

PRESS RELEASE



United Nations Development Programme

Migration policy reforms in Malaysia could increase gains for the country, says new UN report

Human Development Report 2009 calls for an expansion of legal channels for migrants; also for the protection of migrant rights and welfare

Kuala Lumpur, 6 October 2009 – Countries that are destinations for migrants, including Malaysia, should expand legal channels for migrants and strengthen protection of their rights in order to maximize the potential gains from human mobility, according to the UNDP's 2009 global Human Development Report (HDR).

Themed "*Overcoming barriers: Human mobility and development*", the flagship report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was launched in Kuala Lumpur today by Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, Tan Sri Nor Mohamed bin Yakcop, following a global launch in Bangkok by the Thai Prime Minister and UNDP Administrator, Helen Clark, on October 5.

"Mobility is a basic element of freedom, bringing with it improved opportunities for work, education, political rights, safety and health care to migrants, but also potentially large gains for source communities and countries, as well as destination countries, such as Malaysia", said Kamal Malhotra, Resident Representative for UNDP in Malaysia and Resident Coordinator of the United Nations in Malaysia.

Mr. Malhotra, citing the positive impact of migrant labour for Malaysia's development story over the last few decades, stressed the Report's assertion that more gains from migration could be gained if migration policy were built into national development policy, allowing both high and low-skilled workers to complement the local workforce legally, in line with Malaysia's plan to transition to a high income economy by 2020.

In his official address, Tan Sri Nor Mohamed bin Yakcop, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department said, "Migration has the potential to enhance economic development – both for source and destination countries and regions. Thus, policies need to be developed and adapted over time, to ensure that it continues to be mutually beneficial and in line with the evolving developmental needs of the economy".

In presenting the highlights of the 2009 HDR, the Report's lead author and Director of the UNDP's Human Development Report Office in New York, Ms. Jeni Klugman, said, "Contrary to popular public perception, the Report shows that migration can and has been a positive force for human development, improving opportunities for income, education and healthcare for the world's one billion migrants, who oftentimes are the poorest".

Elaborating, Ms. Klugman said, "Through extensive research, the Report shows that migrants can and have much to contribute to receiving countries, such as Malaysia, if their basic rights and access to services are ensured through migration policies that promote regularization and ease of entry in accordance with the country's developmental needs".

According to the Report, South East Asia is a major hub for migration in the world, where almost 36 million people participate in intra-Asian migration. Moreover, Asia accounts for almost 20% of all international migration.

Due to its economic prosperity and rapid economic growth over many decades, the Report cites Malaysia as a major destination country for poorer citizens of neighbouring countries. It hosted approximately 2.1 million legal migrants out of a total workforce of 12 million in 2008; it is also estimated that a quarter of all Malaysia's migrants are irregular.

The Report also highlights that high barriers for migration in South East Asia, such as protectionist policies that favour local workers, as well as the high cost of moving, are factors that have encouraged the growth of irregular migrants who felt increased pressure to move despite increased personal risks such as arrest, detention and human trafficking. For example, the Report indicates that a low-skilled Indonesian worker would have to pay 6.5 months in salary to work in Malaysia or Singapore, 8 months salary to work in Hong Kong China and 14 months salary to work in Taiwan Province of China.

Recognising the right of people at destination places to shape their societies, the Report does not advocate wholesale liberalization in migration policies. Instead, it has developed a core policy package of 6 proposals that can support governments in developing pro-migration policies that are mutually beneficial to both receiving countries and well as to the migrants themselves.

"As a key partner in development with governments worldwide, the UNDP is pleased that this year's Report will provide valuable insight into and guidance on this complex issue, helping key destination countries like Malaysia manage their migrant populations more effectively and humanely, whilst simultaneously reaping the economic benefits and minimizing anti-migrant backlash", said Mr. Malhotra.

In the conclusion of his speech, Mr. Malhotra noted a particular finding in the Report which indicated that Malaysians were the least in favour of welcoming migrant workers, according to a 2005/2006 survey of 46 countries worldwide that looked at attitudes of locals towards migrant workers.

"I am confident that the 2009 HDR's comprehensive and thorough look at migration will do much to dispel misconceptions on the issue, including the perceived threat of migrant workers to local livelihoods, which becomes more exaggerated in times of economic uncertainty, despite the lack of evidence to support this claim", said Mr. Malhotra.

To promote discourse on the issue of migration for society at large, a panel discussion was held following the launch, moderated by Datuk Dr. Denison Jayasooria, Human Rights Commissioner with the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM). Panel members also included Ms. Florida Sandanasamy, Programme Coordinator for the Migrant Rights Working Group and Mr. Alan Vernon, UNHCR Representative in Malaysia, who were joined by Ms. Klugman during the Q&A session that followed the panel discussion.

Human Development Index

Also released today as part of the 2009 Human Development Report was the latest Human Development Index (HDI), a summary indicator of people's well-being, combining measures of life expectancy, literacy, school enrolment and GDP per capita. Malaysia ranked **66th out of 182 countries** with a HDI of 0.829. Neighbouring Singapore ranked 23rd (0.944), Thailand ranked 87th (0.783), and Indonesia came in at 111th (0.734). The number 1 ranking went to Norway (0.971).

This year's HDI, which is based on 2007 data, highlights the very large gaps in well-being and life chances that continue to divide our increasingly interconnected world. It shows that despite progress in many areas over the last 25 years, the disparities in people's well-being in rich and poor countries continue to be unacceptably wide.

To access the 2009 Human Development Report, please visit: www.hdr.undp.org

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ABOUT THIS REPORT: *The Human Development Report continues to frame debates on some of the most pressing challenges facing humanity. It is an independent report commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Jeni Klugman is the lead author of the 2009 report. The Report is translated into more than a dozen languages and launched in more than 100 countries annually.*

ABOUT HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: *Human Development is the expansion of the freedoms that people have to live their lives as they choose. This conception—inspired by the path-breaking work of Nobel laureate Amartya Sen and the leadership of the late Mahbub ul Haq, and known also as the capabilities approach because of its emphasis on the freedom that people have to achieve vital 'beings and doings'—has been at the core of UNDP's approach since the first Human Development Report in 1990, and is as relevant as ever to the design of effective policies to combat poverty and deprivation. This approach has proved powerful in reshaping thinking about topics as diverse as gender, human security and climate change.*

ABOUT UNDP: *UNDP is the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life. We are on the ground in 166 countries, working with them on their own solutions to global and national development challenges. As they develop local capacity, they draw on the people of UNDP and our wide range of partners.*

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Issued by UNDP Malaysia.

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