

EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

INTEGRATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: TRAJECTORIES OF INCLUSION, DYNAMICS OF EXCLUSION



Gender and Mobility: Displacements, Borders, Social values, and displacements.

In a study of how Southeast Asian states cope with diversity and prosperity, this policy brief focuses on gender. It analyses the social construction of gender in the context of mobility: how gender roles are established and reiterated and how gender inequality remains a critical challenge. It also addresses gender and human trafficking. Case studies include examples from Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam.

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INTRODUCTION

This policy brief addresses the issue of gender in Southeast Asia and utilizes gender as a perspective to engage with issues of mobility and work. It challenges the idea that local gender identity constructions are being swept away on the tide of globalization. Rather, such constructions are reworked and rethought: while some are reiterated, others are creatively manipulated to comply with change and new expectations. This brief highlights the ways local cultural understandings of femininity and masculinity are always framed against the history and contemporary socio-economic realities of specific countries at specific times with specific results and outcomes. It recognizes that while it is important to devote resources to specific work with women and girls, working with men and boys can also help to challenge deep rooted gender inequalities and inequitable social norms. The results and recommendations reflect this perspective as well as considerable regional differences.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

Borders and social values

Research in Indonesia concerned the role of traditional gender norms and values, as generally understood, and the social expectations that arise from them. In Indonesia, the idea of gendered individuals with prerogatives, duties and expectations is still quite powerful. As highlighted by

literature the ideological discourse on gender in Indonesia was and is represented linguistically as a sex/gender system, through the overlapping of sexed bodies and gendered social attributes. This sort of discourse holds, for example, that it was in the “nature” of women to be reproducers and a source of domestic labor. The discourse on gender operated through an extensive network of policies, programs and institutions that encouraged and enforced normative gender meanings, most notably through school education and textbooks. In recent years, new female roles and ideas of femininity have emerged in Indonesia and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. These are often state driven discourses about gender roles in Indonesian society, and have historically worked together with religious (Islamic) views about proper conduct for women and men. Islamic writers are similarly concordant with the idea that women and men are different by nature.

Accordingly, dominant state and religious discourses about masculinity have been centered on the idea that men, and fathers, are economic providers for the family. Research in Indonesia showed that successful masculine identities seem to relate closely to the ability to provide for the family, and to fulfil onerous (in terms of time and resources) community expectations. In particular, there is a perception that the transition to masculine adulthood is complete only when men are able to draw together the considerable financial and cultural resources required to marry a woman from the community and to provide well for their wife, family and extended kinship network and, in the case of first-born sons, to care for their parents.

In Indonesia, research has also shown the social relevance of groups of males who interact with each other and band together for various purposes. This underlines the importance of male sociality. While many theories of change recognize that gender inequalities are structurally rooted and that change is implemented at multiple levels, the roles played by men and boys in challenging unequal gender power relations are not often recognized. The focus is almost exclusively on women and girls and where men and boys do appear, they tend to be framed only as “barriers” to gender equality.

Case studies undertaken in SEATIDE show that work continues to be gendered and gendering. Local gender roles have not been swept away on a tide of globalization, but reworked to comply with the demands of modernity. This was observed at construction sites and mines in Indonesia: male spaces where illicit behavior (alcohol, drugs, paid sex), high personal risk and dreams of fast money articulate a masculinity which is external or parallel to homes and parenthood, and suspended from expected norms of adult life.

On the other hand, machine operators in Hanoi’s electronics industry embody a new femininity in which young bodies exist for intensive work, not reproduction. Working mothers in industrial parks must find their own childcare solutions, which involve the migration of grandmothers to factory hamlets to look after children. Conversely, in the informal and dangerous environment of Bangkok’s slums some women, who cannot otherwise secure wage work, manage to earn a living (as vendors, recyclers) and to live with their husbands and children. For their part, migrant girls working in Banda Aceh are perceived as perpetual children to be lodged, guarded and poorly paid. Islam plays a role in structuring their infantilized lives. However, exchanges of information sometimes embolden individuals to take unexpected initiatives: overseas migration, quick marriage, second wife status or drug dealing.

Displacements

Research in Vietnam looked at two aspects of mobility: women and men who travel to look for a job and seek to make a living, and displaced people. In Southeast Asia, the phenomenon of human trafficking originates from an increasingly gender-insensitive integration process that particularly affects women, for whom modernity has created new uncertainties and difficulties. Indeed, the promotion of a culture of constant mobility associated with integration leads to gendered injustices, underpaid employment, broken families and social exclusion. While desperately seeking to be included in a more prosperous world, female migrants fall victim to trafficking, labor exploitation (including sex work) and forced marriages. Trafficking takes place at different levels: domestically, from rural to urban areas, across borders to neighboring countries, regionally within Southeast Asia and internationally to more distant countries in the Middle and Far East.

On the level of research, policies and humanitarian aid, the historical and persistent association of human trafficking with female prostitution has diverted attention from male trafficked migrants and homosexuals. While major improvements in anti-trafficking laws have led to greater recognition for trafficked men, widespread gender stereotypes and engrained misconceptions continue to mark people's attitudes and service providers' practices. As a result, trafficked men and homosexuals remain under-assisted.

In this context, the study of female trafficked returnees in Northern Vietnam highlights the normalizing and gendered nature of recovery and reintegration services, notwithstanding the approval voiced by former residents of shelters, notably with regard to job placements, salaries, and also liberation from traditional gender roles and values attached to young women, particularly in the rural areas. Shelters tend however to infantilize residents and encourage dependency by offering traditional gender-stereotyped skills training activities that are not market-oriented but promote an image of childish uncontaminated womanhood. As a result, reintegration services often act as a barrier to the full personal, social, and economic integration of these young women, who face persistent socio-economic marginality and the threat of social stigma in their after-shelter life. Shelter facilities for trafficked males are non-existent.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Reframe gender policies in relational and inclusive terms. Avoid replicating gender stereotypes, such as framing females as vulnerable and males as perpetrators, and where possible highlight male and female roles and contributions. A focus on inequalities experienced by women should be accompanied by knowledge of norms that also affect and/or restrict men's lives.
2. Ensure adaptive approaches to changing realities (migration, sociality and the labor market).
3. Provide welfare for women and sufficient funds for gender equality, irrespective of the gender or sex of recipients.
4. Promote the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of women, men homosexuals, and particularly migrants. Take action to counter the widespread grassroots culture of prejudice and misconception, and encourage policies and institutions to facilitate the improvement of migrants' SRHR. The alarming lack of attention to men and homosexual migrants, specifically in cases of human trafficking, must be tackled.
5. Ensure that services to assist migrants do not make use of gender-stereotyped practices. Trafficked and exploited migrants must be helped to (re)integrate into society via the provision of market-oriented training courses, for which more funds need to be invested. At the same, psychological assistance and follow-up should be reinforced.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

1. Main scientific objective

Integrative processes offer the promise of economic and cultural development, the free movement of people, the promotion of citizenship and knowledge networks with extensive links with the wider world. At the same time, failure to take advantage of these benefits can result in processes of exclusion that undermine national/regional frameworks, and entail risks in the fields of human development/security, including the danger of framework disintegration.

In examining these processes, SEATIDE's research will be informed by an awareness that dynamics of exclusion should be studied in tandem with dynamics of inclusion to produce holistic analyses of integrative processes and their contemporary forms, which take into account long-term local perspectives.

2. Research capacity building

By reinforcing European research on SEA, the project will contribute to the coordination of EU-ASEAN scholarly exchange, the improvement of networking capacity, and the promotion of a new generation of field researchers on SEA.

3. Methodology

The project will conduct field research and produce analyses that take into account local knowledge as well as macroeconomic studies and expert perspectives. Qualitative and quantitative data will be presented in case studies structured by a common analytical framework, centred on but not restricted to four SEA countries (Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia), with a unifying focus on transnational issues.

PROJECT IDENTITY

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| PROJECT NAME | Integration in Southeast Asia: Trajectories of Inclusion, Dynamics of Exclusion (SEATIDE) |
| COORDINATOR | Yves Goudineau, EFEO, Paris, France, direction@efeo.net . |
| CONSORTIUM | Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient – EFEO – Paris, France University of Hamburg – UHAM – Hamburg, Germany Centre for History and Economics – CHE – University of Cambridge, UK Tallinn University – TU – Tallinn, Estonia Università di Milano-Bicocca – UNIMIB – Milano, Italy Universiti Sains Malaysia – USM – Penang, Malaysia Universitas Gadjah Mada – UGM – Yogyakarta, Indonesia Chiang Mai University – CMU – Chiang Mai, Thailand Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences – VASS – Hanoi, Vietnam |
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| BUDGET | EU contribution: 2 415 017 €. |
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| FURTHER READING | Ford, M., Lyons, L., & Schendel, W. van (Eds.). (2012). <i>Labour migration and human trafficking in Southeast Asia: critical Perspectives</i> . Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge. Ford, Michele. <i>Men and masculinities in Southeast Asia</i> . Vol. 41. Routledge, 2012. Parker, Lyn, and Pam Nilan. <i>Adolescents in contemporary Indonesia</i> . Vol. 59. Routledge, 2013. |

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