



International
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▶ **ACTRAV Interregional Webinar: Sharing Good Practices of Migrant Workers Resource Centres as an Innovative Organizing Tool for Migrant Workers**

5 August 2021 | 9:00 CET/14:00 BKK | Zoom
ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

► Speakers and resource persons

Speakers

Maria Helena André	Director, ILO Bureau of Workers' Activities, Geneva
Anna Engblom	Chief Technical Adviser, TRIANGLE in ASEAN, ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok
Patuan Samosir	Senior Director, Organizing and Projects, International Trade Union Confederation Asia-Pacific, Singapore
Mohd Effendy Bin Abdul Ghani	Acting President, Malaysia Trades Union Congress
Suriyanandhini Doraisamy	Malaysia Trades Union Congress, MRC National Coordinator
Yatini Sulistyowati	Chairperson, Department of Migrant Workers, Confederation of Indonesian Workers Welfare Union
Binti Rosidah	Vice Chairperson, Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers Association, Malaysia
Baek Seon-yeong	Organizing Director, Korea Confederation of Trade Unions
Nezam Qahoush	Desk Officer for Arab States, ILO Bureau of Workers' Activities
Ariel Castro	Desk Officer for Asia-Pacific, ILO Bureau of Workers' Activities

Moderator

Pong-Sul Ahn	Regional Specialist in Workers Education, ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
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► Introduction

The International Labour Organization's (ILO) interregional webinar was organized to exchange experiences and good practices among trade unions in Asian and Arab States regarding Migrant Workers Resource Centre (MRC) management and to promote the MRC as an innovative tool to reach and organize migrant workers and thus increase their social and legal protections.

Pong-Sul Ahn, as moderator, started the event by greeting and appreciating the participants for joining the webinar. He introduced himself as a specialist within the Bureau of Workers' Activities (ACTRAV) and based in the ILO regional office in Bangkok. He acknowledged the participants from the various countries, organizations and backgrounds and the resource persons who will share their good experiences of MRC operations.

Mr Ahn conveyed that ILO ACTRAV, as a supporter for workers' activities, views the MRC as a tool to reach and organize migrant workers. ILO ACTRAV believes that the organizing activity is an important entry point to empower, advocate and train migrant workers to minimize the risk of migration process while also maximizing the benefit of the migration experience for all consented parties in sending and receiving countries.

► Opening remarks

Mr Ahn invited ACTRAV Director Maria Helena André for her opening remarks. Because she was on leave, she spoke through a video recording. Mr Ahn explained that Ms André had worked hard during the pandemic, along with her staff, to advocate with trade unions and organized many virtual meetings to connect with the trade unions to hear their concerns, issues and to share knowledge and experiences so that they could further make organizing campaigns together. Mr Ahn clarified that this webinar is part of that effort.

Maria Helena André, Director, ILO Bureau of Workers' Activities

Maria Helena André welcomed all participants and the resource persons who were attending the webinar. Although she was not able to join the event and discussion, she believed that by the assistance of the ILO ACTRAV colleagues, the discussion would be active, relevant and useful for moving forward.

Ms André explained that for years, MRCs have provided support and assistance for migrant workers in countries of origin and destination countries. Since its first establishment and with a range of services and based on the rights model and approach, the MRCs have been widely acknowledged as having a role in the protection of migrant workers. During the pandemic, the MRCs provided essential COVID-19-related services for migrant workers in distress, including repatriation and support for both quarantine and survivors of the virus. She reported that some countries in the region operate MRCs with support from the ILO to support their objectives and, to a certain degree, they have been successful. She also informed that the success story of the MRC establishment and operation has been highlighted in many global forums and discussions on migration.

Ms André mentioned that several trade unions, in Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Malaysia and Thailand, have realized the importance of services for migrant workers through the establishment of their own MRC. The reports received from unions from these countries have pinpointed an increase in unions' capacity to reach out to those groups of workers who are not traditionally reached – migrant workers. This is an important contribution to the ongoing discussion on the trade union revitalization, with unions demonstrating the ability to become the representative organization and the voice of all workers.

She cited the memorandum of understanding that the ASEAN Trade Union Council (TUC), the South Asian Regional Trade Union Council (SARTUC) and the Arab Trade Union Confederation (TUC) signed on migration and to strengthen collaboration and partnership among them to protect the rights of migrant workers. It is also interesting to see the effort of these three subregions of union groups in establishing an MRC in Amman, Jordan in 2019 and their continuous work on the visibility and credibility among migrant workers, especially with services provided for women migrant workers from South-East Asia. Ms André praised the experiences of the MRC in Jordan and its inclusion in the webinar because there are so many lessons that the participants can learn from it.

Ms André conveyed that ACTRAV will continue to focus its work in supporting trade union initiatives to organize and to broaden their services for their existing and new members. She acknowledged that trade unions have an enormous challenge ahead. They must develop their efforts to organize and represent workers, especially in the new and emerging form of their performance. Some trade unions are advancing and progressing, but some still have more work to do to achieve their objectives. She was convinced that through this type of activity, in which participants can examine the opportunities, learn the lessons and innovate and scale up the models and approaches that are useful to keep unions stronger and become more representative organizations with the capacity to make the voice of workers heard. She was confident that the discussion will not be the end but the beginning of a process in which all parties can contribute to unions becoming the voice of all workers in all activity sectors across the globe.

Mr Ahn noted that Ms André had highlighted several issues, including that trade unions must represent the voices from all sectors of working groups, including migrant workers.

► Sharing experiences and good practices of trade union Migrant Workers Resource Centre: Strengths and weaknesses

Mr Ahn turned to the first expert speaker who is the ILO lead in the organization of the ASEAN Forum for Labour Migration (AFLM), which takes place once a year with tripartite constituents and civil society organizations. In 2021, the AFLM will be 6–8 September and guided by the theme, “Recovery and Labour Migration in the Post-Pandemic Future”.

Anna Engblom, Chief Technical Adviser, TRIANGLE in ASEAN, ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok Presentation: Labour migration in ASEAN and ILO support to Migrant Workers Resource Centres

Anna Engblom explained that she is particularly happy to participate in the webinar because TRIANGLE in ASEAN programme has been supporting Migrant Workers Resource Centres (MRCs) in six Member States of the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for the past ten years. It was TRIANGLE that started the first MRC in 2011 and thus has a long history of MRC work.

Ms Engblom explained the background of the MRCs. Migrant workers, especially those in elementary occupations, too often suffer exploitation and abuse at all stages of the migration cycle – during recruitment, employment and often on their return and reintegration. One reason is because migrant workers have limited information on how to migrate safely, how to protect themselves during the migration stages and what are their rights during employment. Another important reason why migrants are being exploited is that they have limited opportunities for support when their rights have been violated. This is where the MRC comes in. The MRCs are physical offices with full-time staff, where migrant workers, potential migrant workers and all family members can come and find migration-related information, ask questions, seek legal counselling and file complaints. The MRCs provide information regarding migrant workers’ right to join trade unions and they help migrant workers to organize. They conduct trainings and provide a range of services. The MRCs operate in countries of origin and destination countries. Aware that not all migrant workers have the ability to visit an MRC, the staff also conduct outreach activities, like visiting villages and other working areas where migrant workers congregate. Support is increasingly provided online and by phone, especially after onset of the pandemic. In the ASEAN region, trade unions, government institutions and civil society organizations operate MRCs.

To reinforce the need for the MRC services in the region, Ms Engblom explained there are currently more than 20 million migrant workers coming from ASEAN countries. That’s why MRCs in the countries of origin are essential. There are around 10 million migrants working within the ASEAN region and that highlights the demand for MRC services in the countries of destination. In the ASEAN region, Thailand is the largest destination country, followed closely by Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam.

Ms Engblom reiterated that one of the important functions of an MRC is giving support to migrants who have had their rights violated. A couple years ago, the ILO published a report on migrant workers’ access to justice in South-East Asia. Their study analysed more than 1,000 legal cases supported by MRCs in five ASEAN Member States and found that the most common complaint was a delay in deployment or a job is not provided as promised. The second most common complaint was non-payment or underpayment of wages, which was occurring in the destination countries. And the third most common recruitment-related violation was the passport was not provided. Interestingly, complaints regarding the living conditions were infrequent.



Ms Engblom showed the following graphic overview of the ILO-supported MRCs in the ASEAN region as of February 2021: at 53 Centres in nine ASEAN Member States (none in Brunei Darussalam). A few more have since opened, including one in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. In the next year, there will be an increasing number of centres due to a new regional labour migration project focusing on fishers. Four labour migration projects in the region support various MRCs: TRIANGLE, the Safe and Fair programme, the Development of Internal and International Labour Migration project in Myanmar and another one in Malaysia (the Migrant Workers Empowerment and Advocacy project). The trade unions that operate an MRC (designated by a square on the graphic) include the Cambodian Labour Confederation, the Lao Federation of Trade Unions, the Malaysian Trades Union Congress, the Confederation of Trade Unions, Myanmar, the State Enterprise Workers' Relations Confederation in Thailand and the Umum Solidaritas Pekerja Musik Indonesia and the Confederation of Indonesia Prosperity Trade Union.

To showcase the achievements of MRCs to date, Ms Engblom highlighted:

- MRCs have reached 213,458 migrant workers with a range of services.
- More than US\$11,490,000 has been ordered in compensation to migrant workers for legal complaints that had been handled by an MRCs.
- MRCs have been crucial in providing emergency support to migrant workers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2020, more than 180,000 migrant workers have been reached with emergency support that included food, personal protective equipment, hygiene kits, rental subsidies and other emergency needs.

Mr Ahn thanked Ms Engblom and expressed interest in the use of technology in communicating and connecting migrant workers to each other through mobile phones and online platforms. He then explained that the next speaker directs the development and implementation of organizing and project activities within the International Trade Union Confederation–Asia Pacific (ITUC-AP), including the joint MRC operating in Jordan. Patuan Samosir, Mr Ahn introduced, has reported on human rights and labour rights issues as well as labour rights violations and has been working to build international solidarity, especially in the Asia-Pacific region since 2008.

Patuan Samosir, Senior Director, Organizing and Projects, International Trade Union Confederation Asia-Pacific, Singapore Presentation: Joint Migrant Workers Resource Centre: ARAB Trade Union Confederation, South Asian Regional Trade Union Council and ASEAN Trade Union Council

Patuan Samosir expressed appreciation to ILO ACTRAV for inviting the International Trade Union Confederation Asia-Pacific (ITUC-AP) to the webinar and letting him talk about the challenges, results and opportunities with the joint MRC in Amman, Jordan. He highlighted that it is a joint MRC, so it is managed by the ITUC-AP as well as the Arab Trade Union Confederation, the South Asian Regional Trade Union Council and the ASEAN Trade Union Council.

As for the rationale or the background of the joint MRC establishment, Mr Samosir explained that the promotion and protection of workers' rights, including migrant workers, is a priority for ITUC-AP. The Confederation has been working for many years on these issues with many trade unions in the region as well as globally. The ITUC-AP has close cooperation with the ILO on issues associated with labour migration, particularly in regard to migrant workers.

The MRC was established in the Arab region because it is a popular destination for migrant workers. It was important to the ITUC-AP to cooperate with the Arab TUC and different organizations of the destination countries to protect the rights of migrant workers. But the ITUC-AP also realized that the Arab region is huge and thus it could not manage all issues. The Confederation began looking at which country seemed most realistic for tackling the issues, and it went to Jordan. The ITUC-AP understands that migrant workers in the Arab States are actually employed in a variety of sectors, but a huge number of them are domestic workers and most of them are women. He explained that ITUC-AP had been discussing various issues with the Arab TUC, SARTUC and the ATUC on many occasions, including during ILO ACTRAV meetings and agreed that it would be useful and important to jointly set up an MRC in Amman, Jordan, as a pilot project. The MRC would target the domestic workers mainly coming from South Asian and South-East Asian countries.

The joint MRC focuses on domestic workers coming from four countries at the moment: Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. As for why they chose domestic workers as the target of the MRC, he explained that domestic workers often are not aware of their rights, they are required to work long hours and are exposed to physical, verbal and sexual abuse. From its inception, Mr Samosir said the MRC had receive strong support from the General Federation of Jordan Trade Union. In addition, he acknowledged the importance of the financial support from the ITUC-AP Solidarity Fund, ILO ACTRAV and civil society organizations. The joint MRC is thus financially supported by ITUC-AP, ILO ACTRAV and the Danish Trade Union Development Agency.

As the first step for jointly establishing the MRC, the Arab TUC, SARTUC and ASEAN TUC signed an Implementation Agreement of Joint Migrant Workers Resource Centre with the support of the ITUC-AP in April 2019. There are four components to that agreement:

1. Information services to empower vulnerable migrant labourers, in particular migrant domestic workers who face the greatest risk of exploitation, harassment and physical and sexual violence.
2. Legal assistance to migrant workers, in particular migrant domestic workers from Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka.
3. Research and publications on the violation of migrant workers' rights and the handling of cases.
4. Capacity-building and organizing of domestic migrant workers.

An MRC was established in Amman, Jordan in 2018. The MRC distributes many publications and brochures on the rights of migrant workers as well as laws and policies. The MRC also publishes information about its services, such as the MRC's Electronic Wallet that workers can use to transfer their earnings to family members or a bank at home. After onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the MRC began providing

considerable support, such as humanitarian aid and information on how workers can navigate the conditions of the pandemic in Amman. The MRC created virtual platforms (through Facebook, WhatsApp and Databases) to establish alternative communication streams. They have created more than 30 videos to disseminate information to migrant domestic workers.

As for legal assistance, Mr Samosir shared a good outcome of the MRC's work: Through the MRC, the General Federation of Jordan Trade Union concluded a bilateral agreement with the Ministry of Labour to enable the MRC to file complaints and do the necessary follow up. This indicates that the MRC is not only working at the ground level but also at the political level to approach the Government of Jordan and to establish this agreement. The MRC has so far dealt with 182 cases (73 cases settled), mainly involving physical and sexual abuse by employers or recruitment agency staff, withheld salaries and passports and working illegally due to not having proper documents. The MRC has helped migrant domestic workers with their travel documents and tickets to facilitate their return and helped register migrant domestic workers' children in public school.

The joint MRC published a research paper that covered:

1. the desired outcomes of including migrant workers in social security protection schemes;
2. challenges preventing social security systems from including migrant workers;
3. collaborative efforts needed to overcome these challenges.

The joint MRC also has produced leaflets and brochures in four languages (Filipino, Indonesian, Bengali and Sri Lankan).

Regarding capacity-building and organizing, the joint MRC selected focal points or contact persons among migrant domestic workers from the four targeted countries to help support the MRC outreach programme. The MRC conducts many workshops, trainings and awareness campaigns on various issues, such as the rights of domestic migrant workers, social protection, minimum wages, health and safety and organizing. The joint MRC in Amman established the first migrant domestic workers union, in February 2019. Around 400 migrant domestic workers from the four targeted countries joined and made an international celebration on International Migrants Day.

Mr Samosir said that the primary challenge related to the MRC is that it is very expensive to operate in Amman (it spends around US\$100,000 per year). Thus, the question of sustainability looms large, especially because the MRC remains a pilot project. Every year, a management board meets, composed of the general secretaries of the regional organizations (ITUC-AP, Arab TUC, SARTUC and ASEAN TUC), to evaluate the work of the MRC. Mr Samosir said he's convinced it's an important project for everyone. Therefore, all parties need to think about the MRC sustainability and look at how they can operate it independently. As for the opportunities, so far the MRC has the backing of solidarity-support organizations, such as ACTRAV and the Danish Trade Union Development Agency, that remain willing to assist the operations financially. The MRC also is searching for additional support from other organizations. In concluding, Mr Samosir stressed that the MRC has a strong commitment from the trade union organizations and, in the future, it will extend its services to cover other migrant workers, such as African migrant workers.

Mr Ahn also emphasized that this is not the end but the beginning of the activity. ILO ACTRAV appreciates the good work done by ITUC-AP and the other subregional union bodies, he added. To sum up, Mr Ahn highlighted three major lessons: First, the MRC is run by three subregional bodies (Arab TUC, SARTUC and ASEAN TUC) under the supervision of the ITUC-AP. Second, the unions have used the MRC to leverage political activities to influence policies related to migrant workers' issues. And the joint MRC in Jordan is a success story that can be replicated in other regions and by national unions. ILO ACTRAV is conducting a study to consolidate showcases of trade union MRCs that includes the MRC in Jordan.

Mohd Effendy bin Abdul Ghani, Acting President, Malaysia Trades Union Congress

Suriyanandhini Doraisamy, Migrant Workers Resource Centre National Coordinator

Presentation: Malaysian Trades Union Congress experience with Migrant Workers Resource Centre operation

Mohd Effendy bin Abdul Ghani introduced himself as the Acting President of the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) and thanked ILO ACTRAV for the opportunity to share his organization's experiences with operating several MRCs. ACTRAV has provided assistance to maintain the MRC project for around a decade now, he said. He explained there are three MRCs in Malaysia, the Centre, the North and the South. Moving forward, the MTUC would like to expand the services into Sabah and Sarawak. He said the MRCs had successfully met their objectives. For instance, the MRCs provide services to migrant workers, especially in Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Johor Baharu. The MRCs have conducted workshops on organizing migrant workers and increasing their participation in union activities. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the MRCs conducted many case management activities, such as rescue and conflict resolution, the documentation of migrant workers and case monitoring and analysis. The MRCs disseminate information on labour rights in the event of arrest or detention of migrant workers. The MRCs have provided training for trade union leaders and intend to keep on providing training on the human rights of workers in Malaysia. The MRCs have built up a network of civil society and trade union partners within the country and in sending countries. The MRCs collaborate with sending countries for effective case management, especially in Malaysia, and they continue to advocate for the protection of migrant workers.

Ms Doraisamy continued the presentation by sharing good practices of the MRCs in Malaysia. She explained that the MRCs have good practices at the ground and diplomatic levels. The thing that is paramount, she stressed, is having a good relationship with network leaders and with migrant workers. This really bridges the trust gap that exists when it comes to any work related to migrant workers. It also assists the MRCs to communicate better with workers because the language barrier issues are also addressed. One of the key component points is identifying the network leaders in the community or in a group of migrants that the MRCs target for organizing. From its experience, the MRCs have realized that having relationships with leaders is of great assistance to build a long-term relationship even after a group of migrant workers have organized. Because of the pandemic, another key component is a bit challenged because it's more difficult to have face-to-face regular meetings, even a simple luncheon for building friendships and providing information that will help migrant workers. Ms Doraisamy said that having regular face-to-face meeting creates bigger impact because migrant workers may lack access to communication alternatives due to an unstable internet connection.

The MRCs do much work on education and informing trade unions and migrant workers, she continued. The MRCs lead on education with trade unions that otherwise should be organizing migrant workers but may have some internal biases. And migrant workers receive information about their rights. If migrant workers know, understand and are aware that they have certain rights, they can empower themselves to come forward even more. This is important, she added, because it's not easy for them to make complaints regarding any violations they may have experienced if they don't even know their rights. The MRCs do outreach activities through Facebook and other platforms of social media. According to the number of groups and members thus far, Ms Doraisamy said this approach has been quite successful. Through the social media groups, the MRC materials have potential to reach millions of migrant workers.

Because MRCs cannot work alone, they work at having a good close relationship with unions, civil society organizations and other bodies. They jointly assist in the promotion and protection of migrant workers' rights. The MRCs are much attached to the MTUC because it's an important component for organizing migrant workers. Through these relationships and cooperation, the MRCs have managed to achieve their goals faster and better.

As part of building trust, MRCs get involved in investigating cases of abuse. When migrant workers make a report, MRC staff meet with them and get to know them and their friends, colleagues and networks. Ms Doraisamy reiterated that MRCs are not only working on the violations that migrant workers are facing,

but they also work at the consular level. Thus, the MRCs need to attach to the MTUC as a tripartite organization to have constant dialogues and meetings with the Government, to participate in policy development, to be consulted for any amendments related to migrant workers and to lobby the Government to make certain changes or to implement certain policies that are in line with ILO Conventions and are relevant to migrant workers. The MRCs have a cross-border agreement because they would like their work to transcend beyond the scope of Malaysia. If migrant workers have found a solution in Malaysia but then have to return to their country of origin, it is expected that they would still need assistance.

Ms Doraisamy added that not only the MTUC but also the trade unions affiliated with the MTUC often bring up important points related to sector-specific issues. For instance, in the plantation sector, migrant workers might inform the MRC about some sector-specific issue, which in turn the MRC would bring up with the Government to advocate policies regarding migrant workers in that sector.

The MRCs provide training in small groups to migrant workers. On a bigger scale, the MRCs offer trainings for trade unionists, civil society organizations and government officials on how to manage migrant workers' issues and to be helpful towards migrant workers as well as protect them better. The MRCs' trainings range from the smallest to the bigger scale, but the crux is that they all need to receive the necessary training to be competent in dealing with issues as sensitive as organizing migrant workers. Trust is the main challenge that they keep facing due to the violations that migrant workers experience in the country.

In summary, Mr Ahn noted from the presentation the many positive changes and developments that have been made through the intervention of the MTUC with the Government as well as the MRCs' work. He underscored the effort on networking with civil society organizations and trade unions in the sending countries to make the goals more achievable in a faster and better manner. He also noted that different approaches have been applied by MRCs at every level, from the local, sectoral and national to the international level.

Yatini Sulistyowati, Chairperson, Department of Migrant Workers, Confederation of Indonesian Workers Welfare Union

Presentation: The experience of Migrant Workers Resource Centres in Indonesia

Yatini Sulistyowati began her presentation by explaining the background for the formation of the MRC in Indonesia:

- A World Bank survey launched in 2017 found that there were about 9 million Indonesian migrant workers spread around the world. Around 67 per cent of them at that time were women, and 52 per cent were working as domestic workers.
- There also were a large number of cases of violence experienced by Indonesian migrant workers, and it was increasing.

The MRC was formed to provide support towards the implementation of the Migrant Workers Protection Law (Act No. 18 of 2017), which was quite new at that time and differed from the previous one. Additionally, there were new issues with law enforcement regarding the crime of human trafficking (Act No. 21 of 2007) because migrant workers were highly vulnerable.

The MRCs in Indonesia represent multiparty cooperation between the Confederation of Indonesia Prosperity Trade Union (KSBSI), the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union (SBMI), the Women's Crisis Centre, the Ministry of Manpower, the local governments' One Roof Integrated Services (Layanan Terpadu Satu Atap) and village government.

As a pilot project, the MRC operates in four areas in Indonesia: Tulungagung and Blitar in East Java Province; Cirebon Regency in West Java Province; and East Lampung in Lampung Province. The KSBSI operates in the areas of Tulungagung and Blitar while the SBMI operates in the areas of Cirebon and East Lampung.

The Indonesian MRCs are supported by the Safe and Fair Spotlight Initiative, the ILO and UN Women. And they are integrated with the One Roof Integrated Services so that it has an office at a local labour office at the district level. The MRCs provide information and legal aid, work on awareness-raising and make referrals to psychosocial counselling for migrant workers who become victims of violence. It also conducts training for women migrant workers.

Ms Sulistyowati then explained the functions of the MRCs associated with the Confederation of Indonesian Workers Welfare Union:

- advocate policies and cases;
- campaigns so that migrant workers would want to join the union;
- outreach, recruitment and organizing of migrant workers;
- campaigns regarding safe and fair migration for migrant workers;
- capacity-building for migrant workers and their families;
- capacity-building of the local government apparatuses, especially at the district level because the migrant workers come from the district and the knowledge of the district government apparatuses regarding the migrant workers is not well developed yet;
- prevent human trafficking and support the Government to implement policies.

Regarding the advocacy function, MRCs:

- give safe and fair migration information, which is also gender-responsive;
- receive complaints from migrant workers or their families;
- give legal aid;
- give counselling or consultation for migrant workers before and during employment as well as after their return home;
- refer migrant workers who have become victims of violence, according to their need;
- work to prevent violence and human trafficking;

- raise awareness of Indonesian migrant workers and their families so that they immigrate by choice and not by force.

Capacity-building activities have included:

- To support the implementation of the Law of Indonesian Migrant Protection, legalized in 2017, the MRCs conducted capacity-building for village government apparatuses regarding the development of gender-responsive policies and for migrant workers so that they understand that immigrating is a choice. The MRCs provided the village government with data related to migrant workers and the management protocol regarding services and referral system for migrant workers.
- The MRCs have provided training for staff of the One Roof Integrated Services and field officers of the MRC related to gender-responsive services, case management and gender-responsive policy planning.
- The MRC continue to provide training to migrant workers who have returned home and for prospective migrant workers so that they understand what is safe and fair migration, workers' rights and the value in joining a union, which will afford them protection and a chance for their aspirations to be heard.

The MRCs also work on cross-border advocacy, such as:

- Handling the case of a woman migrant worker in Brunei Darussalam who experienced violence and harassment from an agency. The MRC coordinated with the Women Crisis Centre and the Indonesian Embassy in Brunei Darussalam. At the moment, the woman is staying at the Embassy shelter and waiting for the judicial process because she is the key witness of her own case.
- Handling the case of one woman migrant worker in Hong Kong, China who was exploited during the pandemic. She was not allowed to take a rest for days. She then requested to return to her home country. The MRC has coordinated with a domestic workers union in Hong Kong, China to assist her in returning to Indonesia.

As for the challenges, Ms Sulistyowati explained:

- With the pandemic, it has been difficult for the MRCs to conduct offline meetings, but while doing advocacy online is less effective. The conditions also make filing complaints with an MRC more difficult for migrant workers.
- The understanding of village government apparatuses about migrant workers' protection is not well-developed yet. This is due to the policies that mostly give more freedom to the private agencies but do not delegate the village government to be involved in migrant workers' protection.
- Indonesian migrant workers and their families prefer to search and to get information from a middleperson so that it becomes a barrier for them to consult with an MRC.

In nearly one year, the MRC has made several achievements:

- Establishment of coordination between the central Government, local governments, unions, the Women's Crisis Centre and migrant workers so that they have more willpower to protect migrant workers from slavery, violence and human trafficking.
- The increased understanding of village government apparatuses. They have become more serious in developing service protocols for migrant workers that involve other stakeholders.
- Migrant workers and their families have started filing complaints to and have consultations with the MRCs.
- The MRC in Cirebon was launched and inaugurated by the Ministry of Manpower.
- There are youth organizations in Indonesia that are now involved in the MRCs to promote, campaign and work on the protection process.

Ms Sulistyowati concluded by highlighting the main lesson from the MRC operations: The presence of coordination with many parties enables the services and advocacy for migrant workers' protection to be faster, easier and more reliable. And now the Government has become more involved in the protection of migrant workers.

In summary, Mr Ahn highlighted the keen willingness of Indonesian migrant workers to organize themselves and join unions, which is important for the advocacy process, especially now with the ineffective yet inevitable use of online platforms for advocacy due to the pandemic situation. Innovative ways to do advocacy through digital tools should be developed, he said. The networking with the village government to prevent prospective migrant workers from experiencing violations seems like a good practice, he added.

Discussion and Q/A session

Mohammad Mazen al-Maita, General Secretary of the ASEAN TUC, pointed out two things regarding the importance of the joint effort in Jordan of regional organizations in dealing with migrant workers' issues.

1. The problem with migrant workers is the problem of standards, in particular the application of international labour standards in the countries of destination and the oversight of the application by the countries of origin. In addition to providing services to migrant workers, the joint MRC in Amman works on the principle of empowering migrant workers by working at the political level, with decision-makers in the countries of destination or communicating with embassies of the countries of origin to strengthen national legislation that guarantees the rights of migrant workers.
2. The importance of the joint effort between the regional union organizations to strengthen the control over the principles of decent work in addition to qualitative services that this joint corporation can provide. This is what the regional bodies have worked on through the joint agreement between the partners in the Amman MRC.

Question for Ms Sulistyowati: For Indonesian MRCs, is there any benefit working with a women's agency or the Women's Crisis Centre in terms of expanding the outreach or organizing migrant workers in the destination country or country of origin?

Ms Sulistyowati responded that because the Women's Crisis Centre has more experience in terms of outreach to women, especially those who have experienced violence and particularly sexual violence, it has the strategies and certain approaches to allow victims to speak up as well as to facilitate the trauma healing for them. Because the majority of Indonesian migrant workers are women and they are working in the domestic sector, a lot of them have experienced physical and sexual abuse. Therefore, they need special treatment for their trauma and the one that has the skills are those from the Women's Crisis Centre.

Union experience-sharing on organizing migrant workers

Mr Ahn next turned to trade union experiences with organizing migrant workers, with two situations: from the Indonesian Trade Union in Malaysia with the support of the International Domestic Workers Federation and the Malaysian Trades Union Congress and the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions in the Republic of Korea.

Binti Rosidah, Vice Chairperson, Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers Association in Malaysia

Presentation: Best practices on organizing migrant domestic workers in Malaysia

Grateful for the opportunity to present the good practices of organizing migrant domestic workers in Malaysia, Binti Rosidah introduced herself as a former migrant domestic worker in Malaysia as well as the Vice Chairperson of the Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers Association (PERTIMIG). She then explained

that Malaysia is a destination country in South-East Asia where exploitation and violence against domestic workers occurs, such as:

- unpaid salary;
- no day off or rest day;
- sexual harassment;
- document confiscation, such as: work permit, employment contract and passport;
- physical abuses;
- no minimum wage and compensation.

She highlighted the issues of domestic workers protection in Malaysia:

- Employment Act in Malaysia is still using the term “domestic servant” and not domestic worker.
- There’s no specific regulation or law that protects domestic workers.
- There’s no freedom of association for domestic workers, and the law prohibits migrant domestic workers from joining a union.

Due to these situations, Indonesian migrant domestic workers started to organize themselves in the beginning of 2019, which evolved into the PERTIMIG. PERTIMIG became an association and conducted its first congress in June 2021. Currently, PERTIMIG has 115 members and four work focuses: organizing migrant domestic workers, capacity-building for migrant domestic workers, case handling and referral, and awareness-raising campaigns.

Even before PERTIMIG was established, migrant domestic workers had already joined in social groups and done outreach activities in various areas in Malaysia. They disseminated flyers regarding the rights of domestic workers and decent work to other migrant domestic workers and conducted small discussions.

The capacity-building and skill improvement of migrant domestic workers on domestic worker issues and the law in Malaysia enabled the migrant domestic workers realized that the issues of abuse and violation affect all of them. Due to that understanding and because Ms Rosidah was a tutor for a sewing class, she recruited her friends from the class to start PERTIMIG. In the beginning it was not easy to organize domestic workers, she recalled. However, when they managed to gather themselves they agreed that domestic workers face the same issues regarding poor working conditions. PERTIMIG, with support from the International Domestic Workers Federation and the ILO Safe and Fair programme, conducted trainings on leadership, gender equality, the importance of organizing, handling cases and even English and sewing classes. As a result, migrant domestic workers became more confident and they believed that PERTIMIG would be important for their issues to be heard and their aspirations to be achieved.

Another good practice occurred in 2020, when PERTIMIG managed to arrange some dialogues. One of them was a dialogue with the Ministry of Human Resources, NGOs and trade union representatives to push for more inclusive labour law reform in Malaysia and to recognize domestic workers as workers so that they would receive the same entitlements as workers from other sectors. PERTIMIG appreciated the Malaysian Government for including migrant domestic workers in the social security programme that has been active since June 2021. This programme needs to be socialized so that migrant domestic workers and their employers can access it. PERTIMIG also advocated and lobbied the Indonesia government for a dialogue with BP2MI to discuss safety and zero-cost recruitment for migrant domestic workers.

Another important activity of PERTIMIG is the campaign on the recognition of domestic workers’ rights. PERTIMIG receives and handles migrant domestic workers’ complaints. Some cases have been prominent, such as unpaid salary during the pandemic and being fired without any compensation. After onset of the pandemic, PERTIMIG began providing food, counselling and assistance for cases reported to the Indonesian Embassy and Jabatan Buruh (some difficult cases were referred to affiliated NGOs).

As for the challenges in organizing migrant domestic workers, Ms Rosidah pointed out:

- There is no or limited communication access and no day off for migrant domestic workers living in their employer’s home, which leaves them isolated and thus difficult to reach.
- Employers and agencies prohibit workers from joining an association or a trade union.

- There are heightened security issues because some migrant domestic workers are undocumented so that they have to deal with the threat of arrest, discrimination and xenophobia.
- There is a lack of protection of freedom of speech and association.

Ms Rosidah concluded with a note on the future plans of PERTIMIG, which is to focus on increasing memberships and conduct media campaigns.

Baek Seon-Yeong, Organizing Director, Korea Confederation of Trade Unions

Presentation: Organizing migrant workers in the Republic of Korea

Baek Seon-Yeong started her presentation by highlighting the number of local and migrant workers in the Republic of Korea who have been organized by the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU). She explained that 10 per cent of 20 million local workers are organized and 0.1 per cent of the 1.5 million migrant workers are organized. The challenges faced by migrant workers have become the reasons why the KCTU wanted to organize them: low wages, high labour intensity and the non-union strategy imposed by the Government enables excessive exploitation.

Ms Baek gave a brief history of the migrant workers' movement in the Republic of Korea:

- 1994: Undocumented migrant workers' sit-in struggle against forced deportation of those injured at work.
- Since March 1994: Industrial Accident Insurance applied to migrant workers.
- 1995: 13 Nepali migrant workers' stage a sit-in demanding abolition of the Industrial Trainee System.
- Since February 1995: Partial application of the Labour Standard Act.
- Inauguration of Joint Committee for Migrant Workers in Korea, the first-ever migrant support organization.
- 2000: Coalition for Full Achievement of Migrants' Labour Rights and Freedom of Movement and Employment was launched.
- May 2001: ETU-Migrants Branch was formed.
- November 2003 to November 2004 (381 days): Myeong Dong Cathedral stage a sit-in struggle against forced deportation and for legalization of undocumented migrant workers. The documentation can be watched on <https://youtu.be/SxGo3HIqUOM>.
- 2005 and 2015: Founding of the Migrants' Trade Union and legal recognition of Migrants' Trade Union, respectively.

Migrant workers in the Republic of Korea have demanded:

- free job change and change from Employment Permit System into Work Permit System;
- fundamental labour rights for migrant workers;
- abolition of after-departure payment of severance pay;
- abolition of article 63 of Labour Standard Law and guarantee of workers' rights in agribusiness and fishery sectors;
- stop cracking down against undocumented migrant workers and legalize them;
- guarantee decent accommodations;
- eradicate gender-based discrimination and violence on women migrant workers;
- stop the racial discrimination in COVID-19-related policies.

Up to 2021, the KCTU had in total 2,090 members with a migration background:

- KMWU 129/KPTU 68
Programme: KMWU endeavours to organize contingent workers, irregular workers, women workers, migrant workers and all unorganized workers and through the struggle to eliminate discrimination, we shall fight to strengthen and build the Korean Metal Workers' Union.

Union code: article 9. Fight against all kinds of discrimination as well as fight for achieving human dignity and for improving living conditions of minority groups, such as people with disabilities, older persons, migrant workers and LGBTQI.

Regulation: article 21 (protection of minority groups) in compliance with article 20 implementation of the quota system for the protection and promotion of social minority groups:

- KFCITU 1100 and KCTF 31;
- KFCLU 3 and KUWU 3;
- KDGF 21;
- Seoul Regional Branch (MTU, Dasan Call Centre) 645;
- Daegu Regional Branch 90.

In some cases, communication in migrants' own language is impossible. Therefore, training and meeting documents were translated and disseminated through the member education activities, visiting and phone calls, as well as through social media (Telegram, Facebook, YouTube).

Ms Baek explained the legal code and regulation of the unions related to the migrant workers:

- The code and regulations of union establishment at: Hwasum Food Union
 - Code: article 8. We contribute to the development of the international labour movement in solidarity with workers around the world and fight for the realization of lasting world peace and human co-prosperity against the threat of war and nuclear weapons.
 - Regulation: article 5. Activities for the protection and organization of irregular workers, unorganized workers and migrant workers.

KCTU organizes migrant workers through many activities:

- meetings – with organizers for migrant workers in each affiliate and regional branches and through a coalition;
- education and training on migrant workers' issues for KCTU affiliates, with the Legal and Counselling Academy for organizers;
- action at events, such as the International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Mayday, Abolition of Employment Permit System and National Migrant Workers' Rally;
- joint action organized by issues;
- networking among migrants' solidarity groups nationwide.

Cases of organizing migrant workers:

- Daegu Sam-woo Jungmil union: All migrant workers from Indonesia joined a union and achieved unionship through a strike. Their aim is achieving the same working conditions as other local workers through field-based unity, bargaining power and fighting spirit.
- Vietnamese workers working at construction sites fighting for unpaid wages: Around 180 Vietnamese migrant workers under the Employment Permit System who worked in a construction site of Incheon New Port voluntarily refused to work and went on strike. A task force formed to fight their dismissal and imprisonment. The remaining workers joined the construction union.

As for the achievements, Ms Baek cited:

- Metal Union Geumtoil branch collective agreement:
 1. The company shall apply all the provisions of the collective agreement and employment rules equally to migrant workers, regardless of whether they are employed illegally or legally, and guarantee their union membership, and shall not discriminate on the ground of nationality, race, employment type, etc.
 2. When a migrant worker returns to their home country due to the expiration of their passport, the company shall issue necessary documents to support legal procedures.
 3. When a migrant worker requests to renew the employment contract three months before its expiration, the company must re-employ them as a full-time employee and recognize the continuity of employment and guarantee the salary of their career. However, union members must request re-employment within three months and enter the company.

- A total of 16 collective bargaining agreements on migrant workers have been signed. Metal workplaces mostly organizing migrant workers have a collective bargaining agreement.
- KCTF Polipia branch collective bargaining agreement (the branch union was established in January 2015):
 - eating together;
 - recommending migrant workers who can speak Korean to participate in the union;
 - agreement on payment of severance pay before departure;
 - equal participation in sports competitions and retreats;
 - equal payment of holiday gifts, with a bonus of 110 per cent (originally they were going to ask for 210 per cent but the permanent workers objected);
 - vacation bonus is the same as local workers.
- SeongSeo Trade Union Jinhae woodworking branch collective bargaining agreement:
 - Jinhae Timber workers struggle in which Sri Lankan workers protested against physical attacks and verbal abuse.
 - KCTU joined the struggle and migrant workers collectively joined the union after victory in struggle when the company president accepted their demands and posted public apologies in multiple languages around the workplace.

As for activities of KCTU, Ms Baek cited:

- KCTU's visiting and training programme (July–November 2019): Significance of organizing migrant workers, institutional framework for migrant workers and history of migrant workers' movement; obligation and task of democratic trade union movement. Participated by:
 - Regional branches (8): Seoul, Gyeong-gi, Incheon, Jeju, Gyeongbuk-Gumi, Gyeongju;
 - Affiliates (2): KMWU Incheon, KMWU Busan and Yangsan;
 - Workplace (1): KMWU Daicel Local.
- Legal and Counselling Academy
 - 2015–2019 National Programme: institutional framework, case study, history of migrants' movement;
 - 2020 Regional Programme: metropolitan area and DaeguGyeongbuk, Busan-Ulsan-Kyeongnam and Gwangju-Jeonnam. Migrant workers' demand at the time of COVID-19 crisis, Asian people's history and Immigration Control Act;
 - 2021: Continuation of regional programme on basic system and workers' movement, with significance of organizing migrant workers, best practices and connecting local organizing projects;
 - National migrant workers rally in 2018 and 2019.
- Publications:
 - 2020 *Migrant Workers Rights Handbook* (translated into 11 languages): provides basic information on the Employment Permit System, the migration system and basic information on labour rights.
 - KMWU newspaper for migrant workers: Distributed two times a year (Mayday, November National Workers Rally) to unorganized migrant workers in industrial complex in various languages by local and regional branches along with migrant support groups (Chinese, Myanmar, Thai, Bengali, English, Bahasa, Khmer, Uzbek, Vietnamese, Nepali, Sinhali and Korean).
- Case handling:
 - Death accident of Cambodian worker at Vinylgreen House (2020): A Cambodian migrant woman worker was found dead in a plastic house (agriculture labour). Active response to the case through legal action, mobilizing public opinion and advocacy with distribution of brochure published in multiple languages. In total, 16 provincial offices of KCTU organized simultaneous nationwide one-person picketing protests in front of the Labour Provincial Authority of the Ministry of Employment and Labour. As a result, the Government promised to improve the accommodation conditions of migrant workers.
 - Solidarity Action for Civil Disobedience Movement in Myanmar (2021) in Ulsan, Busan, Daegu and the POSCO steel company.

- Nationwide networking among regional organizations, such as: Gwangju and South Jeolla Province (Migrant Workers Network); Daejeon Chungcheong Provincial Government (Migrant Workers Alliance); Daegu and North Gyeongsang Province (Migrant Workers' Labour and Human Rights Alliance); and Busan, Ulsan and South Gyeongsang Province (Joint Taskforce Committee for Migrants' Human Rights).

In concluding, Ms Baek mentioned other actions by KCTU:

- COVID-19 crisis response for workers: make migrants visible amid discrimination and exclusion;
- fight against discrimination and hate against migrant workers: persistent training and action;
- migrant worker representation: migrant workers in leadership and delegates;
- narrowing gap between regions: strengthening relations with migrants' organizations;
- organizing led by industrial unions.

In summary, Mr Ahn appreciated the historical background of KCTU, the current status of the union and the roles of the union in supporting the migrant workers in the Republic of Korea. He highlighted the important role of the union in incubating the migrant workers' union. Without the national trade unions support, it might be difficult for the migrant workers to unionize themselves. The union activities and supporting efforts would change the mindset of the workers themselves, considering the migrant workers as co-workers, as well as the mindset of society, recognizing the migrant workers as contributors to the receiving country. And KCTU has successfully included migrant workers' issues in the collective bargaining agreement.

▶ General comments and takeaway lessons

Mr Ahn invited Nezam Qahoush, Desk Officer for Arab States with ILO ACTRAV, to deliver his comments on the presentations, suggestions and lesson learned that he picked up from the presentations concerning the MRCs and union experiences in organizing migrant workers.

Nezam Qahoush, Desk Officer for Arab States, ILO ACTRAV

Nezam Qahoush started his reflection by appreciating all panellists and resource persons. He then expressed his agreement with Patuan Samosir on the concern regarding the sustainability of the MRCs, the plan to expand the scope of their services as reflecting the cooperative principles and suggestions for future funding resources.

Further developments that he sees as important are the MRCs' services for workers and their effort to increase workers' knowledge on their rights and equip them to manage and deliver the benefit of the services. For instance, a current service that the MRCs offer is basic legal support for workers through weekly counselling sessions provided by NGOs in cooperation with the MRC in Jordan. Through the legal services, workers can receive assistance to address discrimination, harassment, forced labour and other labour rights violations. He also found that various training for workers is needed to improve their job and life skills, including literacy, language skills, computer skills, basic organizing and legal rights. True that it is the trade unions' job to organize workers, but he rationalized that workers themselves should be trained on basic organizing and trade unionizing.

Mr Qahoush has witnessed throughout the COVID-19 pandemic that mental health and psychosocial services are also what workers' need, including basic psychoeducation and non-specialized mental health and psychosocial services, as well as basic counselling and case management. The MCR, he believes, must give capacity to workers who require specialized protection. He believes there are good practices yet also more work must be done in the sending and receiving countries. He hoped that the coordination between all the trade unions in the receiving and sending countries, NGOs and other bodies can continue.

▶ Closing remarks

Mr Ahn thanked every participant and resource person for attending.

Ariel Castro, Desk Officer for Asia-Pacific, ILO ACTRAV

Ariel Castro noted that how unions run the MRCs demonstrates their strengthened resilience. COVID-19 has brought many lessons, and unions are showing a good sign of becoming organizations for and by workers. The establishment of the MRCs is really a good sign that unions are there for workers.

The presentations reflected greater innovation from the unions than purely organizing by providing a range of services. These services are opening up to all workers, including migrant workers. He reiterated what Ms André had said at the beginning: “Unions for workers.”

He remarked on a great sense of significant social responsibility that he had heard in the presentations. The unions are now not turning a blind eye to all workers, not necessarily within the country but also within the internationality of the country they operate in. And they are opening up to other workers from other countries. He saw this demonstrating the greatest sense of civic responsibility or social responsibility for unions and really reflects the sense of “no one left behind”.

The ability to network and to build alliances he commended. The MRCs presented in the webinar have greatly demonstrated that within a small sphere of operation, they have the ability to expand, to network with the government agencies and with embassies (as the Jordan MRC showed) and to expand their range of services.

Beyond the experiences and knowledge-sharing, everyone’s ability now is tested to go towards the next step. As for the next step, how do the MRCs make sure they contribute to increasing membership for the unions in the destination countries? Are they able to enrol them? Are they able to make sure that they are considered as part of the unions, especially when their contracts have expired and they have to go back to their country of origin? He emphasized that this is something that the MRCs need to look at in terms of how to make sure that the workers’ membership in the union remains something that will travel with them wherever they go, wherever they work.

Another step ahead is also about having a discussion on impacts and results. Mr Castro acknowledged many numbers, cases and data from the presentations about service provision. However, he believed that it is also important to publicize what differences that the MRCs have made in the lives of migrant workers in the destination countries, especially those that have benefited from the MRCs. He also noted that the biggest challenge of all is to ensure that the MRCs scale up and show that this is a unique union service. Each MRC must exert a certain character – different from the MRCs that are offered by the NGOs, so workers will see that this is the union’s MRC and that this is where they belong. And that this is where they must go because they will feel that they are a worker and they are part of the MRC.

Mr Castro thanked all colleagues and participants as well as the resource persons who shared their information. He encouraged all parties to move to sharing deeper concern that revolves around the MRCs and the union movement. He said that this is something that will be continued and the union-run MRCs will continue to operate and demonstrate that they are part of the trade union movement, whether they are in the destination country or in the country of origin.

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