

Evaluating the Role of ASEAN in Addressing Human Trafficking Against Migrant Workers: A Case Study of Myanmar and Thailand (2021-2025)

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ABSTRACT

Following the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, migrant workers became increasingly vulnerable to labor exploitation and human trafficking along the Myanmar–Thailand corridor. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of ASEAN in addressing human trafficking through regional mechanisms such as the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons (ACTIP), ASEANAPOL, and Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime. This research employs a qualitative method, and its analytical framework is based on the perspective of human security. The study shows that ASEAN has established various regional anti-trafficking instruments; however, their implementation still faces challenges such as the dominance of the non-intervention principle, weak regional coordination, and differences in the capacities of member states. In addition, ASEAN's attention remains focused on state security rather than the direct protection of victims. This study argues that ASEAN needs to strengthen a human-centered security approach in order to protect migrant workers, who constitute a vulnerable group.

INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking constitutes one of the most complex and continuously evolving forms of transnational crime, particularly in Southeast Asia. This issue extends beyond criminal activity, as it is closely linked to migration dynamics, economic inequality, and the lack of protection for vulnerable groups, especially migrant workers. The Myanmar-Thailand border area has emerged as a high-risk corridor for trafficking due to significant cross-border labor mobility and ongoing political instability.

Recent global assessments indicate that trafficking is increasingly associated with patterns of international migration and human mobility. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2022) trafficking trends in southeast Asia are strongly connected to irregular

migration flows, particularly in border regions such as Myanmar-Thailand. The 2021 military coup in Myanmar has further intensified these vulnerabilities by increasing displacement and exposing the population at risk of exploitation.

According to International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022), Migrant workers represent a highly vulnerable group that is particularly susceptible to various forms of exploitation. Due to their limited access to legal protection and heavy reliance on recruitment agents, they are frequently exposed to discriminatory practices and abuses, including forced labor and human trafficking. Furthermore, uneven levels of development among Southeast Asian countries contribute to irregular and unregulated labor migration, thereby creating greater opportunities for exploitation by transnational criminal networks.

(Caballero-Anthony, 2021) explains that in the regional context, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has developed various frameworks and policy instruments to address human trafficking, including the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons (ACTIP) and inter-state cooperation through ASEAN National Police (ASEANAPOL). (Jaya et al. 2022) also explained that the effectiveness of these initiatives remains limited in fully addressing the exploitation of migrant workers across borders. Diverging national interests, weak intergovernmental coordination, and the persistence of a predominantly state-centric security approach continue to pose significant challenges for ASEAN in advancing implementation of these policies.

A growing body of literature has explored human trafficking in Southeast Asia from multiple perspectives. (Midhol, 2022) highlights that trafficking in the region is closely associated with socio-economic disparities and weak regulatory frameworks. Similarly, (Yea, 2022) emphasizes that trafficking is embedded within regional labor migration systems and driven by demand for low-cost labor. Furthermore, (Caballero-Anthony, 2021) argues that ASEAN's institutional response remains limited due to state-centric norms and weak regional enforcement mechanisms. Despite these contributions, existing studies tend to focus on broad regional dynamics rather than specific high-risk corridors such as the Myanmar-Thailand border.

While previous research has significantly contributed to understanding human trafficking in Southeast Asia, several limitations remain evident. Most studies emphasize normative frameworks and general regional trends without sufficiently evaluating their real-world effectiveness in specific contexts. In addition, limited attention has been given to the post-2021 political situation in Myanmar, which has significantly altered migration dynamics and increased vulnerability to trafficking. This gap highlights the need for more focused and context-specific analysis of ASEAN's role in addressing human trafficking against migrant workers.

Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the role and effectiveness of ASEAN in addressing human trafficking against migrant workers, with a specific focus on the Myanmar-Thailand corridor. The research seeks to answer the following questions: (1) How has human trafficking evolved in this corridor during the period 2021-2025, especially for migrant workers? (2) What role does ASEAN play through its regional frameworks and mechanisms? (3) To what extent are these mechanisms effective in addressing trafficking? By addressing these questions, this study contributes to broader

discourse on regional governance and human security, while also providing policy-relevant insights for strengthening ASEAN's response to human trafficking.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach using case study design to examine the role of ASEAN in addressing human trafficking against migrant workers in the Myanmar-Thailand corridor. A qualitative approach is appropriate for exploring complex social phenomena and understanding institutional dynamics, policy implementation, and contextual factors influencing human trafficking.

The case study method allows for an in-depth and context-specific analysis of a contemporary issue within its real-life setting, qualitative research is particularly suitable for investigating processes and meanings that cannot be quantified (Creswell & Poth 2016). In addition, (Yin, 2018) argues that case studies are effective in examining "how" and "why" questions in situations where contextual conditions are highly relevant.

Data Sources

This research relies on secondary data gathered from various credible and trusted sources to ensure the data is valid and reliable. The data sources include:

- International organizations: reports from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), International Labour Organization (ILO), and International Organization for Migration (IOM)
- Regional institutions: ASEAN official documents, including the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons (ACTIP) and related policy frameworks.
- Academic literature: peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and scholarly publications relevant to human trafficking, migration, and regional governance
- Institutional report: publications from non-governmental organization (NGOs) and policy research institutional

Using multiple data sources allows for data triangulation, which improves the credibility and strength of the findings (Yin, 2018)

Data Collection Technique

Data were collected through document analysis, a systematic method for reviewing and interpreting written materials. Document analysis is commonly used in qualitative research to explore policy frameworks, institutional responses, and social issues (Bowen, 2009)

The data collection process include: Identify relevant documents based on the research goals, selecting sources published between 2020 and 2025 to ensure data relevance and timeliness, and extraction and organizing key information related to trafficking patterns, migrant worker vulnerabilities, and ASEAN policy responses.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs Human Security Theory, which was introduced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the 1994 Human Development Report. This theory emphasizes a shift from a state-centric conception of security toward a human-centered approach. Within this perspective, security is understood not only as protection from military threats but also as the protection of individuals from various forms of vulnerability that may undermine their well-being, dignity, and survival.

Human security includes seven areas: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security. This idea focuses on people as the main concern in security and shows the importance of keeping them safe from problems like poverty, fighting, unfair treatment, and broken rights (UNDP, 1994).

The Human Security approach is particularly relevant to the issue of human trafficking against migrant workers in the Myanmar–Thailand corridor, as it recognizes that the threats faced by migrant workers stem not only from transnational criminal activities but also from political instability, poverty, limited access to legal protection, and inadequate protection of fundamental rights. Human trafficking is therefore understood as a threat to human security that undermines the economic, personal, and political security of migrant workers.

Through this theoretical framework, the study evaluates ASEAN’s effectiveness in protecting vulnerable individuals from human trafficking and examines whether ASEAN’s regional mechanisms prioritize human protection or remain predominantly influenced by state-centric security concerns.

Analytical Framework

This study adopts the Human Security framework to evaluate ASEAN’s effectiveness in addressing human trafficking against migrant workers in the Myanmar–Thailand corridor. The analysis focuses on three dimensions of Human Security that are particularly relevant to this issue: economic security, personal security, and political security.

Economic security is examined to assess how economic hardship, unemployment, and limited access to decent employment contribute to irregular migration and increase migrant workers’ vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation. Personal security is used to evaluate ASEAN’s capacity to protect migrant workers from forced labour, violence, abuse, and other forms of exploitation associated with human trafficking. Political security is applied to analyse how political instability, particularly following Myanmar’s 2021 military coup, has intensified migrant workers’ vulnerabilities and affected ASEAN’s effectiveness in responding to these challenges.

Through these dimensions, the study evaluates whether ASEAN’s regional mechanisms, including the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons (ACTIP), ASEANAPOL, the Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC), and the ASEAN Plan of Action Against Trafficking in Persons, have effectively reduced migrant workers’ vulnerabilities and strengthened protection for victims of human trafficking.

DISCUSSION

This section analyzes the development of human trafficking involving migrant workers along the Myanmar–Thailand corridor during the 2021–2025 period and evaluates the effectiveness of ASEAN’s responses through its various regional frameworks and mechanisms. In order to assess ASEAN’s capacity to protect vulnerable individuals, rather than merely maintaining state stability, this analysis employs a human security approach. Accordingly, the primary focus of the discussion lies not only in the increase of human trafficking cases, but also in ASEAN’s ability to address the sources of vulnerability, strengthen victim protection, and implement effective regional commitments.

1. The Development of Human Trafficking Against Migrant Workers in the Myanmar–Thailand Corridor (2021–2025)

1.1 Increasing Vulnerability Following the 2021 Myanmar Military Coup

The dynamics of human trafficking in Southeast Asia, especially along the Myanmar–Thailand corridor, dramatically exacerbated after the military coup in Myanmar in February 2021. Millions of people lost their jobs, state protection, and access to essential services as a result of the political unrest and violence that followed the coup. These circumstances increased irregular migration to neighbouring countries, especially Thailand, which in turn increased vulnerability to human trafficking and exploitation (UNODC, 2022).

From the standpoint of human security, this situation shows that dangers to personal safety result from the loss of social, legal, and economic security in addition to armed combat. People are more susceptible to being taken advantage of by international criminal networks when the state fails to provide fundamental protection for its citizens. As a result, people trafficking along the Myanmar–Thailand corridor can be viewed as both a result of a larger human security concern and a cross-border criminal problem.

The Myanmar state's diminished institutional capabilities after the coup made the issue worse. The number of illegal migrant workers from Myanmar to Thailand surged dramatically after 2021 (UNODC, 2022). With no legal protection, many migrants depended on unofficial recruiters and illicit migratory routes. One of the main elements raising the risk of forced labour and human trafficking is this reliance on irregular migration channels.

1.2 Patterns and Modes of Exploitation Against Migrant Workers

Human trafficking in the Myanmar–Thailand corridor has developed in various interconnected forms of exploitation. One of the most dominant forms is labor exploitation in the fisheries and seafood processing industries. (Yeoh & Lam, 2022) explains that the fisheries industry in Southeast Asia has a high prevalence of forced labor due to weak oversight of global supply chains and the difficulty of monitoring working conditions at sea by state authorities. Thailand, as one of the world’s largest seafood exporters, faces significant pressure to maintain low production costs, thereby creating opportunities for the exploitation of migrant workers from Myanmar.

Exploitation takes place not only in the fishing industry but also in the construction, agricultural, and domestic work sectors. Many migrant workers are hired on the basis of promises of lawful employment and respectable pay; however, once they reach their destination nation, they encounter physical violence, restrictions on their freedom of movement, identity document confiscation, and unpaid wages. Debt bondage techniques are frequently employed as tools of victim control. According to (Piper 2005). Labour migration networks in Southeast Asia often result in dependency relationships that make it challenging for migrant workers to flee abusive circumstances.

Labor exploitation against migrant workers is further reinforced by weak labor oversight in the informal sector. Many migrant workers are employed without formal contracts and lack access to legal protection and social security. This situation makes it difficult for victims to report exploitative practices due to fear of deportation or arrest as undocumented migrants.

New forms of trafficking based on online fraud have also emerged as a result of the advancement of digital technology. There has been a rise in cyber scam trafficking instances in the border regions between Thailand and Myanmar, where victims are coerced into working in cyber fraud operations after being promised jobs in the technology or customer service industries (UNODC, 2023). Insufficient cross-border oversight and uncertain political settings have allowed cyber scam compounds in Southeast Asia to grow quickly. This phenomena shows how human trafficking keeps evolving in response to local economic situations and technical advancements.

1.3 Victim Profiles and Characteristics

In the Myanmar–Thailand corridor, victims of human trafficking typically come from structurally vulnerable groups, including low-income migrant workers, women, children, and ethnic minorities. The main things that push people into exploitative situations are poverty, a lack of education, and a lack of access to legal protection.

The victims' profile grew more complicated after the coup in 2021. Many casualties came from pro-democracy activists, members of ethnic minority groups facing political discrimination, and displaced populations impacted by armed conflict, in addition to economic migrant labour. From the standpoint of human security, this situation shows how a confluence of interrelated social, political, and economic challenges leads to the development of people trafficking.

Victims' vulnerabilities are further exacerbated by language barriers, limited knowledge regarding legal rights, and distrust toward law enforcement authorities. Consequently, many victims choose not to report the exploitation they experience. This condition suggests that official data regarding the number of trafficking victims is likely far lower than the reality on the ground.

1.4 Factors Driving Human Trafficking

Human trafficking in the Myanmar–Thailand corridor is influenced by various interrelated structural factors. The first factor is economic inequality among Southeast Asian countries. Thailand, as a country with relatively more stable economic growth, has become a primary destination for migrant workers from Myanmar, which has experienced economic and political crises. This disparity creates large-scale labor migration flows that are difficult to control.

Weak regional migration governance is the second factor. Many migrant workers rely on less expensive and quicker illicit migration methods due to limited access to official migration channels. One of the things raising the risk of trafficking in Southeast Asia is the lack of regional coordination for migrant worker protection (David, 2017).

The existence of international criminal networks that take advantage of political unrest and lax state regulation is the third element. These cross-border networks recruit, transport, and abuse victims by taking advantage of legal loopholes and a lack of coordination among ASEAN member states.

2. ASEAN's Role Through Regional Frameworks and Mechanisms

2.1 ACTIP as ASEAN's Normative Foundation

In responding to the issue of human trafficking, ASEAN has developed several regional frameworks, particularly through the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. This convention constitutes the most important regional legal instrument in ASEAN's efforts to combat human trafficking, as it regulates member states' obligations to criminalize trafficking, strengthen cross-border cooperation, and provide protection for victims.

A significant advancement in ASEAN regionalism is demonstrated normatively by the existence of ACTIP. ACTIP is proof of ASEAN's transition from a declaratory strategy to more specific legislative obligations. Additionally, ACTIP shows that human trafficking has come to be seen as a regional concern that calls for collaboration among ASEAN member states (Mely Caballero-Anthony, 2021).

Additionally, ACTIP urges ASEAN nations to harmonise their domestic laws with international norms for the protection of victims of human trafficking. Both Thailand and Myanmar have formally joined ACTIP and pledged to work together in the area to combat human trafficking.

Nevertheless, ACTIP's efficacy still faces a number of obstacles. The ideals of non-intervention and respect for state sovereignty continue to rule ASEAN, which means that the organization lacks robust enforcement measures against member nations that violate regional obligations. Therefore, each member state's ability and political desire play a major role in how ACTIP is implemented.

2.2 SOMTC, ASEANAPOL, and ASEAN's Operational Mechanisms

In addition to ACTIP, ASEAN has also developed various operational mechanisms such as the Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime, the Working Group on Trafficking in Persons (WG-TIP), and police cooperation through ASEANAPOL. These mechanisms aim to strengthen cross-border coordination in information sharing, joint investigations, and the repatriation of trafficking victims.

ASEANAPOL plays an important role in regional law enforcement cooperation through joint operations against human trafficking networks and transnational criminal organizations. Meanwhile, SOMTC functions as a policy coordination forum among ASEAN member states in addressing transnational crimes, including trafficking.

However, given the complexity of the region's trafficking problems, these techniques' efficacy is still comparatively low. According to (David, 2017), the execution of ASEAN anti-trafficking measures is

hampered by a lack of independent monitoring systems, differences in institutional capacities among member nations, and poor regional data integration.

ASEAN's inability to successfully combat human trafficking is further demonstrated by the political unrest in Myanmar during 2021. Cross-border cooperation between Thailand and Myanmar was hampered by political unrest, and transnational criminal organizations took advantage of the circumstances to grow their operations. In these circumstances, ASEAN's response has typically been reactive and focused more on state security than on providing direct victim protection.

2.3 ASEAN Plan of Action and Regional Approaches

The ASEAN Plan of Action Against Trafficking in Persons (APA) was formulated as an implementation guideline for ACTIP covering prevention, victim protection, law enforcement, and regional cooperation. This document demonstrates that, normatively, ASEAN has begun to adopt a more victim-oriented approach and a stronger emphasis on human rights protection.

Nevertheless, there are still a number of issues with the APA's implementation. There is a substantial disconnect between ASEAN's normative pledges and their actual application in the field. Many member states continue to have inadequate victim identification systems, few protection facilities, and restricted victim access to legal aid and psychosocial rehabilitation (Jaya et al. 2023)

3. Evaluating ASEAN's Effectiveness from a Human Security Perspective

This section assesses ASEAN's effectiveness in addressing human trafficking against migrant workers in the Myanmar–Thailand corridor from a Human Security perspective. The analysis focuses on three key dimensions: economic security, personal security, and political security. Furthermore, it examines the institutional and political constraints that continue to affect the implementation and effectiveness of ASEAN's regional mechanisms in combating human trafficking.

3.1 Economic Security

Viewed through the lens of economic security, ASEAN's efforts to combat human trafficking have yet to adequately address the underlying economic conditions that make migrant workers vulnerable to exploitation. Persistent poverty, unemployment, and economic disparities between Myanmar and Thailand continue to drive labour migration, often through irregular channels. While ASEAN has developed several regional instruments, including ACTIP and the ASEAN Plan of Action Against Trafficking in Persons, much of the emphasis has been placed on strengthening legal and enforcement measures. Comparatively less attention has been directed toward reducing the economic pressures that frequently compel individuals to accept unsafe migration arrangements. Consequently, many migrant workers remain exposed to trafficking risks due to limited access to secure migration pathways, decent employment opportunities, and effective social protection.

3.2 Personal Security

With regard to personal security, ASEAN has taken important steps to enhance cooperation among member states in addressing human trafficking. Mechanisms such as ACTIP, ASEANAPOL, and SOMTC have contributed to greater coordination in information exchange and cross-border law

enforcement efforts. Nevertheless, the experiences of many trafficking victims suggest that significant protection gaps remain. Cases involving forced labour, physical abuse, exploitation, debt bondage, and restrictions on freedom of movement continue to be reported across the region. In addition, access to legal support, healthcare services, and rehabilitation programs remains uneven. These conditions indicate that regional initiatives have not yet fully ensured the protection and recovery of trafficking victims.

3.3 Political Security

Political insecurity has become a critical factor shaping trafficking dynamics in the Myanmar–Thailand corridor. Following the military coup in Myanmar in 2021, widespread instability, armed violence, and internal displacement disrupted the lives of millions of people. Faced with deteriorating economic and political conditions, many individuals sought opportunities outside the country, often relying on irregular migration routes. This situation created favourable conditions for traffickers to target vulnerable populations. Although ASEAN has engaged diplomatically in response to the crisis, its actions have been constrained by long-standing principles of non-interference and respect for national sovereignty. As a result, ASEAN has encountered considerable challenges in addressing the political circumstances that continue to fuel trafficking and increase the vulnerability of migrant workers.

3.4 The Gap Between Normative Commitments and Implementation

An evaluation of ASEAN's effectiveness demonstrates a significant gap between normative commitments and policy implementation in practice. Although ASEAN possesses various legal instruments and regional cooperation mechanisms, protection for victims of human trafficking remains inadequate.

ACTIP implementation is still unequal among ASEAN member states. While some nations continue to struggle with insufficient law enforcement and institutional capability, others have built comparatively better national laws and victim protection systems (Jaya et al. 2023).

3.5 The Constraints of the Non-Intervention Principle

One of the principal obstacles to ASEAN's effectiveness is the dominance of the non-intervention principle within the organization's institutional culture. ASEAN places strong emphasis on respect for the sovereignty of member states, thereby limiting the regional organization's ability to exercise political pressure or monitor the implementation of domestic policies (Mely Caballero-Anthony, 2021).

Because of this, ASEAN lacks supranational organizations and penalty mechanisms that might guarantee the uniform application of ACTIP throughout all of its member nations. ASEAN has also encountered political challenges in addressing a domestic crisis in post-coup Myanmar, which directly led to the rise in trafficking in the area.

3.6 The Dominance of a State-Centric Security Approach

ASEAN's response to human trafficking continues to be shaped by a state-centric security approach that prioritizes law enforcement and the preservation of state stability. From a Human Security perspective, however, the effectiveness of anti-trafficking measures should not be assessed solely by the number of arrests and prosecutions, but also by the extent to which they enhance the protection, well-being, and recovery of trafficking victims.

This perspective emphasizes that security should be measured by individuals' ability to live free from fear, exploitation, and structural vulnerabilities. Despite being rescued from trafficking situations, many victims continue to face risks such as deportation, criminalization, and limited access to legal assistance, rehabilitation services, and long-term recovery support. These challenges indicate that existing responses have not fully addressed the broader human security needs of trafficking victims.

3.7 Limitations in Victim Protection

Even while ASEAN highlights the value of a victim-centered approach in a number of regional papers, there is still very little actual victim protection. Many victims of human trafficking lack proper access to healthcare, psychosocial support, legal aid, and economic reintegration.

Furthermore, rather than being viewed as victims of exploitation, illegal migrant workers are often punished as immigration criminals. Many victims are afraid to report this scenario to law enforcement because they fear being arrested or being compelled to return home.

3.8 Opportunities and Strategic Recommendations

Despite ASEAN's various limitations in addressing human trafficking in the Myanmar–Thailand corridor, several strategic opportunities may strengthen the effectiveness of regional responses in the future.

First, through better organised and quantifiable regional monitoring systems, ASEAN must bolster the implementation of ACTIP. It is necessary to have a regional monitoring system that can more consistently assess member nations' adherence to anti-trafficking pledges. Second, a victim protection strategy grounded in human security principles must be strengthened by ASEAN. In addition to law enforcement, ASEAN's reaction should emphasise victim recovery through socioeconomic reintegration, legal protection, healthcare, and psychosocial support. Third, improving legal migration routes for migrant workers from Myanmar is a crucial step in lowering reliance on unofficial recruiters and illicit migration routes. Human trafficking and exploitation dangers may be lessened via safe and lawful migration routes. Fourth, ASEAN's cooperation with international organizations and civil society actors needs to be strengthened. Organizations such as the International Organization for Migration, International Labour Organization, and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees possess important operational capacities in protecting migrant workers and trafficking victims. Fifth, ASEAN needs to enhance regional cooperation capacity in addressing emerging forms of digital-based trafficking such as cyber scam trafficking, which has expanded in the Thailand-Myanmar border areas. This requires stronger intelligence cooperation, cross-border data sharing, and increased oversight of digital criminal networks in Southeast Asia.

Accordingly, strengthening ASEAN's effectiveness requires not only the addition of normative instruments, but also a transformation of the regional approach from a state-centric orientation toward a human-centered security approach that places the protection of individuals as the primary priority.

CONCLUSIONS

Alongside the worsening of Myanmar's political and security circumstances after the 2021 military takeover, human trafficking targeting migrant labourers along the Myanmar–Thailand corridor escalated dramatically between 2021 and 2025. In addition to weakening official protection for society, the crisis increased the vulnerability of migrant workers to forced labour, human trafficking, and labour exploitation. In this regard, human trafficking represents a larger human security concern that jeopardises people's economic, personal, and political security in addition to being a transnational criminal problem.

Through a number of regional frameworks and mechanisms, including the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ACTIP), ASEANAPOL, the Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC), and the ASEAN Plan of Action Against Trafficking in Persons, ASEAN has made an effort as a regional organization to address the problem of human trafficking. Normatively speaking, the presence of these tools shows a significant advancement in ASEAN's regional dedication to preventing human trafficking and safeguarding migrant labourers.

ASEAN's effectiveness in addressing human trafficking in the Myanmar–Thailand corridor remains limited. Due to poor coordination among member states, differences in institutional capabilities, and the predominance of the non-intervention principle, which restricts ASEAN's capacity to carry out efficient monitoring and policy enforcement, the implementation of various regional mechanisms has not performed at its best. As a result, there is still a significant disconnect between ASEAN's normative obligations and the actual state of victim protection.

From a Human Security perspective, ASEAN has not yet been able to fully ensure the economic security, personal security, and political security of migrant workers in the Myanmar–Thailand corridor. While regional mechanisms have contributed to strengthening normative commitments and cross-border cooperation, significant vulnerabilities continue to persist due to economic inequalities, inadequate victim protection, and ongoing political instability in Myanmar.

This analysis shows that ASEAN's response is still largely shaped by a state-centric security approach that prioritizes law enforcement and state stability over the direct protection of vulnerable individuals. Therefore, enhancing ASEAN's effectiveness requires a shift toward a more human-centered security approach. This can be achieved by strengthening the implementation of ACTIP, improving protection mechanisms for migrant workers, expanding safe and legal migration pathways, and increasing regional and international cooperation in preventing and responding to human trafficking.

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