



## **Singapore Country Programme**

Briefing Note

December 2014

### **What is the Issue?**

The UNDP's 2009 Human Development Report estimates that 740 million people migrate internally and another 90 million migrate within developing country regions, often to improve development prospects for themselves and their families and due to lack of alternatives. Migration can contribute to improving the economic and social well-being of migrants and their families. However, it can also expose migrants to new vulnerabilities, such as debt and limited access to services. Political authorities and origin and destination communities often do not have effective policies in place to adequately manage migration.

While many governments in the Global South and international donors have become aware of the importance of migration for poverty reduction, they lack substantive evidence and data that can help them to maximise the benefits of migration and minimise its potential harms.

### **What is the Programme?**

The [Migrating out of Poverty Research Programme](#) Consortium is a seven year (2010-2017) multi-partner research programme with funds of £6.425m provided by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), which aims to generate policy relevant evidence on the nature and extent of internal and regional (South-South) migration.

The Consortium is led by the School of Global Studies at the University of Sussex, with partners based in five regions: in South Asia, the Bangladesh-based Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) at the University of Dhaka; in Southeast Asia, the Asia Research Institute (ARI) at the National University of Singapore; in West Africa, the Centre for Migration Studies (CMS) at the University of Ghana; in East Africa, the African Migration and Development Policy Centre (AMADPOC) in Nairobi; and in Southern Africa, the African Centre for Migration and Society (ACMS) at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa.

Each partner, under the guidance and support of the Consortium lead, is responsible for designing and conducting research projects that address the overall programme research questions. The projects consist of academic research, complemented by activities to ensure the communication of findings and influencing of migration policy and practice. For more information, please contact: [<migrationrpc@sussex.ac.uk>](mailto:migrationrpc@sussex.ac.uk) or visit [<http://migratingoutofpoverty.dfid.gov.uk/>](http://migratingoutofpoverty.dfid.gov.uk/).

### **What the programme aims to achieve:**

The research conducted by each partner is designed to address the following programme objectives:

- To understand why migration plays a significant role in poverty reduction in some places and contexts, but not in others
- To explore the transformational potential of migration on poverty
- To contribute to the generation of quality data on migration
- To have a strong policy focus
- To influence policy and practice through engagement with key stakeholders among policy makers, the media and civil society

## **Past and On-Going Activities in Singapore**

The Singapore-based Asia Research Institute (ARI), the consortium partner in Southeast Asia, is currently implementing two research projects in Singapore:

### **1. Financing Migration, Generating Remittances, and the Building of Livelihood Strategies: A Case Study of Indonesian Migrant Women as Domestic Workers in Singapore**

This project draws on quantitative and qualitative methodologies to highlight the perspectives of Indonesian domestic workers embarking on migration as a livelihood strategy for poverty alleviation. It investigates the significance of 'money' at different points of the migration process – that is, how families finance the migration of a wife, mother, or daughter; what and how migration brokers charge to facilitate the move; and what amount of remittances are generated over the course of the labour contract. In addition, it examines the mediating role of communications technologies in reducing the transaction costs of migration and remittance sending. The evidence gathered has provided the basis for policy recommendations on: (a) facilitating the gains through migration for the family through reducing recruitment, placement, and other intermediary costs; and (b) better use of communications technologies to reduce remittance-sending costs and to manage remittances.

Related research uptake activities within this project included an ASIA Trends public lecture, 'Here Today and Tomorrow: Transnational Domestic Workers and the Decent Work Agenda in Asia' (see: <[http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/events\\_categorydetails.asp?categoryid=15&eventid=1462](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/events_categorydetails.asp?categoryid=15&eventid=1462)>), screening of the short film 'Ceria' and photo exhibition (see <<http://migratingoutofpoverty.dfid.gov.uk/newsandevents/18december/picturegallery2>>) in August 2013, and a policy roundtable discussion on 'Migrant Domestic Workers in Singapore' in November 2013.

The following outputs based on this research are available online:

**'Financing Migration, Generating Remittances and the Building of Livelihood Strategies: A Case Study of Indonesian Migrant Women as Domestic Workers in Singapore'** (working paper): <<http://migratingoutofpoverty.dfid.gov.uk/documents/wp10-platt-et-al-final.pdf>>

**'Ensuring Decent Work in Singapore's Domestic Work Industry'** (policy brief): <<http://migratingoutofpoverty.dfid.gov.uk/documents/ari-rp001-policy-brief-19dec13.pdf>>

**'The Costs and Benefits of Domestic Work as a Livelihood Strategy'** (policy brief): <<http://migratingoutofpoverty.dfid.gov.uk/documents/ari-rp001-policy-brief-2-final-jun14.pdf>>

### **2. Migration and Precarious Work: Negotiating Debt, Employment and Livelihood Strategies Amongst Bangladeshi Migrant Men Working in Singapore's Construction Industry**

Taking the case study of Bangladeshi men migrating to Singapore as low-wage construction workers, this study drew on large-scale surveys and in-depth interviews to examine the specific conditions of (im)mobility and precarious work that contributes to job uncertainty and insecurity amongst men who embark on migration as a livelihood strategy. In particular, it aimed to understand the financial and social costs involved in the labour migration process, and specifically how Bangladeshi migrant men viewed and negotiated debt in their migration experiences through various decision-making practices by means of job placement strategies and remittance sending. The evidence gathered provides a firm basis for policy recommendations and advocacy work by identifying specific areas of vulnerability in need of intervention, so that necessary measures may be put in place to safeguard migrant workers against precarious situations and unacceptable cases of abuse and exploitation.

A Public Symposium in November 2014 presented the project's findings to an audience of policy makers, the general public and academics. In addition to a panel discussion there was a screening of the short film, 'Gone Home' looking at the experience of the construction workers on their return to Bangladesh,

which will be released online in 2015 (View the trailer at: <<http://vimeo.com/112075508>>). There was also a multi-media presentation on the experience of Bangladeshi migrant construction workers in Singapore.

A Working Paper based on this research will be published in 2015.

### **Future Activities in Singapore**

ARI is also in the process of developing two research proposals to be conducted in Singapore over the period October 2014 to June 2016.

#### **1. The Migration Industry in Asia: A Case Study on Recruitment and Placement Agencies for Migrant Domestic Workers in Singapore**

This study builds on the Consortium project on the costs and benefits of migration amongst Indonesian domestic workers in Singapore (see Project 1 in Past and Ongoing Activities section above). Specifically, it seeks to analyse the multi-scalar nature of recruitment and placement practices by examining how brokers and intermediaries operate.

The analysis of the inner workings of the employment agencies aims to cast light on the current debt-financed migration 'model', where placement fees for domestic workers are typically paid upfront by employers and subsequently recovered from the employee via monthly salary deductions. Amidst increasing efforts by major sending and destination states to regulate the industry, the project seeks to understand the arbitrating function of EAs in the implementation of policy, through the brokering services they provide to both migrants and employers. Thus the research aims to shed light on how migration policies are operationalised and negotiated in practice through a variety of actors including migrants, brokers, employers, and government regulatory bodies.

#### **2. The dynamics of policy formulation and implementation: A case-study of Singapore's mandatory weekly day-off policy for migrant domestic workers**

This project focuses on Singapore's mandatory weekly day-off policy for domestic workers as a case-study for understanding the socio-political dynamics of policy-making processes in the industry, as well as ongoing tensions that currently impinge upon its widespread implementation. Although the government has yet to ratify the ILO's Decent Work for Domestic Workers Convention no. 189, the day-off policy represents a strong signal of the government's increasing commitment towards enhancing the social protection of migrant domestic workers.

Whilst the bulk of existing research on migrant domestic workers in Singapore has focused on state policies, household/workplace dynamics, and issues of social exclusion, there has been less emphasis on the different institutional, social, and economic mechanisms that underpin ongoing policy processes and practices within the industry. The proposed study seeks to analyse the socio-political trajectories of different campaigning efforts for migrant domestic workers, whilst assessing competing stakeholder interests and current barriers to implementation. The study will provide insight into the dynamics of policy formulation, as well as identifying lessons for existing advocacy efforts to promote the decent work agenda for migrant domestic workers in Singapore.