AMS countries with the highest net emigration rates between 2000

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<sup>2</sup> James Raymer, Qing Guan & Jasmine Trang Ha, "Overcoming Data Limitations to Obtain Migration Flows for ASEAN Countries" (2019) 28 *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* at 385-386.

<sup>3</sup> Graeme Hugo, "The Changing Dynamics of ASEAN International Migration" (2014) 51 *Malaysian Journal of Economic Studies* at 43-44.

<sup>4</sup> Raymer et al., *supra* note 2 at 390.

and 2010.<sup>5</sup> Kikkawa and Suan further noted that intra-ASEAN migration tripled, rising from 2.1 million in 1995 to 6.9 million in 2015.<sup>6</sup> By 2020, there were 23.6 million Southeast Asian migrants living outside their home countries.<sup>7</sup> This raises the question: what were the driving factors behind these trends?

#### A. *Migration Drivers in ASEAN*

From a theoretical standpoint, Castles argued that migration is part of a broader process of social transformation, driven by significant changes in global political, economic, and social relationships.<sup>8</sup> Building on this approach, Black et al. identified economic and environmental changes as two of the five major dimensions of the human movement. Economic drivers of migration include factors such as employment opportunities and income disparities between regions, while environmental drivers encompass exposure to hazards and the availability of ecosystem services.<sup>9</sup> It's essential to recognise that these drivers rarely act independently. Their interaction shapes the specifics of migration, i.e., the scale or internal versus international migration.<sup>10</sup>

On the one hand, various models support understanding migration's economic drivers. Accordingly, as early as 1970, Harris and Todaro identified net income, wage differentials and income volatility as key factors driving migration.<sup>11</sup> In 1982, Stark widely promoted the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) model, emphasising rural risk as an essential factor in migration decisions.<sup>12</sup> This development enabled Lilleør to refine the model, identifying two primary drivers of migration: the (expected) income differential between origin and destination locations, and income variability.<sup>13</sup>

The first driver, the income differential driver, suggests that wage differences, after accounting for migration costs, unemployment rates, and the discount rate of future earnings, motivate people to migrate internally and internationally. According to Hugo, labour migration in Southeast Asia is primarily driven by rural poverty and disparities in wages and economic opportunities. Existing social networks in host countries act as pull factors, alongside a well-established migration industry that includes agents, recruiters,

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<sup>5</sup> United Nations, "International Migration Report" ST/ESA/SER.A/346 (2013) at 6-13.

<sup>6</sup> Aiko Kikkawa & Eric B Suan, "Trends and Patterns in Intra-ASEAN Migration" in Elisabetta Gentile, ed, *Skilled Labor Mobility and Migration* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019) at 6.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations, International Migrant Stock | Population Division (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 14 September 2024), online: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock>.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Castles, "Understanding Global Migration: A Social Transformation Perspective" (2010) 36 *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 1565 at 1566.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Black et al, "The Effect of Environmental Change on Human Migration" (2011) 21 *Global Environmental Change* 3 at 56.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid* at 55.

<sup>11</sup> John R Harris & Michael P Todaro, "Migration, Unemployment and Development: A Two-Sector Analysis" (1970) 60 *American Economic Review* 126 at 126-142.

<sup>12</sup> Oded Stark & David Levhari, "On Migration and Risk in LDCs" (1982) 31 *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 191 at 191-196.

<sup>13</sup> Helene Bie Lilleør & Katleen Van Den Broeck, "Economic Drivers of Migration and Climate Change in LDCs" (2011) 21 *Global Environmental Change* S70 at S72.

travel providers, and immigration officials.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, McAdam argued that labour migration is a multigenerational poverty reduction strategy in Southeast Asia.<sup>15</sup> Statistics support this trend: in 2015, the ILO reported that approximately 19% of all migrant workers in Southeast Asia and the Pacific in 2013 were workers seeking a path out of poverty.<sup>16</sup>

The income variability driver, in contrast, posits that individual migration decisions are influenced by past income fluctuations, signalling a moment when a household faces a high risk of consumption failure, thereby creating an incentive to diversify income sources. This is evident in the Philippines, where, as Quisumbing and McNiven noted, migration becomes a family strategy to utilise the insurance aspect of having a migrant family member in response to cumulative shocks experienced by internal migrants.<sup>17</sup> This model of thinking also extends to overseas Filipinos, who similarly respond to domestic income shocks, as suggested by Yang and Choi.<sup>18</sup>

Conversely, the environment also plays a crucial role in migration decisions. Seto observed that while migration from rural to urban areas can boost income and living standards, it also decreases vulnerability to environmental hazards such as floods, hurricanes, and coastal erosion.<sup>19</sup> Hence, the ecological characteristics of a location influence both (1) the population's exposure to hazards and (2) the availability of essential ecosystem services, which can significantly affect the decision to migrate. Most of the time, these two influences go together.

Regarding the first influence, rapid-onset environmental events like floods, tsunamis, and earthquakes are common triggers of displacement. These displacements are usually temporary, with people often returning home soon after the event subsides. However, environmental factors and political stability influence whether and when they can return, making such events an early stage of migration.<sup>20</sup> In that context, Southeast Asia is a "hotspot" for extreme weather and environmental degradation, facing rising sea levels, coastal flooding, and powerful storms.<sup>21</sup> According to the 2021 World Bank's Groundswell Reports, the lower Mekong subregion of Southeast Asia is expected to experience internal displacement owing to climate-related reasons for 3.3 million to 63.3

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<sup>14</sup> Graeme Hugo, *Migration in the Asia-Pacific Region* (GCIM, 2005) at 37.

<sup>15</sup> Marika McAdam, *COVID-19 Impacts on the Labour Migration and Mobility of Young Women and Girls in South-East Asia and the Pacific* (IOM, 2020).

<sup>16</sup> ILO, *ILO Global Estimates of Migrant Workers and Migrant Domestic Workers: Results and Methodology* (ILO, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> Agnes Quisumbing & Scott McNiven, "Moving Forward, Looking Back: The Impact of Migration and Remittances on Assets, Consumption, and Credit Constraints in the Rural Philippines" (2010) 46 *Journal of Development Studies* 91 at 91–113.

<sup>18</sup> Dean Yang & HwaJung Choi, "Are Remittances Insurance? Evidence from Rainfall Shocks in the Philippines" (2007) 21 *The World Bank Economic Review* 219 at 219–248.

<sup>19</sup> Karen Seto, "Non-Environmental Drivers of Migration to Cities in Asian and African Mega-Deltas" (2011) 21 *Global Environmental Change* S94 at 94–107.

<sup>20</sup> Black et al, *supra* note 8 at 57.

<sup>21</sup> Soo-Chen Kwan & David McCoy, "Climate Displacement & Migration in South East Asia" (OCHA – ReliefWeb Blog, 28 February 2023), online: <https://reliefweb.int/report/viet-nam/climate-displacement-migration-south-east-asia>.

million people between now and 2050.<sup>22</sup> Although there have been limited attempts to record external disaster displacement, the physical geography of Southeast Asia and the Greater Mekong sub-region indicates that cross-border migration may become a major concern as the effects of climate change worsen.<sup>23</sup>

At the same time, moving to the second influence, Fisher defines ecosystem services as the environmental components used to enhance human well-being.<sup>24</sup> Adams and Adger argue that changes in these services impact both well-being and migration demand.<sup>25</sup> This is because services are crucial for local livelihoods, particularly in agriculture or fisheries-dependent economies. Severe productivity failures, like droughts or degradation, can prompt large-scale migration. At the same time, minor environmental declines might lead to short-term moves within or to urban areas in search of alternative income sources.<sup>26</sup> Such climate shifts often exacerbate existing economic inequalities, as those with fewer resources struggle to adapt. Its strain on urban infrastructure and job markets can also create further socio-economic challenges. In that sense, it brings us back to the economic drivers of migration.

Environmental risks impact economic drivers by affecting agricultural productivity, rural livelihoods, industry locations, employment, and settlement patterns, and political drivers by influencing conflict and public policy. Hertel et al. highlighted the correlation between environmental change and household incomes, suggesting that climate change can affect the cost and feasibility of moving, particularly for those with lower wealth.<sup>27</sup> For Ahmed et al., the poorest are most vulnerable, as their livelihoods are more likely to suffer from environmental changes.<sup>28</sup> Knowing that these drivers often go hand in hand, the situation of Southeast Asian and ASEAN Member States (AMS) again fits in such a picture. 1.4% to 2.7% of the region's population is expected to experience significant climate change effects, including migration and relocation due to rising sea levels, coastal flooding, and storms.<sup>29</sup> The Global Climate Risk Index ranks the Philippines, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam among the top 10 countries most affected by climate change.<sup>30</sup> A projected sea level rise of 70 cm by 2100 poses a particular threat to Southeast Asian nations like Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam, with

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<sup>22</sup> Anggita Marthin & Louis Budiman, "The Discourse of Climate Migration: Unravelling the Politics of ASEAN's Environmental Policies" (2020) 26 *Pacific Journalism Review* (2) 35 at 42.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Brendan Fisher et al, "Defining and Classifying Ecosystems Services for Decision-Making" (2009) 68 *Ecological Economics* 643 at 643–656.

<sup>25</sup> Helen Adams & W Neil Adger, "Changing Places: Migration and Adaptation to Climate Change" in Linda Sygna, Karen O'Brien & Johanna Wolf, eds, *The Changing Environment for Human Security: New Agendas for Research, Policy, and Action* (Routledge, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> Black et al, *supra* note 8 at 57.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas W Hertel, Marshall B Burke & David B Lobell, "The Poverty Implications of Climate-Induced Crop Yield Changes by 2030" (2010) 20 *Global Environmental Change* 577 at 577–585.

<sup>28</sup> Syud Amer Ahmed et al, "Climate Volatility and Vulnerability in Tanzania" (2011) 21 *Global Environmental Change* 46 at 46–55.

<sup>29</sup> Kwan & McCoy, *supra* note 20.

<sup>30</sup> See also: Indra Overland et al, "Impact of Climate Change on ASEAN International Affairs: Risk and Opportunity Multiplier" (2017) *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs & Myanmar Institute of International and Strategic Studies* 1.

densely populated coastal cities such as Jakarta, Manila, Bangkok, Yangon, and Can Tho facing significant future settlement challenges.<sup>31</sup> These data all suggest a feasible tendency for migration due to environmental concerns. But to where?

#### B. Migration in ASEAN-OECD

Hugo observed that Southeast Asian countries are involved in intricate migration systems characterised by significant circularity, reciprocity, and repeat movements. These patterns have created strong connections within ASEAN and with OECD nations.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, the number of ASEAN migrants in OECD countries has skyrocketed in recent decades.

The driver for this rising number does not lay simply in economic interests and environmental concerns from ASEAN. The situation in OECD countries, especially their future climate pictures, poses an attractive promise for ASEAN migrants. Gathering data from 198 origin countries and 16 OECD destination countries from 1980 to 2015, Minehan and Wesselbaum found that climate variables affect the decision to migrate international migration to OECD countries. Accordingly, not only the current temperature affects the decision to migrate towards OECD countries<sup>33</sup> but also the future expected temperature at origin in 2030 and 2050.<sup>34</sup>

In 2013, OECD countries hosted the majority of emigrants from ASEAN, with the United States being the top destination, harbouring 4.32 million ASEAN-born residents, or 23% of the total ASEAN diaspora. Intra-ASEAN migration to Asian-OECD countries is also significant, with Thailand (3.6 million), Malaysia (1.5 million), and Singapore (1.2 million) among the top five destinations. Non-Asian OECD countries include Australia (844,181) as the sixth largest destination and Canada (664,628) as the eighth. In Europe, notable destinations are the United Kingdom (308,087), France (278,026), Germany (238,407), the Netherlands (186,438), and Italy (149,444).<sup>35</sup>

Current statistics by ASEAN and/ with OECD focus on two groups of migrants: (1) students and (2) labour workers. There has been a notable rise in ASEAN students in OECD countries, with numbers increasing by 66% from 2000 to 2010, reaching 2.8 million. Notably, the number of Thai students more than doubled, while students from Brunei Darussalam, the Philippines, and Myanmar also saw significant increases of 74.3%, 73.8%, and 67.2%, respectively.<sup>36</sup> The strong networks of Filipino (55% of ASEAN

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<sup>31</sup> See also: Wan Shiao Dong et al, "The Impact of Climate Change on Coastal Erosion in Southeast Asia and the Compelling Need to Establish Robust Adaptation Strategies" (2024) 10 *Heliyon* 4.

<sup>32</sup> Hugo, *supra* note 2 at 66.

<sup>33</sup> See also: Amelia Aburn & Dennis Wesselbaum, "Gone with the Wind: International Migration" (2019) 178 *Global and Planetary Change* 96 at 96–109.

<sup>34</sup> Shannon Minehan & Dennis Wesselbaum, "Do Climate Change Expectations Drive Migration? Evidence from Migration Flows towards OECD Countries" (2023) 227 *Global and Planetary Change* 9 at 9–10.

<sup>35</sup> Hugo, *supra* note 2 at 46–47.

<sup>36</sup> Kikkawa & Suan, *supra* note 5 at 17.

migrants) and Vietnamese (21%) migrants serve as significant pull factors.<sup>37</sup> According to the OECD, from 2014 to 2021, many Southeast Asian countries experienced substantial growth in international students studying in OECD countries, with the number from Vietnam more than doubling.<sup>38</sup>

On the other hand, labour migration to Asian and non-Asian OECD economies has surged in recent years. In 2023, Japan, a major Asian-OECD destination for AMS labour migrants, hosted 2 million workers, a 12% increase from the previous year. Of these, 80% were from Asia, with Vietnamese workers forming the largest group at around 518,000.<sup>39</sup> Indonesian and Myanmarian labour migrants in Japan also saw the highest growth rates at 56% and 50%, respectively. Similarly, migration to non-Asian OECD countries has risen, with Canada seeing Southeast Asia as a primary source of permanent immigrants, especially in economic categories. Since 2015, about 60% of new permanent admissions to Canada have been Asian, with the Philippines contributing 11%, and notable growth from Indonesia and Vietnam.<sup>40</sup>

The data above indicates a significant migration influx between ASEAN and OECD countries, including Asian and non-Asian destinations. Given the development and climate profiles of OECD countries and the established migration drivers in ASEAN, it is reasonable to infer that these migrations may be influenced by economic and environmental factors, either independently or in combination. However, it is vital to acknowledge the lack of empirical research directly supporting this correlation. Additionally, current available data primarily capture legal migration, particularly among students and workers, while failing to account for undocumented cross-border movements. This omission presents a critical gap in existing research, highlighting the need for future empirical studies to quantify and analyse the extent to which the interplay of economic and environmental factors drives migration. However, for the purpose of this research, we will continue with the proposed thesis that migration between ASEAN and OECD are influenced by economic interest and climate change. This brings us to the next stage: what do we call them?

### C. *The Economic Driven Climate-Migration in ASEAN-OECD*

Migration between ASEAN and OECD countries is expected to continue rising, with climate change emerging as a widely discussed driver. Nishimura's general takes on such a phenomenon produced the definition of "climate migrants" as "individuals whose movement is triggered, either partly or entirely, by the effects of climate change".<sup>41</sup> However, this definition does not fully capture the specific characteristics of migration

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<sup>37</sup> Jeanne Batalova, Andriy Shymonyak & Guntur Sugiyarto, *Firing Up Regional Brain Networks: The Promise of Brain Circulation in the ASEAN Economic Community* (Asian Development Bank, 2017).

<sup>38</sup> OECD, *International Migration Outlook 2023* (OECD, 2023) at 34.

<sup>39</sup> OECD, *Labour Migration in Asia: Trends, Skills Certification and Seasonal Work* (OECD, 2024) at 9.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid* at 16.

<sup>41</sup> Lauren Nishimura, "Climate Change Migrants: Impediments to a Protection Framework and the Need to Incorporate Migration into Climate Change Adaptation Strategies" (2015) 27 *International Journal of Refugee Law* 107 at 144.

between ASEAN and OECD nations, as it overlooks the dominant role of labour and economic motivations in this particular context. Given this limitation, Beatriz Felipe Pérez's categorisation of climate migration provides a more nuanced framework. Among Pérez's four categories, "climate-induced migration" is particularly relevant.<sup>42</sup> This category refers to migration occurring within evolving environments where the gradual impacts of climate change affect economic conditions and livelihoods over time. According to Pérez, this type of migration often manifests as labour-driven mobility, underscoring the intertwined nature of economic and environmental factors.<sup>43</sup>

For the specific purpose of examining migration patterns between ASEAN and OECD countries, this research proposes a new sub-group: **economic-driven climate migrants**. This category encompasses labour migrants whose decision to migrate is partly or entirely influenced by climate change-related economic disruptions. The research recognises the dual forces shaping migration decisions by integrating both Nishimura's broad conceptualisation and Pérez's more structured framework. While this focus narrows the scope of the research to a particular subset of climate migrants, it allows for a more precise analysis of the interconnected economic and environmental drivers at play, as highlighted in existing studies.

Furthermore, this approach enables the research to critically assess whether current ASEAN and OECD foreign labour policies sufficiently address climate-induced economic migration. Specifically, it raises the question of whether existing legal frameworks incorporate climate-related vulnerabilities and provide adequate protections for economic-driven climate migrants. If current policies fail to acknowledge this intersection, the findings could serve as an impetus for policy adaptation, ensuring that migration governance structures better reflect the realities of climate-labour mobility. By addressing these gaps, this research contributes to a broader global discourse on climate migration, offering insights into how international migration frameworks can evolve to support those displaced by the complex interplay of economic and environmental stressors.

## II. ASEAN POLICIES AND OECD COLLABORATION ON ECONOMIC-DRIVEN CLIMATE MIGRATION

ASEAN Member States (AMS) face increasing challenges in addressing economic-driven climate migration as the impacts of climate change intensify across the region. The convergence of environmental pressures and economic disparities has necessitated robust policy responses at both national and regional levels. Concerning a regional level, ASEAN's policies aim to balance the need for labour mobility with climate resilience, ensuring sustainable solutions for affected populations. Simultaneously, collaboration with OECD countries plays a critical role in shaping migration pathways, as these

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<sup>42</sup> Felipe Pérez, Beatriz. "Beyond The Shortcomings of International Law: A proposal for the legal protection of climate migrants" in Simon Behrman & Avidan Kent, *Climate Refugees* (Routledge, 2018) at 214–215.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid* at 216.

nations often serve as destinations for skilled migrants from AMS. Then, this section examines the policies enacted by ASEAN to manage climate-induced migration while fostering regional economic growth and evaluates the partnerships with OECD countries in enhancing the capacity and protection mechanisms for migrants in the context of escalating climate challenges.

#### A. ASEAN's Labour Policies in Dealing with Economic-Driven Climate Migration

##### 1. The Climate and Worker Nexus

Globally, about 1.2 billion jobs rely directly on the effective management and sustainability of the environment.<sup>44</sup> For ASEAN, environmental sustainability and employment are tightly interconnected<sup>45</sup> as approximately one-third of Southeast Asians depend on the environment and ecosystem services for their livelihoods, with 37% of jobs in the region directly linked to environmental factors - ranging from 27% in the Philippines to 52% in Myanmar - affecting over 100 million workers, primarily in agriculture but also in sectors such as waste management, wood product manufacturing, and ecotourism.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, workers in environmentally linked jobs are likely to already be among the most vulnerable in the labour market, facing lower wages, precarious employment conditions, and limited social protection, heightening their susceptibility to environmental shocks and economic instability.<sup>47</sup>

Practically, ASEAN's frequent disasters and extreme weather events often disrupt economies and jobs, impacting worker's incomes, productivity, and livelihoods.<sup>48</sup> Several AMS rank among the most exposed and vulnerable to climate change-related extreme weather events, with the Global Climate Risk Index (2000–2019) placing Myanmar 2nd, the Philippines 4th, Thailand 9th, Vietnam 13th, and Cambodia 14th out of 180 countries.<sup>49</sup> Estimates indicate that climate change, including extreme weather events and environmental degradation, resulted in an average loss of 536 working life-years per 100,000 working-age individuals in the Asia-Pacific region between 2008 and 2015, the highest globally.<sup>50</sup> Workers in climate-vulnerable sectors who risk losing their jobs tend to explore new income opportunities in internal and cross-border regions.

Regarding the policy, the enactment of environmental tax legislation has mandated industrial enterprises to minimize greenhouse gas emissions to mitigate environmental pollution. Consequently, this regulatory requirement has contributed to

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<sup>44</sup> ILO, *World Employment and Social Outlook: Greening with Jobs* (ILO, 2018).

<sup>45</sup> ILO, *ASEAN: The Employment–Environment–Climate Nexus: The Employment Environmental Sustainability Factsheet* (ILO, 2022).

<sup>46</sup> OECD, *Towards Greener and More Inclusive Societies in Southeast Asia, Development Centre Studies*, (OECD Publishing, 2024) at 14.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> ILO, *Regional Study on Green Jobs Policy Readiness in ASEAN* (ILO, 2021).

<sup>49</sup> David Eckstein, Vera Kunzel & Laura Shafer, *Global Climate Risk Index 2021: Who Suffers Most from Extreme Weather Events? Weather-Related Loss Events in 2019 and 2000-2019* (Germanwatch, 2021)

<sup>50</sup> ILO, *supra* note 43.

a reduction in the workforce within their manufacturing facilities.<sup>51</sup> Concurrently, all AMS have committed to the Paris Agreement, with each country outlining mitigation efforts in their Nationally Defined Contributions (NDCs), which require AMS economies to decarbonise to meet the Paris Agreement's goal of limiting global warming to below 2°C above pre-industrial levels. As a result, the employment shift in numerous working fields affected by the greening process is expected as a policy reaction of companies and enterprises in the industries to remain competitive.<sup>52</sup> On the bright side, though the reliance on agriculture in AMS is already heavy<sup>53</sup>, the growth in green businesses resulted in an increasing number of green jobs which are predominantly associated with the energy sector while still emerging across other sectors including finance, fashion, and transport.<sup>54</sup>

At present, ASEAN is actively promoting green employment in clean energy, energy efficiency, and sustainable urban development, while also formulating policies to support sustainable production and consumption systems, including the circular economy.<sup>55</sup> This approach can significantly impact workers, particularly those in vulnerable sectors, by disrupting livelihoods and exacerbating socioeconomic inequalities. The challenges in integrating climate and labour policies stem from institutional barriers, weak inter-agency coordination, and a lack of comprehensive policy frameworks that account for environmental and social dimensions.<sup>56</sup> For instance, rapid transitions, such as eliminating polluting vehicles, may disproportionately affect low-income workers who rely on outdated technologies. To mitigate these adverse effects, AMS's governments must recognize their crucial role in integrating climate and labour policies, ensuring a just transition through long-term strategies that provide financial support, reskilling programs, and re-employment opportunities for affected workers.

In this context, “green job” policies can play a crucial role in enhancing this greening policy and mitigating or altering the negative impacts of climate change. This is because green jobs can support preserving or restoring the environment, whether in traditional sectors like manufacturing and construction or emerging green industries such as renewable energy and energy efficiency.<sup>57</sup> Not only so, but the conjunction feature of green jobs – just transition – can also ensure that individuals whose jobs are diminished or eliminated during the shift to a green economy have access to alternative

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<sup>51</sup> Guemide Boutkhil, *The Effects of Climate Change on the Economic Growth of ASEAN Countries* (International Studies Association, 2017), online: <http://web.isanet.org/Web/Conferences/HKU2017-s/Archive/05d22192-b7f5-43cc-af17-6d2e1760b191.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> ILO, *Employment effects of green policies in the Philippines - Summary for Policymakers* (ILO, 2019)

<sup>53</sup> ILO, *ASEAN Association of South-East Asian Nations: Employment and Environmental Sustainability Fact Sheets* (ILO, 2019)

<sup>54</sup> Frauke Roeser et al., *Five Major Shifts since the Paris Agreement that Give Hope in a Just, Paris-compatible Transition: a look back* (NewClimate Institute, 2023)

<sup>55</sup> Samantha A. Sharpe & Cristina M. Martinex-Fernandez, “The Implications of Green Employment: Making a Just Transition in ASEAN” (2021) 13 *Sustainability* 7389.

<sup>56</sup> ASEAN Secretariat, *ASEAN State of Climate Change Report: Current status and outlook of the ASEAN region. Toward the ASEAN climate vision 2050* (ASEAN, 2021) at 82.

<sup>57</sup> ILO, *What Is a Green Job?* (13 April 2016), online: <https://www.ilo.org/resource/article/what-green-job>.

employment opportunities and are provided with social protection throughout this transition process.<sup>58</sup>

According to the 2021 Regional Study on Green Jobs Policy Readiness in ASEAN, green jobs are defined as those that are “good for the people, good for the environment, and good for the economy.”<sup>59</sup> In most ASEAN Member States (AMS), the concept of green jobs is derived from the ILO definition<sup>60</sup>, which includes work that adheres to decent work standards and aids in environmental improvement by reducing energy and raw material consumption, limiting greenhouse gas emissions, minimizing waste and pollution, protecting and restoring ecosystems, and helping enterprises and communities adapt to climate change.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, a just transition—recognized internationally through the “Solidarity and Just Transition Silesia Declaration” at the 2018 COP24 meeting in Poland—is essential to ensure that individuals whose jobs are reduced or eliminated during the transition to a green economy have access to alternative employment opportunities and receive social protection throughout this process.<sup>62</sup>

Green jobs hold a prominent position within ASEAN’s agenda, as demonstrated by the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint and the ASEAN Declaration on Promoting Green Jobs for Equity and Inclusive Growth, adopted during the 2018 ASEAN Summit. These frameworks guide AMS in their efforts to advance green jobs, while simultaneously ensuring environmental sustainability and fostering inclusive economic development throughout the region.<sup>63</sup> A key outcome of the first ASEAN Green Jobs Forum, held in October 2020, was the establishment of an annual forum to facilitate regular knowledge exchange among AMS on national-level implementation progress, as well as to identify priorities for the regional execution of the ASEAN Green Jobs Declaration in alignment with ASEAN’s five-year work plan.<sup>64</sup> Most recently, the second ASEAN Green Jobs Forum convened in Kuala Lumpur from 24 to 25 April 2024, aimed at addressing the region’s increasing demand for green skills and advancing a just transition towards a sustainable future.<sup>65</sup>

At a national level, effective institutional mechanisms for coordinating policies on green jobs and just transition have even emerged across ASEAN Member States (AMS) prior to the 2018 ASEAN Summit, highlighting opportunities for regional cooperation and policy coherence.<sup>66</sup> The Philippines, among others, has made significant progress in integrating employment and climate change policies through the enactment

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<sup>58</sup> See also: ILO, *supra* note 47.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid* at 23.

<sup>60</sup> Samantha A Sharpe & Cristina M Martinez-Fernandez, *supra* note 54.

<sup>61</sup> ILO, *supra* note 43.

<sup>62</sup> ILO & ASEAN, *Regional Study of Green Jobs Policy Readiness in ASEAN – March 2021 Highlights* (ILO, 2021) at 5.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid* at 10.

<sup>65</sup> ASEAN, “ASEAN Addresses Skills Development, Labour Market Needs and Just Transition” (24 April 2024), online: <https://asean.org/asean-addresses-skills-development-labour-market-needs-and-just-transition/>.

<sup>66</sup> ILO, *supra* note 52 at 14.

of the Green Jobs Act (2016), the first legislative framework in ASEAN designed to promote and sustain green employment, and Climate Change Plan, including the creation of a Climate Change Commission. The Act establishes institutional mechanisms to coordinate policies across multiple government agencies while providing fiscal and non-fiscal incentives to businesses that generate green jobs. Despite its progress, the Act's implementation and coordination mechanisms remain evolving, necessitating further research to assess its effectiveness and potential adaptation in other ASEAN jurisdictions.<sup>67</sup>

While green jobs policies could align worker interests with climate goals for a better future, ASEAN is still in the early stages of adopting such initiatives. A key challenge is the diversity within AMS, including low- and high-income economies, many with large populations, all heavily impacted by climate change, environmental degradation, and biodiversity loss. Though these nations share aspirations for sustainable development, they follow varied policy frameworks and approaches to achieve these goals, complicating unified progress.<sup>68</sup> Also, the growth of green jobs and the supportive policy ecosystem remain underdeveloped due to the varying pace of progress and different areas of focus within AMS.<sup>69</sup> In evaluating the policy readiness for promoting green jobs and a just transition across AMS, Singapore, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia are the most prepared to implement green jobs programmes. In contrast, others have not yet fully prepared for this transition.<sup>70</sup> As a policy newly introduced in ASEAN in 2018, the green jobs and just transition initiatives still face considerable challenges before they can be fully achieved.

## 2. The Climate and Migrant Worker Nexus

Green jobs policies highlight ASEAN's stance on addressing environmental matters in conjunction with labour issues. Still, they are relatively new and primarily focus on domestic labour within each AMS, while the scope of this article is expected to be much broader. This raises the need to assess ASEAN's long-established foreign labour policies and determine whether they are prepared to address climate-related challenges. However, most AMS is not a party to the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (Migrant Convention) except for Indonesia and the Philippines.<sup>71</sup> If applied, the 1990 Migrant Convention can offer those who fit in its definition of "migrant" protection for not only themselves but also their family<sup>72</sup>. Yet, the limited ratification or endorsement

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<sup>67</sup> Michael R.M. Abrigo et al., "Greening the Philippine Employment Projections Model: New Estimates and Policy Options" (2021) Philippine Institute for Development Studies Discussion Paper Series 26 at 20.

<sup>68</sup> ASEAN Secretariat, *supra* note 55.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid* at 9; ILO *supra* note 42 at 9.

<sup>71</sup> Rey P Asis & Carlos L Maningat, "The 'ASEAN Way' in Migration Governance" in Heaven Crawley & Joseph Kofi Teye, eds, *The Palgrave Handbook of South-South Migration and Inequality* (Springer International Publishing, 2024) at 681.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid* at 217.

of international migration instruments as a whole indicates ASEAN's disengaged stance regarding the particular issue of migration in general and labour migration influenced by climate change in particular.<sup>73</sup>

This reluctance attitude is also reflected in most of ASEAN's labour migration initiatives. Accordingly, the 2007 ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (Migrant Declaration), which is the foundation of ASEAN's labour migration policies, has failed to establish a regional framework for any potential economic-driven climate migrants.<sup>74</sup> Petcharamesree asserted this is because the Preamble of the 2007 Migrant Declaration recognised and prioritised state autonomy in deciding their migration policies including regulating entry into their territory and the terms under which migrant workers may remain.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, it excludes any possibility of a joint effort because each state has complete control over the issue.<sup>76</sup>

The subsequent advancements in ASEAN relevant regulations post-2007 also indicate a tendency to restrict the scope of migrant labourers eligible for ASEAN's protection. The 2012 Agreement on Movement of Natural Persons (Migrant Agreement), which eases the temporary migration of highly skilled individuals, is mainly connected to business and investment activities.<sup>77</sup> Since approximately nine out of every ten migrants seeking employment in ASEAN are classified as low-skilled or semi-skilled,<sup>78</sup> current provisions cover only a small portion of the region's labour migration affected by climate change. Given that climate-driven economic migrants are often considered unskilled, their chances of receiving protection under existing agreements are even slimmer.

This limited approach continues to be reflected in the 2017 ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (Migrant Consensus). Asis and Maningat observed that this newly proposed instrument, while strengthening the legality of the 2007 Migrant Declaration, still only addresses legally resident migrant workers, a scope considerably narrower than most international instruments at the moment.<sup>79</sup> Some positive turn-out can be seen in the 2019 Declaration on the Rights of Children in the Context of Migration (Children Migrant Declaration) which explicitly addresses migration and displacement, recognising “disaster, climate change, and environmental degradation” as key drivers in its preamble. The Children Migrant Declaration further commits to ensuring access to essential services, including healthcare, a clean and safe environment, and psychosocial support for children affected

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Sriprapha Petcharamesree, “ASEAN and Its Approach to Forced Migration Issues” (2016) 20 *The International Journal of Human Rights* 173 at 181.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid* at 182–184.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid* at 183.

<sup>77</sup> See also: Flavia Jurje & Sandra Lavenex, “Mobility Norms in Free Trade Agreements: Migration Governance in Asia between Regional Integration and Free Trade” (2018) 17(1) *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 83 at 83–117.

<sup>78</sup> See also: Aniceto Orbeta Jr, “Enhancing Labour Mobility in ASEAN: Focus on Lower-Skilled Workers” (2013) 17 *PIDS Discussion Paper Series* 1.

<sup>79</sup> Asis & Maningat, *supra* note 70 at 682.

by migration. It is possible that facing the increasing awareness on the issue of human mobility in the context of climate change, ASEAN has made further statements highlighting the protection and promotion of the rights of those on the move. One of the most recent efforts is the 2023 Declaration on the Protection of Migrant Workers and Family Members in Crisis Situations (Migrant in Crisis Declaration) which emphasizes safeguarding both migrant populations and those remaining behind. It highlights the risks posed by “layered, compounding natural hazards and interconnected economies,” which are further intensified by an ageing population, rapid urbanisation, climate change, and increased human mobility.<sup>80</sup>

However, even in the case that such non-binding declarations can serve as a driving tool to reach a common ASEAN consensus on the issue, the prospects of ASEAN effectively implementing its labour framework to protect the rights of all climates migrant workers are increasingly uncertain. This stems from the framework's weak enforcement mechanism,<sup>81</sup> primarily due to ASEAN's principle of non-interference,<sup>82</sup> which hinders member states' accountability. The ASEAN Committee on Implementing the 2007 Migrant Declaration, responsible for overseeing labour migrant policies, has been notably ineffective. The issue's sensitivity and lack of consensus among AMS have significantly slowed the Committee's progress in fulfilling its mandates.<sup>83</sup> Since migration remains a sensitive issue for AMS<sup>84</sup> and enforcement of ASEAN's labour migration framework is limited, the likelihood of ASEAN adopting a broader perspective that acknowledges the role of climate change in labour and economic-driven migration seems unlikely in the near future.

#### *B. Cooperation between ASEAN and OECD in Reacting towards the Economic Driven Climate Migration Flows*

ASEAN, as the original country, and the OECD, as the host country in the migration flow, are expected to play a pivotal role in facilitating and fostering international collaboration to address the issue. The OECD has been involved in policy dialogue and mutual learning with Southeast Asia for more than 25 years, addressing a range of policy areas including investment, taxation, education, digitalisation, and innovation.<sup>85</sup> Particularly, the OECD's Southeast Asia Regional Programme (SEARP) since 2014 has fostered direct collaboration with ASEAN, focusing on regional integration, economic reforms, and policy exchange. Key areas of cooperation include tax policy, investment, education, SMEs, regulatory frameworks, and sustainable infrastructure. Additionally, SEARP

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<sup>80</sup> ASEAN Secretariat, ASEAN Migration Outlook 2.0 (ASEAN, 2024) at 49 - 56

<sup>81</sup> Asis & Maningat, *supra* note 70 at 693.

<sup>82</sup> See also: Amitav Acharya, “The Myth of ASEAN Centrality” (2017) 39 Contemporary Southeast Asia 273 at 273–279; Eric Corthay, “The ASEAN Doctrine of Non-Interference in Light of the Fundamental Principle of Non-Intervention” (2016) 17 Asian-Pacific Law & Policy Journal 1 at 1–41.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid* at 177.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>85</sup> OECD, “Southeast Asia” (14 September 2024), online: <https://www.oecd.org/en/regions/southeast-asia.html>.

supports initiatives on innovation, competition, trade, gender, green recovery, and tourism.<sup>86</sup> While the programme promotes economic development and sustainability, it does not specifically address economic-driven climate migration.

The latest development in ASEAN-OECD collaboration reflects both parties' recognition of the need to expand the scope of their cooperation. With the signing of a new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2022, the OECD and ASEAN accelerated mutual engagement in 35 Priority areas including but not limited to those listed in the Annex of the MoU. The Priority areas list has specifically outlined Environment and Employment and Labour Mobility as 2 out of 35 areas to strengthen the collaboration. However, despite including these two categories, the MoU remains predominantly focused on economic development, treating labour migration and climate change as separate and independent issues. As a result, the cooperative measures outlined have yet to comprehensively and directly address the intersection of climate change-induced labour migration.

Although the direct collaboration between ASEAN and OECD remains minimal, the OECD has implemented broader regional collaboration policies with Asia regarding labour migration and climate change. Given the gradual shift of international migration towards OECD countries from Asia, coupled with the steady increase in migration flows both to OECD countries and within Asia, the ADBI and OECD have convened an annual Roundtable on Labour Migration in Asia since 2011.<sup>87</sup> The second Roundtable was conducted in January 2012 with the main theme: “Managing Migration to Support Inclusive and Sustainable Growth”.<sup>88</sup> At the Roundtable, participating governments considered the outmigration of educated citizens advantageous for enhancing educational returns and remittance levels, sought to broaden migration destinations to improve job opportunities, and focused less on brain drain relative to the promotion of skilled worker migration.<sup>89</sup> Currently, the 14th ADBI-OECD-ILO Roundtable on Labour Migration in Asia, held on 28-29 May 2024 in Japan, serves as a platform for examining labour migration trends, policies, international standards, skills mobility, occupational safety, and the effects of remittances on socio-economic development.<sup>90</sup>

Additionally, regarding the environmental issue, the OECD International Programme for Action on Climate (IPAC) aids countries in progressing towards net-zero greenhouse gas emissions and building more resilient economies by 2050. By providing regular tracking, policy evaluation, and feedback on results and best practices, IPAC enhances and coordinates climate action efforts, which is crucial for achieving countries'

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<sup>86</sup> OECD, “Southeast Asia Regional Programme (12 Feb 2025), online: <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/programmes/southeast-asia-regional-programme.html>.

<sup>87</sup> OECD & ADBI, *Managing Migration to Support Inclusive and Sustainable Growth* (Asian Development Bank Institute, 2013) 1.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid* at 5.

<sup>90</sup> ADB, “ADBI-OECD-ILO Roundtable on Labour Migration in Asia: Maximizing the Impact of Labour Migration on Development,” (14 September 2024) online: <https://www.adb.org/news/events/adbi-oecd-ilo-roundtable-on-labor-migration-in-asia-maximizing-the-impact-of-labor-migration-on-development>.

Nationally Determined Contributions and net-zero targets.<sup>91</sup> While it complements the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement monitoring frameworks,<sup>92</sup> IPAC primarily serves as a tool for the OECD to oversee and support its member and partner countries in their environmental commitments, rather than engaging directly with regions having non-OECD members.

When comparing the two policy approaches, it is evident that the OECD has taken a more proactive and structured approach to addressing labour migration issues. Through continuous dialogue, annual roundtables and international policy coordination, the OECD has established practical and ongoing measures to manage labour migration challenges effectively. In contrast, its climate-related initiatives, while comprehensive in scope, primarily focus on broader policy monitoring and evaluation rather than direct engagement with non-member regions like ASEAN. This distinction underscores the OECD's prioritisation of labour migration as an immediate and tangible issue requiring frequent policy intervention. In contrast, its climate action remains largely advisory and targeted toward existing OECD members.

Finally, despite multilateral and regional declarations highlighting the need to implement measures for economic-driven environmental migrants, concrete actions from the OECD remain limited. For example, the Global Compact for Migration emphasises the importance of environmental migration and advocates for enhanced data collection and multilateral cooperation. In contrast, the Colombo Process, as Asia's principal regional consultative framework for labour migration, calls for increased research into the causes of environmental migration.<sup>93</sup> The OECD, otherwise, has yet to play a direct role in addressing the environmental factors impacting labour migration. At the same time, while the OECD and ASEAN address both labour and environmental issues and recognise climate-related changes as significant factors influencing migration, including labour migration,<sup>94</sup> no concerted effort has been exerted to integrate these concerns in collaboration with ASEAN in this regard.

### III. FUTURE ASEAN'S MANAGEMENT AND OECD'S POTENTIAL ROLE

There is no one-size-fits-all solution for an issue as intersectional as climate-driven economic migration. Currently, such migrants can (or should) be protected under two main frameworks in ASEAN: (1) internal employment-climate policies and (2) foreign migrant worker policies. However, though promising in both areas, ASEAN lacks the capacity for real, impactful change. The OECD faces similar challenges. Addressing this

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<sup>91</sup> OECD, *The Climate Action Monitor 2023: Providing Information to Monitor Progress towards Net-Zero* (OECD, 2023) at 55.

<sup>92</sup> OECD, "International Programme for Action on Climate (IPAC)," (14 September 2024) online: <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/programmes/international-programme-for-action-on-climate.html>.

<sup>93</sup> See also: IOM, *Labour Migration from Colombo Process Countries: Good Practices, Challenges and Ways Forward* (IOM, 2015).

<sup>94</sup> ADBI, OECD & ILO, *Labour Migration in Asia: Impacts of the COVID-19 Crisis and the Post-Pandemic Future* (ILO, 2021) at 47.

dual challenge requires concrete action along both paths while keeping an eye on better integration.

The first step should focus on tackling the root causes: economic pressures and climate change. In particular, AMS has made significant efforts to protect against climate change according to their climate mitigation and adaptation obligations under the 1992 UNFCCC, ASEAN can continue this good example by forging a greater sense of regionalism and facilitating a strong political will to jointly deal with other sub-national and international organisations and civil societies on the topic of labour migration in the context of climate change in Southeast Asia.<sup>95</sup> Such an approach allows ASEAN to satisfy its “will to differ” and to “evolve on its own path”<sup>96</sup> in the context of applying an “ASEAN way” in dealing with an issue that sparked interest from the Western side of the international community<sup>97</sup> and strengthen cooperation in implementing green jobs policies would be a good start.<sup>98</sup>

On the other hand, economically, rebalancing the cost burden of migration - namely visa and documentation fees, agency or broker fees, and travel costs - from migrant workers to employers is essential, especially for those suffering from climate change and weather constraints. These financial burdens frequently result in debt and long-term economic strain for migrants, construing as a significant factor discouraging regular migration.<sup>99</sup> To address this, governments in both origin and destination countries should implement policies that mandate employers to cover recruitment fees and associated costs. The Philippines' approach to integrating ethical recruitment into its migration policy serves as a notable example.<sup>100</sup>

At the same time, the OECD possesses the potential to function as a vital intermediary, facilitating the convergence of economic and environmental solutions in addressing climate-induced migration and its associated economic impacts. Under the framework of ASEAN-OECD MoU 2022, the implementation of the measures to deal with these issues shall be easier with regulated means of collaboration such as information exchange, workshop participation, capacity building, policy dialogues, strategic advice, joint research, co-financed projects, and other agreed cooperation. Moreover, a two-year work programme shall be developed and periodically updated then assessed through meetings, with specific projects subject to separate agreements while adhering to the general provisions of the MoU. With the established policies already in place concerning both domains, the integration of these frameworks could be

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<sup>95</sup> Marthin & Budiman, *supra* note 21 at 47.

<sup>96</sup> See also: Mon Tay, “Human Rights, Culture, and the Singapore Example” (1995) 41 McGill Law Journal 743 at 768; BS Chinni, “Asian Civilizations and International Law: Some Reflections” (2011) 1 Asian Journal of International Law 39 at 41.

<sup>97</sup> Benoit Mayer, “Environmental Migration: Prospects for Regional Governance in Asia-Pacific Region” (2013) 16(1) Asia-Pacific Journal of Environmental Law 93 at 93–94.

<sup>98</sup> ILO & ASEAN, *supra* note 61 at 10–12.

<sup>99</sup> ASEAN Secretariat, *supra* note 79 at 98.

<sup>100</sup> Rio N. Araja, Cayetano: Migrant Workers Act to ensure ‘ethical recruitment’, (Manila Standard, 9 January 2022), online: <https://manilastandard.net/news/314031861/cayetano-migrant-workers-act-to-ensure-ethical-recruitment.html>

implemented more seamlessly. Moreover, the OECD should consider expanding the application of these policies to encompass non-member states within regions that fall under its strategic partnerships, thereby fostering a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to global cooperation with ASEAN.

The next step is mainstreaming migration and climate vulnerability considerations into both domestic and international relevant labour policy frameworks for climate change adaptation. This policy integration solution is one of the most critical aspects of addressing climate change from a policy-making perspective.<sup>101</sup> One of the most effective solutions for tackling climate change across sectors is to review, assess, and incorporate climate change considerations into current policies. AMS in climate-prone areas should integrate migration as a strategic component within their disaster management and post-disaster recovery policies to mitigate potential forced and irregular migration resulting from climate change.<sup>102</sup> An example of this approach can be seen in Vanuatu where human mobility considerations are incorporated into its national climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction planning.<sup>103</sup>

Meanwhile, integrating migrant workers into crisis preparedness and response strategies is essential for future climate mitigation efforts. One of the critical lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic is that destination countries must address the specific needs of both regular and irregular migrants in their emergency preparedness plans and policies.<sup>104</sup> In some cases, providing crisis-related information in multiple languages would facilitate an effective response and foster better cooperation from migrant workers.<sup>105</sup> Otherwise, the Migration in Countries in Crisis (MICIC) Initiative can be applied, aiming to enhance crisis preparedness and migrant protection during conflicts and natural disasters with ongoing efforts through capacity building, research, and operational tool development.<sup>106</sup> These approaches help enhance the overall resilience of crisis response mechanisms and ensure that migrant populations are not left vulnerable in times of emergency while enabling destination countries to better manage crises while safeguarding the well-being of economic-driven climate-migrant workers.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Migration within ASEAN has historically been driven by economic imperatives, particularly labour migration, as workers seek better employment opportunities within the region and beyond. However, the growing impact of climate change is reshaping

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<sup>101</sup> Ton Hien Bui, “Một số giải pháp chủ yếu ứng phó với tác động của biến đổi khí hậu trong lĩnh vực lao động và xã hội (Some Main Solutions to Respond to the Impacts of Climate Change in the Field of Labour and Society)” (2013) 34 ILSSA 1.

<sup>102</sup> IOM, *Labour Migration in Asia: What Does the Future Hold?* (IOM, 2023) at 21.

<sup>103</sup> IOM, *Climate Change and Migration in Vulnerable Countries: A Snapshot of Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, and Small Island Developing States* (IOM, 2017).

<sup>104</sup> IOM, *supra* note 101 at 22.

<sup>105</sup> Bertrand Pauver, John Twigg & Silvio Sagromola, *Migrants, refugees, asylum seekers: Inclusion in disaster preparedness and response* (Europa & Council of Europe, 2016).

<sup>106</sup> Lorenzo Guadagno, *Integrating migrants in emergency preparedness, response and recovery in their host countries: Training manual* (IOM, 2016).

migration patterns, adding new complexities to an already multifaceted phenomenon. Climate change is no longer a distant concern but an immediate driver of displacement, exacerbating existing socio-economic vulnerabilities and compelling individuals to relocate in search of stability and livelihood security. As such, climate-induced migration, although a solution to the growing climate crisis, has emerged as a critical policy challenge that ASEAN nations must urgently address.

This research has examined the role of economic-driven climate migrants, a subgroup of climate migrants whose movement is closely linked to labour market dynamics and regulatory climate frameworks. These individuals, while primarily motivated by economic factors, are increasingly affected by environmental stressors that disrupt their livelihoods and force them to migrate. Low-skilled workers, especially those engaged in climate-sensitive industries are among the most affected, as rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and ecosystem degradation threaten their ability to sustain themselves. Despite this growing trend, existing policies remain fragmented, often treating climate change, labour migration, and economic policies as separate domains rather than recognizing their intrinsic interconnections.

While ASEAN has made some progress in acknowledging the links between climate change and labour migration—through green job policies, regional declarations, and discussions on migrant worker protection—these initiatives remain largely in their infancy. Current policy frameworks do not adequately address the unique vulnerabilities faced by economic-driven climate migrants, particularly in terms of legal status, social protection, and access to safe and sustainable employment. Moreover, while ASEAN and the OECD have explored collaboration on migration and climate change, their efforts remain largely compartmentalised, lacking a comprehensive strategy that integrates both issues into a collective and cohesive policy framework.

To bridge these gaps, ASEAN and its partners must adopt a more holistic and forward-thinking approach. First, migration governance should explicitly recognize economic-driven climate migration as a distinct policy issue, ensuring that affected populations receive the necessary legal and institutional support. Second, ASEAN should enhance intra-regional coordination by fostering greater policy coherence among member states, ensuring that climate migration is systematically integrated into national and regional labour migration frameworks. This includes revising existing declarations and agreements on migrant worker protection to account for the emerging realities of climate displacement.

Furthermore, ASEAN and the OECD must strengthen collaboration by developing joint initiatives that address both economic and environmental drivers of migration. This could involve capacity-building programs, research initiatives, and shared policy frameworks that facilitate the safe and orderly movement of climate-affected workers. Financial and technical assistance should also be prioritized to support adaptation measures in climate-vulnerable communities, reducing forced displacement and enhancing resilience at the source. Additionally, OECD's host countries must ensure

that climate-induced migrants, particularly those in low-skilled sectors, are afforded decent work opportunities, fair wages, and access to social protections.

Ultimately, the future of migration governance in ASEAN will depend on its ability to adapt to the evolving landscape of climate change and labour mobility. By developing integrated policies that address the multifaceted challenges of economic-driven climate migration, ASEAN can position itself as a global leader in proactive migration management. Strengthening regional and international cooperation, improving legal and social protections for climate-affected workers, and fostering sustainable economic opportunities will be essential in building a more inclusive and resilient ASEAN community. As climate change continues to reshape migration patterns, the region must act decisively to protect vulnerable populations while ensuring that migration remains a viable and sustainable pathway for economic and social development.

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