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Editorial

Suffering Children

Children suffer for a number of reasons. They are left behind by parents who opt to migrate to other countries to work. They are deprived of education because of wrong government policy. They are sexually exploited by online predators. The list of causes of the suffering of children is long.

Poverty is not always the cause of suffering of children. They also suffer due to situations at home, in school, in the community and now digitally because of communication technology.

One significant issue here is the consequence of these sufferings.

How do children relate to absentee parents? How do they cope with lack of parental guidance?

What would lack of education cause to the social, emotional and intellectual development of children? What inherent capacities of children would be stunted by failing to go to school?

How would children's view of their own selves and of others be affected by traumatic experience of online sexual exploitation?

The adverse consequences of the suffering of children are likely to have adverse impact on their future lives. This "future" is also the future of the society where the children belong.

There are initiatives at changing the situations that cause the suffering of children. Aside from institutional (government and non-governmental) responses, measures at home and in the community may provide a more immediate and relatively effective relief to the children's suffering.

Voices of Children Left Behind in Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu

UNICEF Pacific Office

Separation from parents and caregivers for long periods of time is causing emotional distress for children and young people. Separation is altering their relationships with absent family members, especially when communication is infrequent. Adults report that children are becoming undisciplined. Solo mothers report that they find disciplining children challenging in the absence of male parents, and reveal that they are sometimes perpetrators of violence against children.

Below is an excerpt from Chapter 3 (“The kids are sad”: The lived experiences of children who are left behind) of *The impact of Pacific labour mobility schemes on children left behind in Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu: An initial study* (September 2024).¹ This study focused on four Pacific countries, to initiate the exploration of issues impacting communities, families and, more specifically, children who remain in the Pacific while their caregivers work abroad.²

Emotional and mental health impacts on children left behind

Being separated from parents and family members who work overseas for long periods of time

can cause emotional and mental health impacts on children, which were often articulated in terms of unhappiness:

“Interviewer: Have you noticed any changes with the children since their parents left?”

Interviewees: The kids are sad (Family, Solomon Islands: SI-FUF17).

“... they’re not fully happy. It seems like they are missing their father” (Family, Samoa: S-FUF30).

Mental health impacts were also expressed as sickness. For example:

“When my brother left for the first time, his kids started to get sick, maybe because they missed him. We always took them around to divert their minds and make them happy” (Youth, Samoa: S-YRF7).

A young person in the Solomon Islands stated that his distress, as a result of worrying about his father while he is away, has caused him to seek medical attention:

“Yes, impact on health. Worry about him too. ... Sometimes my brother takes me to the hospital [the health centre, to

seek medical help]” (Youth, Solomon Islands: SI-YRM6).

A stakeholder observed that a lack of communication with family members can result in low confidence for children:

“Sometimes both [parents] do not have good communication with them. I have talked to two girls, who have said that when their mother did not talk to them, they feel like they have a low self-esteem” (Stakeholder, Vanuatu: SGUM86).

Children are also clearly aware of the emotional impact of separation on the adult caregivers who remain:

“When my husband calls my youngest son would tell him that he should call mum often because she’s sad” (Family, Samoa: S-FUF61).

As a consequence, young children often seek out regular contact from parents and caregivers who are overseas:

“... sometimes they will ask the mother, ‘How long will he take? When is he coming back to Vanuatu? When will he call?’ Like they miss their father, and they want to talk to him. But then she will always just say, ‘Don’t worry because this is the place where your father lives; at

least he will come back here to stay” (Family, Vanuatu: V-FRF60).

“Sometimes they cry and they want to talk to their father, and they want their father to come back” (Family, Vanuatu: V-FUF54).

In focus groups, young people were visibly distressed when discussing the absence of parents. One even mentioned the anger he felt towards his absent father, who failed to send home remittances, which limited their communication:

“I only call him when I am drunk and because I am angry” (Youth, Urban Vanuatu: V-YUM36).

Changed relationships between children and absent and returned workers

One caregiver expressed his concern that his grandchildren’s bond with their mother had altered while his daughter was absent:

“When my daughter returned, her children were already closely bonded with me because we had been living together for a long time. I told her not to leave again. She should stay and look after the children. The kids are growing up and will be in school soon. I told her to stay back with the children and let her husband work overseas” (Family, Samoa: S-FUF43).

Young people discussed how the labour mobility scheme created distance between themselves and absent older siblings (usually brothers),

especially in circumstances of limited contact:

“... the main thing is that we miss our relationship with our brothers. Anything can happen overseas; accidents can happen, and we miss them. I think it’s better to be poor and happily be with each other every day. We just hope we see each other again” (Youth, Samoa: S-YRF7).

This quote illustrates the emotional strain and anxiety of distance, despite the economic benefit.

Returned workers also discussed the challenge in maintaining order and discipline for their children when they finally returned from overseas:

“There’s negative impact on the relationship between parents and children. Even girls are becoming uncontrollable. My daughter used to listen and obey, but now I find myself blaming my family. I was away for six months, and my wife looked after the children. One daughter was looked after by my mother, and I think that’s where the problem started.”

“My daughter only listens to my mother and not to me because my mother spoils her. This creates friction within the family. ... So it was our mothers that helped out with the children which was a good arrangement, but I realize that it has affected our children’s discipline.”

“They are not listening to me – they are becoming

uncontrollable” (Returned worker, Samoa: S-RWUM15).

In some instances, it seems that the relationship has become distant, as the returned parent has failed to understand that children have changed and even grown up while they were absent:

“Three years. He was gone and did not return until just now, and the children are already grown up at home. Yes, we are all grown up. I am independent. I am not close to him anymore. He thinks I would ask for money, but I don’t ask for money from him. I hang out with my friends” (Youth, Vanuatu: S-YRM12).

In this example, it has been difficult to maintain a relationship between parent and child over a protracted period of time. The young person’s exasperation and emotional distance suggest that the distance has been detrimental to his connection with his father.

Discipline, behavioural issues and violence

Caregivers and community members highlighted that children misbehaved or were difficult to discipline when parents and caregivers worked overseas. Solo mothers, in particular, frequently cited this as an issue:

“My main challenge is getting them to obey me and come home on time after school” (Family, Samoa: S-FUF50).

“I am also facing similar challenges. My older kids are

okay, but my youngest son is hard to control" (Family, Samoa: S-FRF44).

"My son is an intelligent kid. He gets straight A's in school, but drastically dropped, and also his behaviour changed. He has become disrespectful and is disobedient. I always advise him well though" (Family, Fiji: F-FRF-1).

"I have also seen some negative changes in my children's behaviours while I was away. They are disobedient to their mother and retaliate when told to do something. This is also why I would be angry from this side" (Returned worker, Fiji: RWR18).

Caregivers frequently explained behavioural issues as a consequence of absent fathers, who tended to be disciplinarians in families:

"The only difficulty I'm facing is the children's mischievous and inattentive behaviour. Even if I scold them, they still don't listen, but they do listen to their father. He has a way of dealing with the children and told me that they don't listen to me because of my harsh tone and advised I talk to them in a softer tone. My husband is not a violent person so when he's gone, I miss him because the children listen to him. He took our second son with him, which has lightened the load because our second son is the hardest to control. He is 20 years old and working with my husband" (Family, Samoa: S-FUF31).

"The only challenge I face is my children's inattentive attitude. The children are afraid of their father, and I miss him even more because he's the only one that the children listen to" (Family, Samoa: S-FRF46).

"During the first year he left, I noticed that they were not listening to me. When their father was here, he would only ask them once, if he wanted them to do something. But with me, I would ask them many times and sometimes they wouldn't bother to do what I asked. Also, when the father was here, they would come together for evening devotion, but now, they would come one by one, sometimes during evening prayer, my son was still swimming at the river" (Family, Samoa: S-FUF44).

"My boys only listen and obey their father, so I need him around this time because my kids are growing up with disobedience. If the father is here, they will listen and obey, but not when they are with me" (Family, Samoa: S-FUF30).

Some perceived children's misbehaviour as a response to being emotionally impacted by the schemes and missing their parents:

"The only negative side of the programme is missing the family. Children miss a father figure, and it becomes especially challenging to control boys when the father is not around" (Family, Urban Samoa: S-FUF44).

"One of the changes in my family is my son did not want to listen to his mum. ... Yes, my son's results had dropped compared to when I am with the family. He does not want to listen to his mum and sometimes did not attend school. I learned about this when I returned to my family. My children were homesick when I am away under the scheme. I have to talk with them regularly so that they feel I am still around them" (Returned worker, Solomon Islands: S-RWM16).

In some circumstances it does seem that solo parents are using violence to discipline children:

Interviewer: Have there been any issues that the children share with their father when he calls?

Respondent: They told him about me smoking and that I hit them. So he advises me not to hit the children.

Interviewer: Why do you hit your children?

Respondent: They can be quite mischievous and challenging to manage. They seem to listen to their father and not me" (Family, Samoa: S-FUF33).

"... the main challenge is dealing with the children's mischievous and inattentive behaviour. ... My daughters sometimes resort to hitting their children, but I didn't raise them that way. I only disciplined them when they were older" (Family, Samoa: S-FUF43).

In both instances, the violence is described as contextual, rather than consistent with previous family dynamics, but in no context is violence against children acceptable.

Another stakeholder observed that children are now congregating on the streets in large numbers, in part due to a lack of support from parents. The above comments suggest that some of these children might also be escaping violence.

“... they are out there in the street, and most of them maybe are not in school, but a lot of them are in school too. Attending high school here in the evening, they’re standing on the street” (Stakeholder, Vanuatu: V-SNUF77).

Another commented that there has been an increase in crime, but this is due to child abandonment and food insecurity:

“But leaving behind those kids, you know, stealing, killing, you will expect it, Vanuatu will expect it, more and more and more because they want to survive. They need food. And I know the government should at least look at every angle of life because it’s really affecting those kids. ... And we don’t know because Vanuatu, we want to produce lots of leaders, but with this type of programme, I don’t think we [will] produce the leaders of Vanuatu. We are more supporting crime rate here on the other hand because if I want to eat you know rice and chicken and I don’t have

any money, you know, what else do you expect me to do? I might rob your house, you see” (Stakeholder, Vanuatu: V-SNUM88).

Others commented that children are also engaging in substance abuse, and that this is connected to the absence of parents:

“There’s only the boys’ gang mainly. There is a girls’ gang too, but you can hardly see them. Inside the communities there is a group of young people less than 18 [years old]. They did not go to school, but they just sitting there in places, hotspot places and smoke. During weekends, they do not work, but every weekend you see them drunk. So where did they get the money?” Marijuana is common (Stakeholder, Vanuatu: V-SNUM86).

“Sometimes, I see young people like me whom their father has gone to the LMS, and I tell them, ‘You need to take a break from drinking alcohol. When your dad is away, you drink [alcohol] a lot. You are not like that when your dad is here” (Youth, Solomon Islands: SI-YRMI).

Following the release of the report, UNICEF brought together Governments from all the study countries along with faith-based organizations to review the findings. Recommendations from the seminar held in Vanuatu are documented in an outcomes statement entitled “2024 Seminar Outcome - Seminar on Protecting Children in the

context of Labour Mobility,” July 2024.

The full report is available at UNICEF Pacific Multi Country Office website, www.unicef.org/pacificislands/media/4641/file/UNICEF%20Pacific%20labour%20schemes.pdf.

For further information, please contact UNICEF Pacific Multi Country Office, United Nations Children’s Fund, 3rd Floor, FDB Building, 360 Victoria Parade, Suva, Fiji; ph (679) 3300439; e-mail: suva@unicef.org; www.unicef.org/pacificislands.

Endnotes

- 1 The study was jointly undertaken by United Nations Children’s Fund, The University of the South Pacific, and Western Sydney University.
- 2 See Executive summary of the report, page 1.

Educating Afghan Girls

Central Asia Institute

The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan marked its third year on 15 August 2024. In that time, girls and women have seen their rights stripped away and the challenges to obtaining an education have significantly increased. Girls have been barred from continuing their education beyond Grade 6, and women from pursuing higher education or a profession, even from walking freely on the street. Just recently, even stricter prohibitions were put in place forbidding women from speaking or showing their faces in public. The scope and severity of these restrictions and the inhumane treatment of women is truly unprecedented. Their large-scale systematic violations of women's and girls' fundamental human rights in Afghanistan constitute gender persecution and an institutionalized framework of gender apartheid.

Currently, work opportunities for women also remain limited as the Taliban has prohibited women from going to office jobs or working outside the home. Even women's beauty parlors were ordered closed. But women are still allowed to work in certain sectors including as teachers and medical professionals, and in industries such as agriculture and handicrafts like carpet weaving and sewing, as long as they are not working alongside men who

are not their immediate family members.

Education of Afghan Girls

Afghanistan's education system, scarred by decades of relentless conflict, grapples with profound challenges, particularly in remote regions. Despite important gains in school enrollment over the past two decades, millions of Afghan children aged 7 to 15 still lack access to school, with girls constituting a staggering 80 percent of this demographic. Complex factors such as entrenched negative traditions and attitudes, the insufficient number of government schools, the scarcity of female teachers, arduous journeys to distant schools, insecurity, a lack of washrooms (especially for girls), and female children's household responsibilities have perpetuated this crisis.

Schools for Afghan Children

For twenty-eight years, Central Asia Institute (CAI) has been working to make education possible for children and women in remote and mountainous communities in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan. Home to the Hindu Kush, Karakoram, and Pamir Mountain Ranges, and some of the tallest peaks on earth, this region is one of the most beautiful and rugged parts of the

globe. It is also one of the poorest and most conflict-ridden. Long plagued by illiteracy, lack of economic opportunity, and insecurity, these disadvantaged and hard to reach areas are typically underserved by their governments and other international aid organizations. CAI works here because others do not.

While CAI serves both females and males, it believes that focusing on girls and women can have a larger impact that lasts for generations. When girls and women are educated, societies are transformed. Both the immediate benefit and long-term impact are staggering. The health of the girl and her family improves, economies get stronger, and the cycle of education continues into future generations. Uplifting a holistic and empowering approach to education has a positive impact on the well-being of an entire community.

Since 2001, CAI has been working in remote, marginalized Afghan communities to support an array of programs that have provided tens of thousands of Afghan children and women with access to quality education and livelihood skills.

Despite the challenges mentioned above, CAI remains steadfastly committed to

working in Afghanistan, to making education possible, and to standing by communities it has served for more than two decades. Because the vast majority of Afghans, including in rural areas, support women's education, CAI aims to fight back against the Taliban's tactics by continuing to enroll Afghan children from poor, marginalized communities into primary school.

One of CAI's priorities in Afghanistan has been to establish community-based primary schools in remote areas where no schools exist and where there is support for girls' education. These community classrooms play a crucial role in providing education to girls and boys who are unable to access regular schools.

In fact, the communities themselves play a key role in setting up and managing the schools. This includes donating the space to hold classes and selecting members of the community to help manage the school. Members of these School Management Committees (SMCs) receive training from CAI and are formally charged with helping to recruit teachers, ensure students attend, monitor student and teacher performance, and intervene when issues arise. For example, there have been instances in which local Talibs have tried to intimidate families into withdrawing their girls from school or shut down CAI schools altogether. In these cases, the communities themselves, through the SMCs, have pushed back. So far this has proven successful in every instance.

CAI provides education for Afghan boys and girls. At present, it supports primary school education through Grade 6 with close to eight thousand children, including 5,388 girls, enrolled in CAI community primary schools. The goal is to get as many children as possible, especially girls, to a level where they can read, write, and do basic math and thus have a chance for a better life.

Tragically, the Taliban has not lifted its ban on education for older girls Grade 7 and above despite enormous pressure from the U.S. and other western governments. While initially CAI has been reaching older girls in smaller groups through private tutors, the Taliban shut down those activities.

At present, CAI community schools also provide training and salaries for two hundred sixty-four teachers, one-hundred ninety-two of whom are women. Teachers have been especially grateful that for the continued support received from CAI given the soaring poverty and unemployment rates.

The continuation of CAI's current community school program is of paramount importance in ensuring that children, regardless of their circumstances, have the opportunity to receive quality education. Programs offer a flexible and locally driven approach that caters to the needs of the students and their communities. By recognizing the significance of addressing the specific educational challenges faced by these

children, CAI has made a meaningful impact on entire districts. It is therefore essential to prioritize and support the continuation of community-based initiatives to ensure that education remains accessible and inclusive for all.¹

Stories

In the remote Rast Qol village of Afghanistan, eight-year-old Rana and her grandmother are the best of friends. After Rana tragically lost both parents in a car accident at the age of three, her grandmother became her full-time caregiver. They got by on subsistence agriculture and income from Rana's uncle, who runs a small shop in the village. But there were simply no options for school—that is until CAI opened a community-based classroom in Rana's village.

Since joining two years ago, Rana has flourished.

Rana is one of the thousands of students who would not have been able to attend school at all without CAI and the many donors who fund its work. The school has not only provided Rana with a strong educational foundation but also increased her social support network.

In the words of her teacher, "She is a hardworking and eager learner. And since no one in her family has been formally educated, I am providing her with extra support to ensure she succeeds." Education is the most crucial path towards change and progress for women, and that is why CAI is committed to supporting girls like Rana.²

At 8 years old, Nadia had never seen the inside of a classroom. She could not read, write or count. "School is important for everyone," she says, "because we learn about ourselves and determine our futures here."³

Aisha and Marwail are two Afghan girls who took the risk of pretending to be boys to attend an English language course. Recalling the first day when they went for registration, they said, "We were scared, but we went to the school office and registered under the names of Ahmad and Mahmood. And we were seated in the boys' class."

In another story, Toba, who was teaching English at a language center, is now forced to stay home. But she and others like her have not given up. Using her smartphone, a laptop, and the Internet, she pursues learning online. "The only thing that encourages us to continue this struggle is the existence of these phones and computers and the Internet. If this space were not there, absolute darkness would rule in our lives," she said.⁴

Challenges

Muhammad Idrees Ghairat, Professional Specialist at the Afghanistan Policy Lab explains that, "So far, engagements with the Taliban by the international community have not proved fruitful. Although a few Muslim scholars condemned the Taliban's policies and have spoken out against the inhumane treatment of girls and women by the Taliban, these efforts have not been impactful." He added that more work needs to be done, "There are a couple

of ways Afghans together with the international community can work to continue the learning process to whatever extent they can, including supporting in-person and online education platforms for Afghan girls and women."

Online education platforms have been described in one report:⁵

Many female students and teachers have turned to online platforms for education. Mahbooba Akbar, a former lecturer, now teaches girls through her YouTube channel. "I was expelled from Kandahar Teacher Training College, and then I created a YouTube channel where I teach mathematics, geometry, and statistics online at the seventh through twelfth grade levels," she explained. "My work is welcomed and admired by people and my family, and I am driven to continue."

Many Afghan students and teachers became familiar with online classes and learning platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2020, when some schools and universities closed and adopted remote learning. The challenge, however, is access. Afghanistan has one of the lowest internet penetration rates in the world. Many Afghans, especially those who live in rural areas, do not have access to the internet or to computers or other technology needed to carry out online education.

In addition to online education, some communities and families secretly try to

provide in-person educational opportunities for girls. There are underground classes taking place in many areas, and some primary schools illegally hold classes for girls above the age of 12. In interviews, some of the teachers and parents who are involved in organizing these classes described the danger they face. One activist who organizes four classes for older girls in a primary school recalled an instance when a Taliban official arrived to inspect the school to ensure classes above sixth grade were not being held. "We had to help all the [older] girls escape out of the classroom windows," she said. "We then threw their bags over the wall into the street and helped them to climb the walls. I was crying because the girls ... panicked and running around scared, and the teachers were trying to get them out." She continued to say the girls and the teachers escaped safely, and that despite the close call, "we still continue to study."

The religious leaders in Pakistan as well as Islamic scholars from the Middle East, particularly Qatar and Saudi Arabia, have important role in influencing the Taliban to convince them of the importance of women's education in Islam and provide examples of the role of educated girls and women in an Islamic Society. He believes that given the risks that women face, men should lead the debates and protests within the country to challenge the Taliban's restrictive views on girls' and women's rights. "There is no other alternative but to convince the Taliban to lift the ban on

girls' education," Ghairat insists. He concludes, "An educated mother helps build an educated family, which leads to an educated society."

But there can also be more than religious reason behind the ban on education of women. Some Afghans argue that⁶

the main motivation is power because the more educated the population is the more able it will be to oppose the group's rule. According to Sahira Sharif, an exiled Afghan politician, "The Taliban understand that if a girl is educated, it means that the entire family is educated. The Taliban and their allies are frightened of educated and intelligent women. They apply the saying: If you want to destroy a society, take the pen out of its hands.

With education, the economic situation of the household improves, leading to better living standards. Every step matters, and every initiative makes a difference. It is crucial that individuals worldwide support the education platforms to keep the learning process alive for Afghan girls."

Another account states that despite these obstacles, "communities across Afghanistan found ways to educate girls, even in remote and impoverished areas." In 2020, girls and boys were learning in a school called Funangziu in Pachir Wa Agam district in Nangarhar province, for example.⁷

Concluding statement

"The presence of a female teacher within our community has refreshed our hopes for the future and established a strong foundation that motivates us for further growth. Girls in our community are proficient in reading and writing and display enthusiasm for their future endeavors. Furthermore, community elders are mobilized and recognize the importance of girls' education, actively advocating for it unlike before." - Mrs. Ramela, a 30-year-old teacher in Mochekan, a remote and mountainous village in the Versaj District of Takhar province.

With more than half of Afghan children out of school, CAI cannot give up on this next generation of Afghan children. They are, after all, their country's best hope for a better future.

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Endnotes

- 1 Alice Thomas, Afghanistan: Amid the Challenges, CAI Continues to Provide Education and Hope, 2024-2025, *JOURNEY OF HOPE*, <https://centralasiainstitute.org/afghanistan-amid-the-challenges-cai-continues-to-provide-education-and-hope/>.
- 2 Rana Dreams Big, <https://centralasiainstitute.org/rana-dreams-big/>.

- 3 Our impact on education, Read about the lives you're changing, <https://centralasiainstitute.org/impact/>.
- 4 Thomas, op, cit.
- 5 Muqadasa Ahmadzai, The War on Schoolgirls: Responding to the Education Crisis in Afghanistan. POLICY BRIEF, Afghanistan Policy Lab, <https://spia.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/2023-06/Girls%20Education%20Policy%20Brief.pdf>.
- 6 Ahmadzai, *ibid*.
- 7 Ahmadzai, *ibid*.

Child Online Protection in Thailand

UNICEF Thailand

Rapid digital technology expansion and increased internet access have drastically transformed the lives of children and youth in Thailand. Internet use has become widespread. Over 75 percent of Thais use the internet and spend considerable time doing so. Children and young people in Thailand are accessing the internet from a younger age than ever. An estimated 94 percent of 12–17-year-olds in Thailand are internet users,¹ and children under 5 use connected electronic devices regularly.² Almost all internet-using children in Thailand go online at least once a day for entertainment or social activities, such as watching videos, using social media, chatting with friends, reading news, and for educational activities, such as joining an online class or searching for new information.³ Given the time they spend online, and their reliance on digital technology, children and young people in this generation are growing up online. They face risks of different types of harm. However, not all risks have the same likelihood of harm to children. Below are the data from different pieces of research that highlight the potential impact of online risk on children:

1. Over 9 percent of internet users aged 12–17 in Thailand were victims of online sexual exploitation and abuse, which occurred in various forms, from being blackmailed to engage in sexual activities, someone else sharing their sexual images without permission, to being coerced to engage in sexual activities through promises of money or gifts.⁴ Around 11 percent of children aged 9 to 18 reported having experienced online harassment and sexualized comments.⁵
2. Between 2019–2021, the US National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), which compiles reports (known as CyberTips) from U.S.-based technology companies, found an increase in the number of reports containing child sexual abuse material (CSAM) related to Thailand. In 2019, NCMEC received 355,369 reports related to Thailand, and the number rose to 397,743 and 589,515 reports in 2020 and 2021, respectively. The reporting on CSAM does not equate to the level of abuse in Thailand.⁶
3. Online grooming, a rising technology, has made it easier to harm children.⁷ Children are uniquely vulnerable to grooming with unsupervised use of the internet, smartphones and webcams, which they use to share images and communicate with strangers. Close to one in five children are sexually solicited online.⁸
4. Between 8 to 15 percent of children in Thailand who had experienced different forms of online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA) in the past year did not disclose the most recent incident to anyone. Very few children used formal reporting mechanisms like police, social workers, or helplines. The main barriers were a lack of awareness around where to go or whom to tell, which suggests that children were not familiar with the formal reporting mechanisms available to them or did not feel comfortable disclosing to their caregivers.⁹
5. While online, children's privacy and protection can be undermined by several risks related to the collection and onward sale of their data and browsing habits, behavior targeting and advertising, the use of biometrics, age verification and the mandatory use of identification, government surveillance and a variety of parental controls.¹⁰
6. Close to 47 percent of children in Thailand did not

know where to access services and get help if they or a friend were sexually assaulted or harassed¹¹ and 82 percent of social workers and police indicated that low reporting was due to the caregivers' low level of awareness of the risks of OCSEA.¹²

7. Nearly 26 percent of children aged 9 to 18 in Thailand were reported to have self-generated sexual images that could be classified as child sexual abuse material.¹³ Such images of children are innocently produced mostly for their own use but are used for bullying and exploitation, including sexual exploitation online.
8. Over 54 percent of children aged 9 to 18 in Thailand were reported to have been exposed to pornographic and child sexual abuse material online in 2022.¹⁴ Pornographic content can harm children. Exposure to pornography and CSAM at an early age may lead to poor mental health, sexism and objectification, sexual violence, and other negative outcomes. Among other risks, when children view pornography that portrays abusive and misogynistic acts, they may come to view such behavior as normal and acceptable.¹⁵
9. Children and young people in Thailand have spent more time online than their peers in countries with similar income levels. Their exposure to hate speech

has increased with more time online. This includes hate between children and teens during online and gaming chats, reflecting how children can be both victims and perpetrators of hate speech.¹⁶

10. Data from eleven countries¹⁷ show that between 43 and 64 percent of 9 to 17-year-olds look for news online.¹⁸ Because of their evolving capacities, children cannot always distinguish between reliable and unreliable information contained in the news. As a result, not only can they be harmed by misinformation/disinformation,¹⁹ but they may also spread it among their peers. Even incredibly young children or those without access to social media networks may be exposed to misinformation/disinformation through their interactions with peers, parents, caregivers, and educators.²⁰ Children and young people are especially vulnerable to online abuse, hate speech and misinformation/disinformation on social media.
11. Social media platforms were designed to hold users' attention as long as possible, tapping into psychological biases and vulnerabilities relating to our desire for validation and fear of rejection. Too much passive use of social media that is extremely popular with young people – just browsing posts – can be unhealthy and has been linked to feelings of envy,²¹

inadequacy²² and less satisfaction with life.²³ Studies have even suggested that it can lead to ADHD symptoms,²⁴ depression, anxiety²⁵ and sleep deprivation.²⁶

12. In Thailand, 41 percent of children aged 9 to 18 years reported showing aggressive behavior. They experienced problems in their social relationships with family and friends because of the impact of online gaming.²⁷ Online gaming has established itself as part of children's lives. Social gaming platforms are expanding because of better, cheaper, and widely adopted virtual and augmented reality devices. Big Tech is investing billions in building the digital infrastructure for the metaverse. The beginnings of it already exist in non-immersive forms, such as the play environments of Minecraft and Roblox, where children create their own worlds or meet in their thousands for music concerts.²⁸

In Thailand, a holistic and coordinated approach is essential to effectively address the challenges faced. This approach must involve all relevant stakeholders, including children, young people, and parents. If implemented systematically, it will empower children and young people in Thailand to navigate the digital world safely and confidently while maximizing the benefits and opportunities the internet offers. Currently, various ministries, departments, and

agencies from the government, civil society organizations, and the private sector are working toward this goal. However, they encounter different limitations. Existing initiatives address various dimensions of the highlighted challenges and can be categorized into administrative, policy, regulatory, educational, preventive, and responsive measures, including hotlines and helplines. Unfortunately, these programs and components remain disconnected, insufficient in scale and coverage, and lack coherence in strategy and messaging.

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Access to Remedy for Migrant Workers in Japan

Migrant Forum Asia, ILO Bangkok, JICA

Attracted by Japan's prosperity and motivated by desire for gaining higher income, migrant workers from Southeast Asia have been migrating to Japan since mid-1990s. This allure has significantly intensified in recent years, leading to a notable increase in migrant workers. As of mid-2023, Japan hosted approximately 358,000 workers under the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) and 173,000 under the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) scheme, predominantly from ASEAN countries.

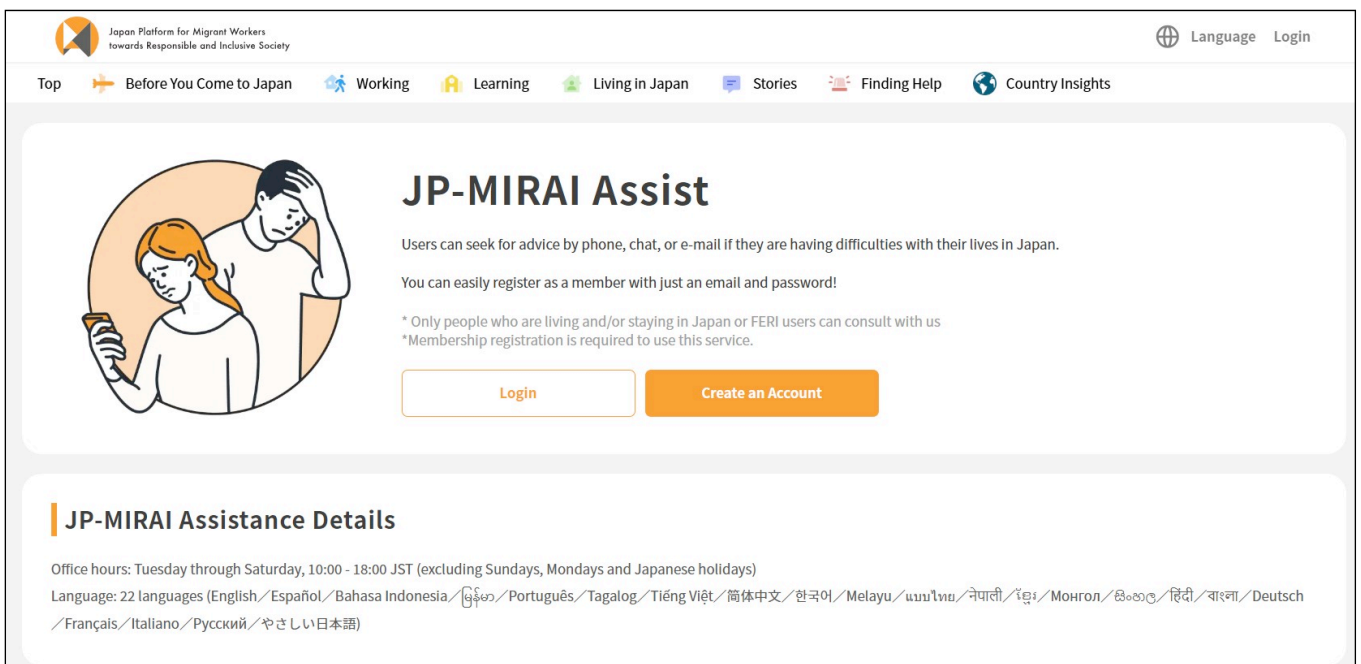
Challenges to accessing justice are widespread and impact all migrant workers, regardless of their status, skills, gender, or nationality. Migrant workers

frequently lack awareness of legal procedures and services, including those available in their home countries. They may also fear legal and immigration authorities due to insufficient social support. Government officials and first points of contact, such as those at Labor Offices, Immigration Offices, and Police stations, often lack the expertise needed to handle complex cases of abuse and exploitation.

The absence of structured grievance mechanisms further exacerbates their vulnerabilities, hindering their ability to seek redress and protect their dignity. Further, financial barriers, including the high cost of legal and accounting services, deter many migrant workers from

pursuing justice. Migrant workers often prefer non-state-based mechanisms for filing complaints due to the inefficiencies of state-based procedures. This preference underscores the urgent need for more accessible and effective complaint resolution systems.

Moreover, addressing post-return access to remedies is crucial, with demands for specific arrangements to ensure returned workers receive appropriate redress and support for cases of sexual or gender-based violence, and any other forms of abuse and exploitation. Japan provides various state-based and non-state-based services to support migrant workers. Japan Platform for Migrant Workers towards



The JP-MIRAI portal website

Responsible and Inclusive Society (JP-MIRAI), a multilingual information portal, offers valuable resources and support for resolving labor disputes. JP-MIRAI's referral system to the Tokyo Bar Association's Dispute Resolution Centre further aids in addressing unresolved cases. Despite these efforts, significant gaps in public awareness and academic research persist.

As Japan's labor market continues to evolve with an increasing number of migrant workers, it is imperative to engage in comprehensive studies and dialogues with lawyers, civil society organizations, and migrant workers themselves. This engagement is crucial for understanding and addressing the complexities of available

access to remedy for migrant workers to Japan. The strong linkage with ASEAN bar councils and individual lawyers who consistently provide pro-bono legal assistance offers a unique opportunity to address these challenges more effectively.

Conducting dialogue/consultation on the challenges as well as available access to remedy in Japan and countries of origin is essential, as trends evolve and the scale of migration increases. By leveraging cross-border collaboration and enhancing legal capacity, we can advance the migrant rights agenda, ensuring that justice is not only sought but achieved. The continued partnership between lawyers, grassroots organizations, and stakeholders

will be pivotal in identifying how the access to remedy works and how they can further enhance and assist migrant workers.

Linkage to the JICA-ILO Survey Project

The ASEAN Lawyers' Consultation on Access to Remedy for Migrant Workers to Japan was held on 28-29 October 2024 in Bangkok, following the consultation meetings and workshops held in Viet Nam and Cambodia in July 2024, and in Indonesia in October 2024 as part of the JICA-ILO project, Survey for Co-creating a Joint Work Plan for Improving Access to Remedy of Migrant Workers from Southeast Asia to Japan. This project aims to engage with wide international and national



stakeholders in the migration corridors from Southeast Asia to Japan and develop a joint work plan with them to improve access to remedy for migrant workers.

The Bangkok workshop was attended by representatives of bar associations in Viet Nam, Cambodia and Indonesia and also representatives of non-governmental organizations from Vietnam, Cambodia, Philippines and Japan.

Post-workshop Plans

After the workshop, The JICA-ILO Survey Project will consolidate inputs from the workshop into the joint work plan, as well as other inputs from the consultation workshops/meetings and pilot activities implemented in Cambodia, Viet Nam and

Indonesia. The joint work plan will be finalized by the final regional workshop planned to be held in February 2025.

MFA seeks to enhance access to justice, due process, and equitable legal treatment for migrant workers, addressing their cases effectively. Align to its Justice for Wage Theft project, MFA advocates for accessible, efficient, and expedited justice mechanisms that migrant workers can utilize, even while they went back to their countries of origin. Filing a case should not impede their ability to work and reside in countries of destination.

For further information, please contact:

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Endnotes

- 1 Hanoi Bar Association - Vietnam, Bar Association of the Kingdom of Cambodia and PERADI- Indonesia. The representative of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines was not able to attend the Bangkok workshop.
- 2 Centre for Migrants Advocacy - Philippines, Serikat Buruh Migran Indonesia, Migrant Care - Indonesia, Legal Support for Children and Women - Cambodia, Ad Hoc Cambodia, Centre for Development and Integration – Viet Nam, Lawyers Beyond Borders – Philippines, and HURIGHTS OSAKA.

Child Online Protection in Thailand

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HURIGHTS OSAKA Calendar

HURIGHTS OSAKA celebrated its 30th year with a symposium held on 7 December 2024. Several speakers discussed current human rights issues in Japan including LGBTQ+ discrimination, Buraku discrimination and adverse consequences of the defunct Eugenic Protection Law.



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HURIGHTS OSAKA, inspired by the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, formally opened in December 1994. It has the following aims: 1) to engender popular understanding in Osaka of the international human rights standards; 2) to support international exchange between Osaka and countries in Asia-Pacific through collection and dissemination of information and materials on human rights; and 3) to promote human rights in Asia-Pacific in cooperation with national and regional institutions and civil society organizations as well as the United Nations. In order to achieve these goals, HURIGHTS OSAKA has activities such as Information Handling, Research and Study, Education and Training, Publications, and Consultancy Services.

FOCUS Asia-Pacific is designed to highlight significant issues and activities relating to human rights in the Asia-Pacific. Relevant information and articles can be sent to HURIGHTS OSAKA for inclusion in the next editions of the newsletter.

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