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▶ **For women,
by women:**

Guidance and activities
for building women migrant
workers' networks

Supported by



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Guidance and activities for building women migrant workers' networks

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► Foreword

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen a large number of migrant workers return to their homes in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region. With restrictions on mobility continuing, return and reintegration support for migrant workers has never been so important.

Before COVID-19, women migrant workers would leave their communities to work overseas with the hope of supporting themselves and improving their family's livelihood. While efforts can and should be made to ensure migrant workers retain their jobs, many have had to return home for the foreseeable future. In fact, the World Bank has estimated that remittances sent by migrant workers will fall by 14 per cent in 2020, compared with pre-pandemic levels.

While it is expected that labour migration will resume in a post-pandemic world, migration should be a choice and not a substitute for creating decent jobs in the country itself. Experience has shown that there is no one better placed to inform and design return and reintegration services that meet the needs of migrant workers and their communities than migrant workers and communities themselves.

The ILO recognizes that support for return and reintegration is crucial to realizing the potential development benefits of migration. In 2020, the circumstances of such returns have required a change in approach. This document provides guidance on how women migrant workers who have returned home can be supported to form networks that can contribute to local development, to the building of communities and to their own resilience.



This guidance on the formation of women's networks draws on lessons learned from providing return and reintegration services to migrant workers, including through the ILO's TRIANGLE in ASEAN programme. These services, the lessons learned and how these learnings can assist other service providers seeking to support returning migrant women need to be examined with a critical eye to ensure that best practices are carried forward into the responses we deliver through this pandemic. In this respect, this guidance is also indebted to the Women's Exchange model successfully implemented by the MAP Foundation.

This guidance outlines how migrant women's groups can be catalysed; what expectations service providers, donors and the development community should have for network building; and how to best spark the beginnings of women's collective action. It reflects the goals and ethos of women's equality and empowerment, and highlights the voices of women migrant workers themselves to help service providers, including MRC staff, best serve these women. First and foremost, it recognizes the need to provide conditions in which such networks can grow organically, and to ensure such groups are women-led, women-owned and women-driven in their structure, goals and delivery.

TRIANGLE in ASEAN's Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality Strategy also embodies these values. The Strategy has ensured that gender mainstreaming occurs in all programme activities, advocacy and interventions, and that a substantial proportion of activities target women specifically. This Strategy, developed by TRIANGLE in ASEAN in partnership with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia (DFAT) and Global Affairs Canada (GAC), is crucial in working toward the goal that the benefits of labour migration are equally realized by migrant workers of all genders, employers and governments – a goal that is vital for shaping inclusive and transformative legislation and policy.

Especially for women migrant workers, the opportunity that migration offers to experience and express one's own agency can be radical. On return, harnessing that experience to share with other migrant women, to build collective pressure in advocating for gender equality in migration and beyond, and to amplify women's voices through solidarity and networking is a precursor to women also being able to enjoy the economic benefits of migration to the fullest.

This guidance is designed specifically for use by those who share these values, and who hold the long-term view that women's migration is an opportunity to claim social and economic power, as well as to bring more migrant women into a global conversation on decent work, labour rights and equality. The ultimate beneficiaries, however, are women migrant workers themselves, in the hope that this can be a foundation for creating the space, time and freedom they need to change their own journeys and their own lives.



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ILO Assistant Director-General and Regional Director
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► Acknowledgements

The ILO, through its TRIANGLE in ASEAN programme, aims to ensure the benefits of labour migration are equally realized by women and men migrant workers, employers and governments. To do this, TRIANGLE in ASEAN recognizes the need to strive for gender transformation in families, communities and workplaces. With the support of TRIANGLE in ASEAN's donors, women's empowerment is a crucial goal. The authors are grateful for the steadfast support to advancing gender equality within the framework of this programme.

Learnings that informed this paper were made possible through the contributions of TRIANGLE in ASEAN programme partners the Cambodian Labour Confederation (CLC) and the Phnom Srey Organization for Development (PSOD). With the assistance of the CLC and PSOD, the ILO facilitated focus group discussions with returned migrant women and representatives from the Commune Committee for Women and Children in Kampong Cham and Prey Veng. The women who participated in these discussions provided us with invaluable insights into their migration experiences that instigated the development of this guidance.

A special thank you to the Cambodian TRIANGLE in ASEAN team in Phnom Penh, for their work in planning, preparing and drafting this guidance, including Veth Vorn and Raksa Preap. Alex Shepherd completed the research for the guidance and authored early drafts. The guidance also benefited from the invaluable contributions and support of Anna Olsen, Jackie Pollock, Andreas Schmidt, Anna Engblom and Rebecca Napier-Moore. Design was completed by Florian Saint-Aubin and editing by John Maloy.

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1



1. Introduction

Women's groups – formal and informal – have long been the force behind community and societal shifts that have delivered progress towards gender equality. Research has demonstrated that group, network and (ultimately) movement building is the best way to ensure women's rights are realized.¹ The establishment of these groups has been a clear goal for many development initiatives, with vastly differing levels of success. Migrant women's support groups have been considered, planned and programmed across the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region in an attempt to ensure women migrant worker voices are heard in policy, advocacy and programming, and in the design and delivery of return and reintegration programming that would realize the development goals of many migration policies. Drawn from this understanding, and with a commitment to the formation of women's collectives, this guidance outlines steps that may assist in catalysing sustainable women migrant worker groups that serve not only these goals, but also the women themselves.

Migration for work has been considered an “empowering” experience for women migrant workers, and the migration and development discourse has emphasized the development potential of migration, especially for women. Unfortunately, the regular migration channels and jobs available to migrating women remain limited, and many migrant work experiences have been characterized by poor working conditions, lack of labour protection, discriminatory practices, exploitation and abuse. In some cases, this has amounted to forced labour or human trafficking. Migrant women's groups may – in part – begin to counter some of the systemic and implementation barriers to positive migration experiences for women migrant workers.

► 1.1. What is a migrant women's network and why do we need one?

► What?

A migrant women's group is a collective of women who have all either experienced, or been affected by, migration. These women engage and use their collective connectivity to drive support and better outcomes for individuals within the group and in their communities.

► Why?

A migrant women's group fosters power, solidarity, sisterhood and social cohesion; uses common experiences to cultivate shared solutions to challenges and counter the sometimes isolating experience of migration; and may amplify women's voices in policy dialogue. Women's groups are known to have advanced gender equality.

This guidance draws together a theoretical basis and values framework that underpins women's collectives, and outlines steps for building groups among returned migrant women. It draws on lessons learned from previous successful and unsuccessful attempts to stimulate sustainable migrant women's groups. It aims to deliver a model of migrant women's groups that is adaptable, inclusive and

¹ Mala Htun and S. Laurel Weldon, “The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1975–2005”, *American Political Science Review*, 106, No. 3 (2013), 548–569.

women-centred, and that gives rise to the numerous ancillary – and often unanticipated – benefits seen when women claim their collective power in any society.

► 1.2. Why now?

The COVID-19 pandemic saw tens of thousands of ASEAN migrant workers returning to their countries and communities of origin, either due to job loss or the desire to be closer to family in troubling times.² Unfortunately, the conditions in many of the labour markets and communities to which they returned have not changed for the better, and many returned migrant women especially are struggling to find work or ways to support their livelihoods.

With many migrant workers now back in their home communities, there is an opportunity to support returned migrant women and provide a platform for them to consider their current needs and options for the future. The current proportion of women migrants at home offers a unique opportunity to share migration experiences and create networks that can support future migration plans – or even policies – or devise ways to support productive investment of remittances. Regardless of the specific timeliness of establishing women's groups now, women's groups will always be needed to advance equality.

► 1.3. Why focus on reintegration?

All migrant workers possess substantial development potential. In the short term, migrant workers' remittances are regularly used to support their families' livelihoods. In the longer term, remittances can be used to support investment in resources and infrastructure, for example, improving a house, establishing a new business or buying land. Successful labour migration (including the return and reintegration phases) and a migrant worker's contribution to development are dependent on a worker's experiences during all stages of the labour migration cycle, including pre-departure, departure, their time overseas and their return and reintegration experience (figure 1).

Reintegration is multifaceted. It can be said to be positively realized when a migrant worker returns to a situation of decent work, or with productive investments, to a community where their migrant work experience is respected and valued for its contribution. Successful reintegration for migrant workers will reflect the complex and interconnected issues around return, and the range of issues faced by migrant workers abroad, and may include recovery from instances of abuse, exploitation and fraud.³ Recent surveys have highlighted the need for programmes to address and resolve issues associated with unemployment, insufficient savings, low wages and the range of social, emotional and mental well-being issues that can impact returned migrant workers.⁴ All of these reintegration challenges are amplified when the returns are hasty, or unplanned, as many have been during the response to COVID-19. For women, all of these issues are also impacted by their experience of their gender in this context.

² See, among others, ILO, "Experiences of ASEAN Migrant Workers during COVID-19: Rights at Work, Migration and Quarantine during the Pandemic, and Re-migration Plans", ILO Brief, 3 June (2020).

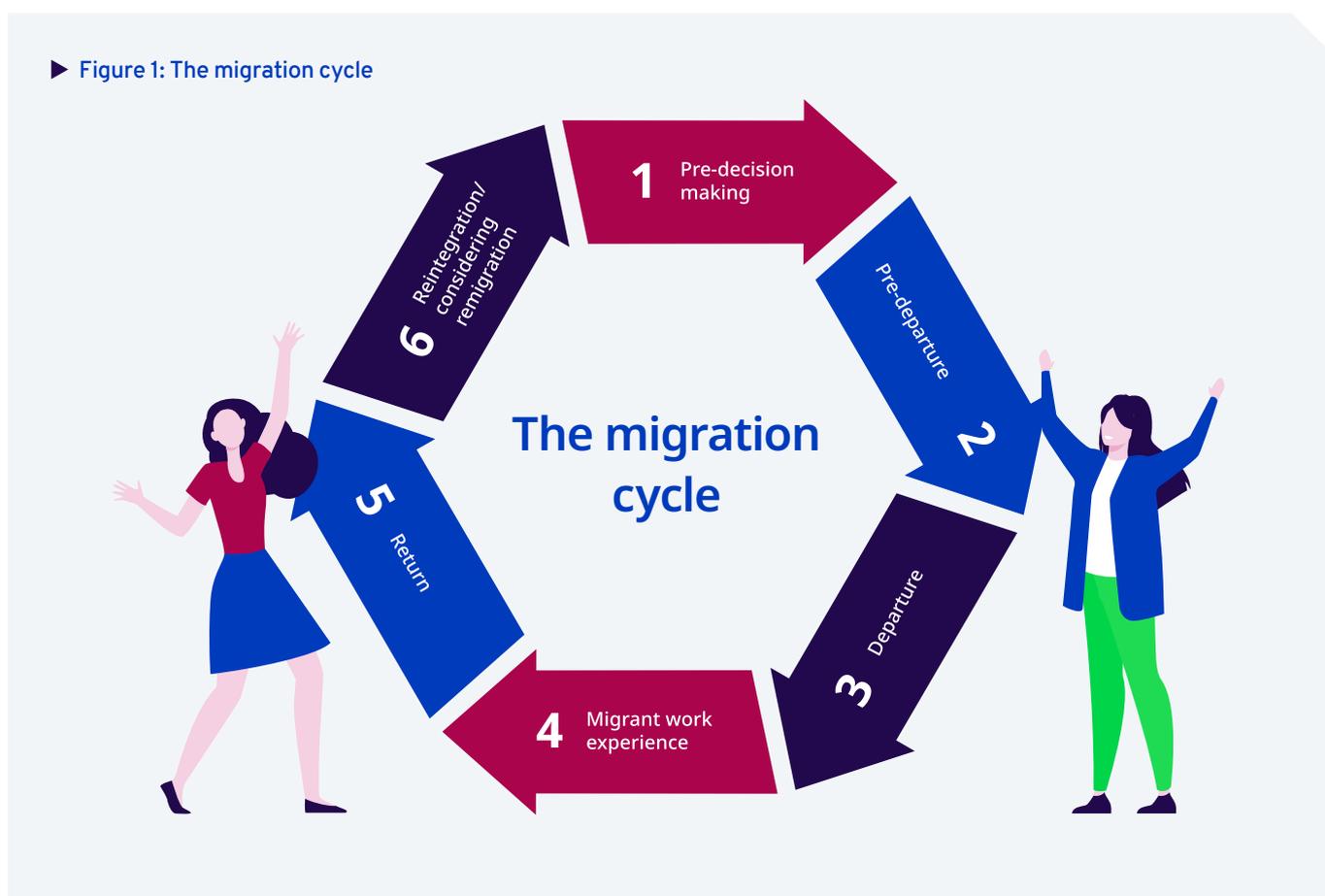
³ See, among others:

- Piyasiri Wickramasekara, *Effective Return and Reintegration of Migrant Workers with Special Focus on ASEAN Member States* (ILO, 2019).

- Justice Without Borders, *Annual Report 2019: Justice Without Borders – Because the Right to Just Compensation Shouldn't End Even When a Victim Returns Home* (2020).

⁴ Benjamin Harkins, Daniel Lindgren, and Tarinee Suravoranon, *Risks and Rewards: Outcomes of Labour Migration in South-East Asia* (ILO and IOM, 2017).

► Figure 1: The migration cycle



1.3.1. Return and reintegration create possibilities

A migrant worker's experiences mean they have had exposure to new environments. Many workers return to their homes with new employment skills and expertise. Often this is complemented with newly acquired and valuable soft skills: language and communication skills, a greater sense of independence, experience with teamwork and problem solving. For many women, migrant work can be a time of self-discovery, and a demonstration of reserves of strength and resilience that the women may not have previously been aware of.

These soft skills and self-awareness can be especially useful as they are transferable between workplaces and can be applied in different contexts. However, a migrant workers' ability to leverage their migrant work experience, including their newly acquired skills, and subsequently transform their learning into improvements in their lives upon returning home is affected by many factors, including the nature and circumstances of their return and reintegration.

Throughout South-East Asia, governments have been rightfully focused on protecting migrant workers throughout their migrant work experience, but this has often resulted in less attention being given to the return and reintegration of migrant workers.⁵ Recruitment agencies have not historically offered or been obliged to offer return and reintegration support beyond return travel, and many other service providers tend to focus on the provision of legal assistance, rather than holistic support. A survey of

⁵ Piyasiri Wickramasekara, *Effective Return and Reintegration of Migrant Workers with Special Focus on ASEAN Member States* (ILO, 2019).

migrant workers in the region found only 8 per cent accessed services to assist with reintegration.⁶ Simply put, many countries of origin do not have the financial or human resources to deliver comprehensive return and reintegration programmes at this time; a network of returned migrant women's networks can begin to fill this gap.

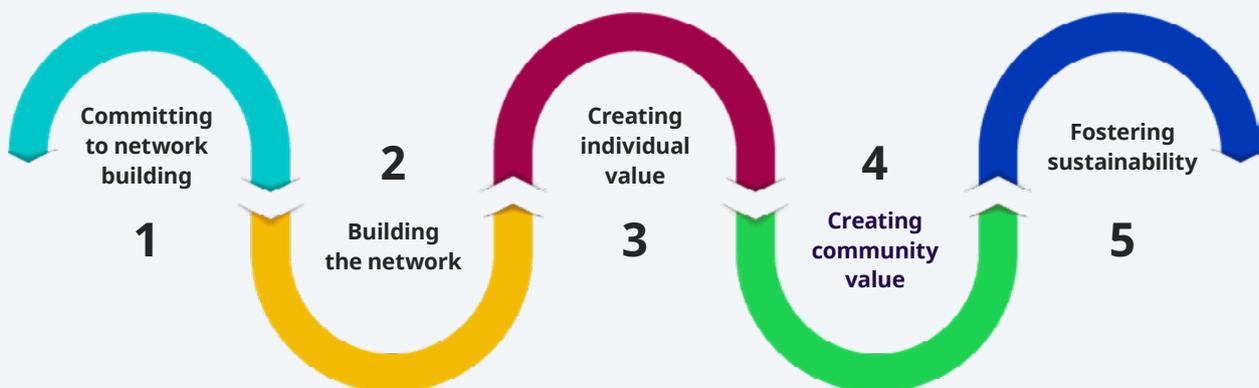
► 1.4. About this Guidance

This guidance takes readers – programme designers and service providers – through the conceptual foundation and suggested steps in building a successful migrant women's network, identified as:

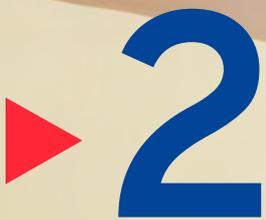
- committing to the network building;
- building the network;
- creating individual and community value in the network; and then
- ensuring a symbiotic relationship – where the community and the network within it are mutually reinforcing (figure 2).

This last step is where the success of the endeavour to build a network and its sustainability may be assessed in terms of project or partner evaluation. For the women engaged, successes and failures will be constantly and personally assessed, and by their nature, the groups should constantly evolve and never reach a “final stage”. The ultimate goal of these networks is to become self-sustaining and embedded in their communities.

► Figure 2: The steps of building and sustaining a migrant women's network



⁶ Benjamin Harkins, Daniel Lindgren and Tarinee Suravoranon, *Risks and Rewards: Outcomes of Labour Migration in South-East Asia* (ILO and IOM, 2017).



2. Values and theoretical framework

This guidance believes that migrant women's groups are a positive development for women and the broader community. The theoretical framework on which this guidance is based is that when women are able to claim space and power and begin to influence their immediate communities, it provides the catalyst for gender-transformative collective action. The goals of any women's group – like those of any group aiming to realize gender equality – should be expansive, ambitious and idealistic, and driven by the women participating in the group. Migrant women's groups should seek to address both practical and strategic needs, and not be bound by programme delivery alone.

It should be noted that this guidance does not make an assessment or stocktaking of the full and rich experience of building women's groups in Asia. There are numerous resources related to specific kinds of women's groups and further academic work on women's groups as catalysts for change that can be accessed by interested readers.⁷

► 2.1. Grounding network building in shared value

This guidance is grounded in a women-centred approach, and trusts that the women engaged are best placed to steer the direction and goals of the network and ensure its sustainability, rather than development actors that may seek to fulfil particular predetermined programmatic goals and indicators.

Network and group building in this guidance is enshrined in a human rights-based approach to development, as it supports the creation and implementation of place-based and co-designed solutions. This kind of peer- and participatory-driven learning inherently rejects didactic methods. Instead, a facilitator – or ideally, and eventually, a participant – oversees inclusive learning activities and guides participants through group-based activities that are selected and agreed upon by the group.

This approach is particularly valuable in the migration context, as the shared and collective experiences of migrant women means they are well-positioned to support each other and collectively tackle some of the hurdles that they face on return, and avoids a top-down structure that can alienate participants.

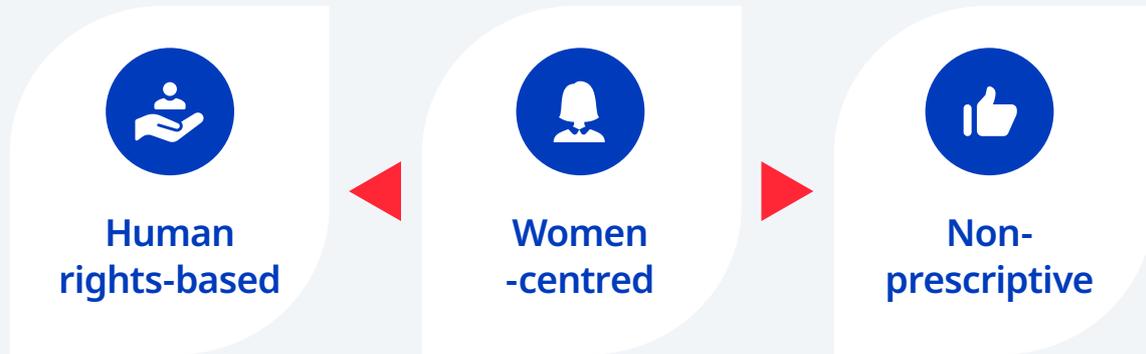
⁷ Concerning different kinds of women's groups, see, among others:

- Eva Majurin, *Business Groups Formation: Empowering Women and Men in Developing Communities* (ILO, 2008).
- Susanne Bauer, Gerry Finnegan, and Nelien Haspels, *Get Ahead for Women in Enterprise: Training and Resource Kit* (ILO, 2004).
- ILO, *Organizing Women Migrant Workers: Manual for Trade Unionists in ASEAN* (forthcoming).

Concerning assessments of women's groups, see, among others:

- World Health Organization, *Tackling Social and Economic Determinants of Health through Women's Empowerment: The SEWA Case Study* (2008).
- Alexandra Bernasek, "Banking on Social Change: Grameen Bank Lending to Women", *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 16 (2003), 369–385.

► Figure 3: Essential characteristics of the approach to developing migrant women's groups and networks



► 2.2. Experience and lessons learned

While this guidance is a regional tool, aimed for use by TRIANGLE in ASEAN partners in any ASEAN Member State, or by ILO programmes or programmers beyond the TRIANGLE in ASEAN framework, the inspiration for the guidance came from work in Cambodia. In March 2020, the Cambodian TRIANGLE in ASEAN team met with returned women migrant workers and other relevant stakeholders in Kampong Cham and Prey Veng, including Migrant Worker Resource Centre (MRC) staff, representatives from the Commune Committee for Women and Children (CCWC), and the relevant Provincial Departments of Labour and Vocational Training. With the assistance of the Cambodian Labour Confederation (CLC) and Phnom Srey Organization for Development (PSOD), the ILO conducted two focus group discussions, each with around ten returned women migrant workers.⁸ Representatives from the relevant CCWC also attended these focus groups. These meetings enabled the ILO to gather qualitative information regarding the experiences of migrant women workers that have been used to inform this guidance.

This guidance has been developed using the insights gained from these focus groups, and from additional research and information gathered from the experiences of TRIANGLE in ASEAN programme staff, implementing partners and clients over years of implementation. The guidance draws heavily from the experience of the Women's Exchange, as implemented by the MAP Foundation since 1999 (see the box below).

⁸ A focus group with ten returned women migrant workers was hosted by the CLC in Prey Veng on 10 March 2020; another hosted by the PSOD engaged with 12 returned women migrant workers and 1 returned male migrant worker on 11 March 2020.

► Women's Exchange by MAP Foundation: A Case Study

Started in 1999 by the MAP Foundation, the Women's Exchange is a women-only space where women from Myanmar can learn about their rights, share experiences and problems, and solve them together. Realizing the need for such spaces, the Women's Exchange model was exported to numerous other locations all along the Thai-Myanmar border. As of 2020, Women's Exchange groups are regular forums in over 12 locations, where every couple of months, migrant and refugee women of different ethnicities, ages, occupations and backgrounds gather to learn from each other, build community, and find ways to resolve their problems. This kind of gathering has become essential because migrant women often feel unable to open up and share their problems and feelings in traditional settings that often centre around religion. Also, as migrants, they have little personal space, with most working during the day, and taking care of domestic chores for their family the rest of the time. Women's Exchange groups are often the only place where these women can relax, have fun and learn something for their benefit. The groups now also help provide crisis management, in part through the leaders' linkages to a network of organizations in their communities that can further assist women.

The MAP Foundation provides support for the monthly meetings and help with networking. Beyond that, the groups are self-run and non-prescriptive, with migrant women leaders, who are selected by the group and receive capacity building from the MAP Foundation, organizing the activities. The leaders may also receive some technical support as necessary. These leaders participate in a couple of Training of Trainers each year to build their confidence and learn practical things, such as how to organize groups and manage expenses, to more intangible things like leadership, facilitation, counselling skills, stress management and how to speak as a representative of the group. They also learn about issues such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-based and domestic violence, labour rights, and migration policies. Part of the leadership experience includes participating in the annual Women's Exchange Get Together, which brings together over 120 Women's Exchange leaders for five days of capacity building in Chiang Mai and culminates with a march on International Women's Day in coordination with a network of local women's organizations, including indigenous and ethnic minority groups, sex workers, people living with HIV (PLHIV), LGBTQIA+ and handicapped women.

2021 will mark the 20th generation of women leaders to pass through the Women's Exchange, as supported by the MAP Foundation. Most recently, groups of HIV-positive migrant women in Thailand and Myanmar, as well as returned women migrants at the border and upcountry, have started their own Women's Exchange groups, independent of, but linked to, the MAP Foundation. This is an example of how women's groups can transition into becoming independent entities. Women's Exchange leaders have helped take care of domestic violence cases; organized factory workers to demand improved working conditions and wages; helped women receive proper maternity rights under social security schemes; advocated to the Myanmar Government for PLHIV migrant women to have access to treatment immediately upon return home; and have assisted with distributing relief during the COVID-19 crisis in Thailand.



▶ 3

3. Committing to network building

Before beginning any kind of network or group building activities, commit to making the appropriate effort that will give the group the opportunity to thrive, and become sustainable. Too often service providers rush into these kinds of activities without having properly considered the ability of the organization to support such a group, the budget available to fund the development of the group, and the appropriate human resources and capacity. Consider the below points within your organization first, before inviting anyone to any activity or meeting (figure 4).

► Figure 4: Committing to network building



► 3.1. The role of the facilitator

Facilitators are critical in the earliest stages of network building. The first step in committing to network building is to determine if you have an appropriate woman or women to play the role of the facilitator in the initial stages of group building.

Ideally, the facilitator/s should – at least initially – be staff members of the service provider, with at least one woman being someone who has had previous engagement with migrant women, ideally from the communities being targeted for returned migrant women’s groups (figure 5). This will ensure a degree of familiarity and help to put the participants at more ease, and may also enable financial support to flow through existing channels. The facilitator/s will need to be women to ensure the space is women-only and that returned women migrant workers are able to discuss issues freely. This guidance strongly suggests an inclusive definition of women that can encourage participation of non-binary individuals in the group.⁹

► Figure 5: The ideal facilitator/s



The most important thing for facilitator/s to remember is that they are not a teacher. Instead, they are there to facilitate a discussion or activity that enables participants to teach and learn from each other. When setting a timeline for the group building, the facilitator should anticipate identifying, within a few sessions, women who may be capable of leading the group in future, and begin to step back from a prominent role at group meetings and events. A successful facilitation will result in all participants gradually gaining skills that would allow them all to lead similar groups in future.

⁹ "Gender binary" refers to the system that considers only two genders: woman and man. Gender non-binary is often used to refer to more diverse experiences or expressions of gender – beyond the woman–man binary – and can be considered more inclusive of the LGBTQIA+ communities. For further resources on this, see, among others:

- ILGA, ARC International and IBAHRI, *Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics at the Universal Periodic Review* (2016).
- UNDP and ILO, *Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics in China, the Philippines and Thailand* (2018).
- UNDP, *Leave No One Behind: Advancing Social, Economic, Cultural and Political Inclusion of LGBTI People in Asia and the Pacific – Summary* (2015).

The facilitator should adopt a strengths-based approach to their role – there is no one ideal way to facilitate. Some facilitators are loud and active in events; others are quiet and thoughtful. Beyond drawing on the facilitator's own strengths, facilitators should strive to create an inclusive environment, providing everyone with an opportunity to engage according to their own strengths. The facilitator, and the group, should respect all contributions and also consider group dynamics. For example, if some participants are more engaged than others, facilitators may like to provide an alternative platform for the others to contribute.

► 3.2. Selecting and capacitating facilitators

This guidance believes only women can facilitate these kinds of groups successfully, and facilitators should be aware of, and committed to, the values and theoretical framework outlined in the previous section. Moreover, the facilitator/s should be committed to the process, and be able to participate throughout the length of the agreed timeline for the initial stages of group building. Where no such facilitator/s can be identified, group building efforts should be postponed until they can be found.

While facilitator/s are not teachers, they do have an important role to ensure the health and well-being of participants, including preventing the spread of false and inaccurate information. While participants will be able to learn from each other, they may have knowledge gaps, which, if repeated by others, have the potential to put other women at risk or in danger. When this occurs, facilitator/s should have previously discussed how to deal with such issues and have protocols in place for how to address these situations. Where necessary, the facilitator should respectfully intervene to clarify misinformation, harmful stereotypes or prejudices, potentially using a “talk it through” approach. By asking questions, the facilitator/s can allow the group to reach the appropriate conclusion about the misperception or stereotype being expressed, without any individual feeling attacked or having their beliefs disrespected. If such instances persist over numerous meetings and set an undesirable path for the group, the facilitators may see fit to halt group proceedings, rather than provide a platform for ongoing reinforcement of negative or prejudicial attitudes.

As part of their role in ensuring the health and well-being of participants, if a woman mentions something that requires specific support or intervention, including specific labour and/or human rights abuses, facilitator/s should provide follow up support and/or referral to other service providers. Facilitator/s should be familiar with the services available in the area, and be able to suggest where women might be able to seek additional help.¹⁰ Of course, the group are likely to also have suggestions. Facilitator/s should also always plan to be available beyond the scheduled end of the meeting, as some participants may seek to approach them and discuss issues they were not comfortable raising as a part of the group. Facilitator/s should be aware that when women are given space and time to share and consider gender issues, it is inevitable that women will disclose experiences of domestic abuse and sexual assault and harassment. Facilitator/s need to be ready for these disclosures and should be equipped with capacity to provide initial mental health first aid where women might be distressed, and equipped with knowledge of the relevant service providers in the area that may be able to assist with specific services.

Despite these serious issues that the facilitator/s will need to be prepared for, one of the most important qualities that a facilitator can have is a sense of fun! Facilitator/s will need to be able to make all women welcome and relaxed, including first-time attendees, and continue to motivate the core group of women who may attend every session. The facilitator/s set the tone for group meetings and activities, and the ability to create safe, non-judgmental and supportive spaces will be critical to the success of the group.

¹⁰ Numerous reference materials on migration and local guides can be found online; the [TRIANGLE in ASEAN webpage](#) is one place to start. Where a Migrant Worker Resource Centre operates in the area, facilitators should link with this group to gather resources, including for referrals.

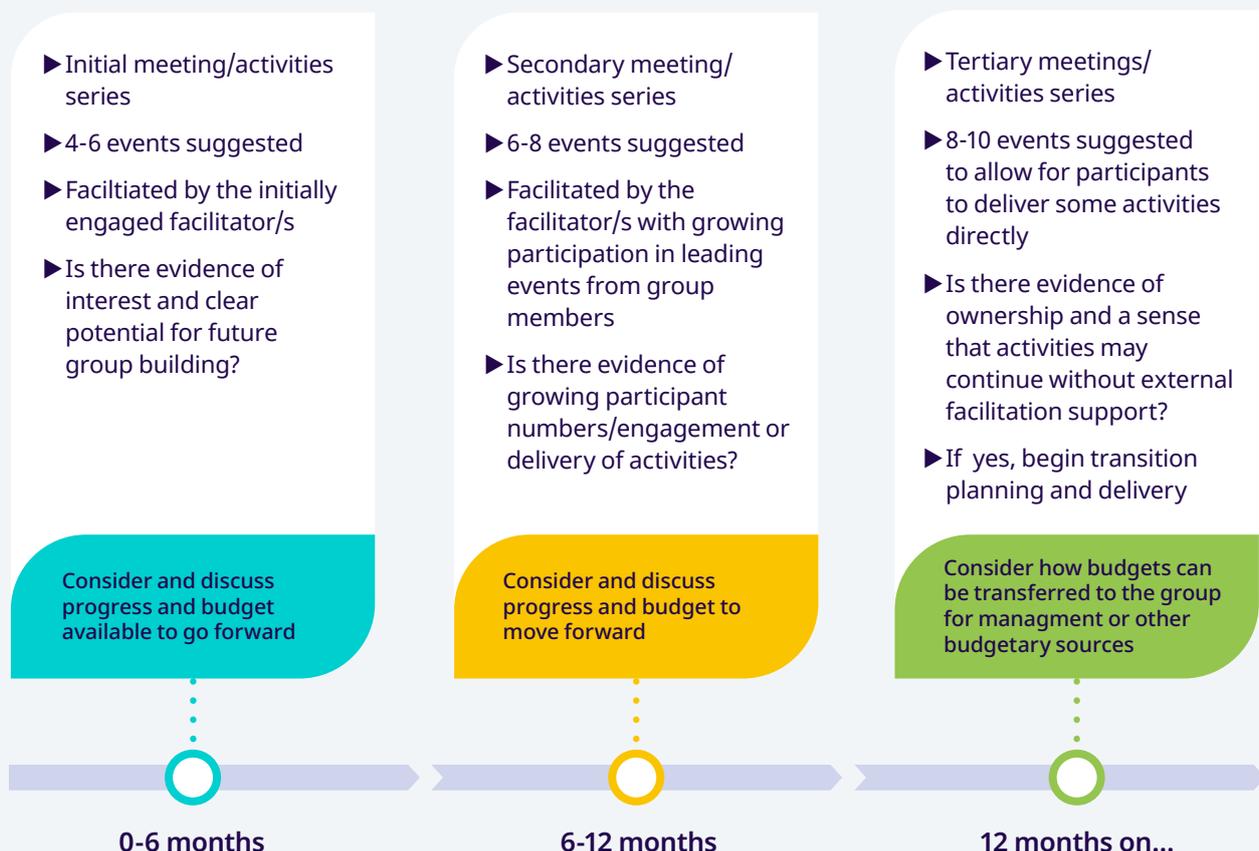
▶ 3.3. Setting a timeline and knowing when to stop

Not all groups work. It is important for the facilitator/s, and the service provider, to be able to determine how much effort – how many meetings or activities – will be initially committed to group building; when to continue to invest time and money; and when to stop. In part, this may be determined by the budget available, or the time that the facilitator/s will be able to support group building.

All groups are different. Some may take just a few meetings to begin to spark ideas and grow into participant-led groups. Some may take longer and require ongoing support. The facilitator/s, in discussion with the service provider or supporting institution, will need to make these decisions in an ongoing manner, reconsidering at the end of each activity or series of activities. At the outset of group building, it is vital to establish these common understandings among those engaged in group building, including the members, to begin to foster the sense of connectivity that will carry the group forward.

If the group is not working, and numbers of participants are dwindling or the group dynamic is not positive, efforts to build this network should stop. There is little chance of forcing a positive group outcome on a negative situation. Remember that women are spending their free time to be a part of the group, and there should be no need to compel or force attendance. There is no shame in not succeeding in building a network, and there should be no adverse organizational outcomes, as long as the expectations with the institutions have been adequately managed.

▶ Figure 6: Timeline of the group/network building process



► 3.4. Budget considerations

Network and group building need not be expensive, but some investment will be required. Women are likely to need financial support to attend – money to pay for transport or transport arranged for them. Groups are also likely to be fluid; a core of women may attend every session, and others will drop in and out of participating, so budgets need to have this flexibility built in.

To ensure the meeting or activity is comfortable, a space may need to be hired, depending on the needs of the activity planned or the equipment needed for the activity. Often communities will have spaces that can be used free of charge, but bear in mind the particular needs for creating a safe space for women when considering spaces for events. Adequate privacy and toilet facilities will be needed, and an area for children will likely be useful. Hotel conference spaces should be avoided if possible, as the formal spaces run contrary to the informal nature of group activities.

Stationary and other supplies for group activities will also need to be considered in budget planning. Drinking water and tea and coffee (or similar) should be provided. Snacks or meals are always welcomed by participants!

► Figure 7: A budget checklist

Budget Checklist

- Space hire
- Cleaning
- Transport support
- Drinks and snacks
- Activity budget
- _____
- _____
- _____

Incentives to attend the event will also cost money, and it is advised to keep a flexible budget to allow the group to determine what kinds of activities they want to engage in. Providing snacks or a meal can be a good incentive, but activities like mask making (see 4.2 below and Annex I) can offer an opportunity to share a productive outcome in the group, and demonstrate the ongoing value of this group within the community (if you distribute the masks afterwards!). Similarly, a “cooking pot” activity (see 4.2 below) can also bring women together and benefit a community that may receive the food at the end of the activity – for example, a school group or a hospital facility. A guest speaker who can discuss something women are interested in may also be an incentive to attend a group activity. The options for incentives are endless and should be determined by the group. Keep a flexible budget for activities so that there will be resources for food, hiring a TV or other resources; supporting a speaker to attend; buying paint; or providing supplies for whatever the activity for the meeting might be (figure 7).

► 3.5. Moderating expectations and ensuring support

Network and group building is not a typical development exercise where performance indicators or expectations can be set and necessarily reached. Group building is a far more fluid process than, say, counting the number of meals delivered or people vaccinated. Much of the success of group building lies within the process, and many of the outcomes cannot be predetermined – or guaranteed. It is best that all development partners, including institutions, donors and funders, are cognizant of the nature of group building and the need to avoid predetermining the outcomes of these activities.

The strength of this approach is that it fosters community organization and ownership in meaningful ways, and advances a feminist approach to development. It is strongly suggested that these concepts be discussed before attempting any group building, and that funding partners are committed to the principles of the approach, and as such, can offer a level of flexibility around budgeting and key indicator targets. Sharing this guidance with funding partners is also encouraged.

In discussions with partners, some basic information can be provided during group building. Once an activity has ended, with participants’ knowledge and consent, facilitator/s could record the following data for reporting purposes:

- how many women attended (including whether any had previously attended any meetings);
- the activity, or what the participants identified as the meeting’s specific goal or objective;
- the main focus of the discussion; and
- any reflections that would enable the facilitator/s or others to better support the group.

If the group consents, pictures of the activities could also be taken and potentially shared with development partners. This information will help with record keeping and ensure that service providers can monitor the nature of the issues raised by women migrant workers. These records will also be useful in reporting to development partners on the progress of the group and the process of group building.



► 4

4. Designing group activities

Building a network means bringing women together. This is most likely done through a series of activities and events tailored to the particular context in which group building is being attempted. Some initial considerations for designing these activities is outlined in this section. Group building activities can be diverse and need not be fixed to a location or any one activity – be creative! Almost any activity – making masks, eating pizza, planting vegetables in a community garden, watching a movie – can offer the opportunity for group building and discussion.

► 4.1. Creating women's spaces

Women-only spaces are sacred in many cultures. For migrant women's networks to flourish, a women-only space needs to be created and protected for group activities. This means finding a space to meet that is private, out of the eyes and ears of other community members, comfortable and fit-for-purpose. Most importantly, it means listening to and discussing with women what it is that they need for group meetings and activities to be comfortable, convenient, safe and inspirational. Facilitator/s should endeavour to become aware of the diversity of women engaged in any activity, including limitations of language and literacy, and modify activities accordingly, so that the space is inclusive.

In recognizing the varied needs and interests of participants, a flexible approach should be taken to attendance. While ideally participants will attend multiple meetings, activities should be structured so that women can engage, regardless of previous attendance. The goals of group building means that newcomers should be encouraged at every activity, so introductions and welcome activities are likely to be required at every event (see section 5.1.1. below for an example of an introductory activity).

To maximize the comfort and engagement of participants, the group activities should be as informal as possible – this is not the time for opening remarks or official attendance!

Informality is important to ensure comfort and accessibility. However, this informality should not compromise the development of respect between participants. Facilitators should support women at each meeting to collectively agree on how they will engage with each other, for example, valuing everyone's contributions, not dismissing others, listening and supporting each other and so on (see section 5.2.2. below). Prior to identifying these values, facilitator/s should oversee an introductory activity enabling women to introduce themselves to each other.

Consider also the role of any kinds of officials in the group. Only in rare circumstances will government or commune or other officials add benefit to the group. Rather than participating as key members, government or other officials may be invited to address the group on a particular topic – but it is suggested that this kind of activity be scheduled in stage two on the timeline (see figure 6 above), to give the chance for groups to establish their links before introducing this presence.

► 4.2. Creating incentives for attendance

Nobody, including returned migrant women, wants to attend events that are not fun, interesting or worthwhile, or do not provide a benefit to the attendee. The challenge for those facilitating or supporting the early stages of a women's network is to ensure that events and activities are ones that women want to participate in, and trust that when these women are together, the opportunities for discussion and solution creation will arise. In the earliest stages, these incentives will need to be created by the facilitator/s, in coordination with group participants. As the group matures, it will be able to identify its own activities and opportunities for group building. Finding activities that women would not ordinarily be able to do, and allowing them to experiment together is a great way to foster group bonding, so think broadly!

A few ideas could be:

- Community gardening – planting vegetables and herbs in a community plot (if available);
- Movie session – arranging the screening of a film or a popular TV show;
- Pizza or hotpot party – getting women together to eat food and talk is almost always successful!
- Discussion – inviting a speaker to present a particular issue of community interest;
- Mural painting – getting women together to paint a mural, or a school wall or similar;
- A sports day – playing soccer, egg and spoon races, or trying roller-skating;
- Field trip – taking women to an area or tourist site of interest, budget permitting;
- Community cooking pot (see below); or
- Mask making (see below).

Some of the suggestions above will likely identify the group in public, as they will be visible to onlookers. In small communities, this may be a concern for some women, so consider and discuss activities that may create this situation with participants before making plans. There may be a benefit to being active within the community; sometimes the idea of women getting together to cook or garden is less threatening than the idea of women getting together just to talk. Facilitator/s will also need to consider if everyone will be able to participate in the activity, depending on the abilities of the group members.

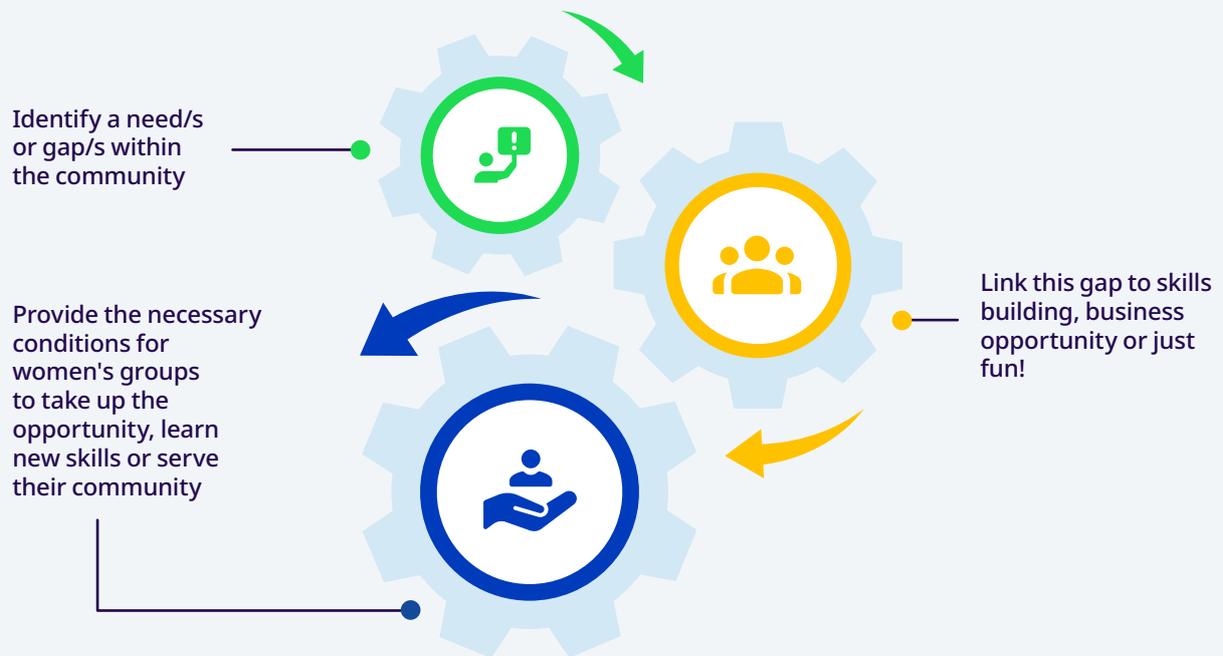
4.2.1. Example: Making masks

Considering creative incentives for attendance at group activities requires a knowledge of potential group members, and a sensitivity around what may, or may not, be useful and needed in the community context. When considering communities low on resources to prevent COVID-19 transmission, mask making may tap into a community need, provide an opportunity for shared learning and skills development, and may even present a business opportunity that women may wish to carry forward.

Figure 8 can be considered for all potential activities in the planning stages.

Returned women migrants can be supported to stitch masks, using the pattern in the Annex I of this guidance. Materials and sewing supplies would need to be budgeted for, but for groups that may be near garment factories, cheap – or even free – material supplies may be available.

► Figure 8a: An illustration of the general process for developing and implementing group activities



► Figure 8b: Applying the group activity development process: The example of mask making



4.2.2. Example: Community cooking pot

In many communities, cooking is traditionally a woman's task within the home. Community cooking with group participants could identify a particular group that may benefit from food delivery at the end of the activity, or could just be making a meal to share within the group. Participants are likely to have specialities that they are able to make, and share these recipes among the group. The activity may like to focus on a seasonal ingredient that might be locally in abundance at the time of the activity.

Ingredients will need to be supplied and a suitable venue for cooking will need to be found for this kind of activity to go ahead.

► 4.3. Arranging activities – consider the practicalities

Making it easy

Travel support

Travel support – financial or arranging for vehicles/transportation – is likely to be needed to ensure that women are able to attend activities and meetings safely. Travelling to and from activities together also creates more opportunities for women to talk and bond in smaller, more geographically specific groups. By arranging or providing support for travel, participation in the group will not incur a cost on potentially strained family resources and can demonstrate the value women hold for the group building. Facilitator/s will also need to consider if participants have special travel or mobility needs in cases of disability.

Child care

Many women have family and child care responsibilities. Child-friendly venues should be chosen, and women who need to bring children with them to group activities should be welcomed. Again, the ability to address the day to day responsibilities of women is central to the purpose of the group. Specific activities that involve or engage children may also be desirable as a part of group building.

Choosing the right time

Choose a day and a time of day that makes attendance most possible by women in your target group. Consider the demands of women's care responsibilities, the time of year (for example, planting or harvest season will likely shift the daily schedule), when it gets dark, and what days and times women are more likely to be flexible. After the first meeting, participants will be able to discuss and suggest when activities should be held.

Making it comfortable

Food and drinks

Meeting spaces and activities need to be comfortable. At a minimum, snacks, drinking water and/or tea and coffee should be provided to ensure women are comfortable during the activity – and be available at any time during the event, and not restricted to particular break times. Bathroom facilities should be accessible by all women, available at the venue or nearby, and be private, safe and clean. In some instances, budget may be required for cleaning of bathroom facilities before the scheduled activity.

Security and safety

Safety and security for women engaged in group activities is paramount. Where possible, meetings and activities should be held in the daytime, to avoid any travel at night when the risks may be higher. Meeting locations will need to strike a balance between ensuring some privacy for the group, but also not meeting anywhere secluded that might heighten the risks for women travelling to and from these locations. Group travel will reduce any risks and should be considered.

Privacy around member details and contacts should be discussed. Some members may wish to have their participation public, others may prefer to keep their involvement private. These matters will need to be negotiated among participants and may be especially relevant if the group decides to participate in community or advocacy events.

► 4.4 Maintaining a safe and productive environment

Maintaining a safe and productive environment in the group activities is everyone's responsibility. Most importantly, group activities should maintain somewhat flexible schedules, so that time pressure does not create added stressors, and so that issues can be dealt with as they arise. It is probably wise to continue to set group expectations at several or all of the initial group meetings, so that the understanding of how meetings proceed and the kinds of behaviours expected become ingrained in participants, who can continue to model such behaviours for newcomers.

The nature of women's groups means that different opinions will and should be heard. Facilitators should be able to create an environment where women can disagree in respectful and thoughtful ways, and where conflict or differences of opinion can be used to drive forward the collective. Passionate disagreement is not a sign of failure, but in fact a strength that can be harnessed to invigorate the group and activities. Facilitators and group members will have set agreements for how to ensure all people are heard during group activities and for how conflict might be deescalated or transformed into positive outcomes.

Creating a ritual, or a routine, for women to engage in when they start a meeting or activity and when they leave, can be a powerful tool to create unity. A handshake, a dance, a little song or a chant that women repeat to each other as they are arriving and/or leaving the activity is a good idea. These rituals can be fun, empowering and set a tone for the beginning of the meeting, and carrying positive experiences home after the conclusion of an activity. These kinds of routines foster unity and can smooth over any feelings of frustration or disconnection that may have arisen during the meeting. It is important that women leave the group with a positive reinforcement of belonging. Women participants should be a part of creating these rituals, as the appropriateness of these needs to be grounded in the group's cultural context.



► 5

5. Building the group

This section includes various suggested activities that can deliver some of the outcomes essential in group building. Activities have been drawn from a variety of sources and experiences. None of the activities listed below are compulsory, but give ideas of how to build individual and collective strength for the group. Facilitators will need to consider their own facilitation styles in determining which activities best suit their groups. Further ideas for additional activities can be found online; the activities in the *GET Ahead for Women in Enterprise Training Package and Resource Kit* are particularly recommended for further consideration.

► 5.1. Creating individual value: Demonstrating power in women

Before any group can begin seeing power in their collective, the individuals who are part of the group need to be aware – and maybe convinced of – their own individual power and worth. When women believe they have something to contribute, the group will be stronger. This guidance is premised on the idea that all women have inherent and innate power that can be harnessed to further progress toward a more equitable society. But, in many communities, women are not encouraged to recognize their power, or to seek opportunities to use it. These groups can provide this valuable opportunity.

Often, women migrant workers may have faced stigma on their return, or may be unable to separate their own contribution from their family experience. In the earliest, facilitated stages of group building, it is suggested that activities that demonstrate the individual power and worth of the participants are explored at each meeting, and that facilitator/s pay particular attention to how women react to these activities. Watching women engage in these activities may indicate potential future group leaders, or those who may need more assistance or help in identifying their own strengths.

5.1.1. Self-worth and self-care

Suggested exercise: Why are you here?



Time: 10–20 minutes (depending on the number of participants)



Number of participants: Any



Tools needed: None



Objective: This one is for the earliest stage of group building, or you may want to do it every time the group meets. Allow participants to meet each other and understand the motivations for attending the group. Gets women thinking about how they are going to contribute as well as what they are expecting and can frame introductory discussions about what the group may set out to achieve.



Method: Before any activities have started, ask each woman to walk around, introduce themselves and share why they came today, with as many other women as possible. A prize can also be awarded to a “winner” who introduced themselves to everyone in the room!

Suggested exercise: Caring for precious things

-  **Time:** 20–30 minutes (depending on the number of participants)
-  **Number of participants:** Any (for groups above ten women, suggest splitting into smaller groups)
-  **Tools needed:** Paper for each participant, drawing supplies (markers, pencils or crayons)
-  **Objective:** This exercise aims to build a sense of power within participants. It can demonstrate how much trust and reliance their families place on women migrant workers, and how vital their work, and subsequently their self-care, is for family well-being. Instead of being instrumentalized solely as income, women can reframe their migration experience as something that requires active investment in self-care to ensure a positive outcome that honours the women themselves as well as the potential outcome of migration for their family.
-  **Method:** Distribute the paper and drawing materials and ask women to draw a picture of themselves in their family and community (an abstract picture is also fine). When women have drawn their pictures, ask them to consider where they are in the picture and to describe their role in relation to the others in the picture. Ask them to divide into pairs or small groups, and describe how they contribute to the well-being of everyone in their picture (for example, caregiving, being a breadwinner, providing support for a particular task). In a plenary session, ask the women to then reflect on the importance of the people in the picture, and bring the group around to discussing investing in the women themselves as a strategy for caring for others. Highlight how when people rely on you, you need to ensure you take care of yourself in all facets of your life as well.

Suggested exercises: Building a resume

-  **Time:** 30–40 minutes (depending on the number of participants)
-  **Number of participants:** Any
-  **Tools needed:** A big display paper or a whiteboard for recording and displaying answers.
-  **Objective:** This activity can demonstrate how even “low-skilled” or stigmatized work is valuable, and that women have gained skills through their work experience. The exercise can also explain how skills can be transferrable, by showing how many women with different jobs are identifying similar skill sets.

 **Method:**

Part 1: Self

1. Separate the group into pairs. Ask women to share with their partner some things that she likes about herself as an individual. Give the group five minutes to discuss.
2. Bring the group back together in plenary and go around the circle with each participant introducing her partner and explaining some of the good personal qualities that this woman has.

Part 2: Work ¹¹

1. You will now transition into discussing the participants' value as workers. It is important that you maintain the sense of pride that you will see surface in the first part of the activity and to stay focused on the positives. Repeat back some of the characteristics shared that make the participants good

¹¹ Since many of the participants may hold or have held similar or the same jobs, they may jump in while another person is speaking to agree, disagree, add on, etc. Allow the conversation to flow naturally, but make sure that everyone has a chance to speak and share their views.

workers before asking them the below question. Write them down or draw them on a display if you like.

2. Ask the group to take a moment to think about the question “What makes you good at your job?” Go around the circle and have each participant share her response to the question.
3. Ask the group to go around the circle again and say what their job is/was – the more specific they are with the work they do, the better (note that this does not need to be a paid job, nor does it need to be the work the women did during migration).
4. Once they have shared, ask the participants to break off into small groups based on similar jobs (for example, participants whose main responsibility is cleaning should work together).
5. In the small group, participants should discuss the questions: “Why is this job important?” and “Why are you valuable in this role?”
6. Bring the group back together. Ask each group to share their answers to the questions. As they share, write or draw these answers into a “skills resume” on the big paper on display.

► 5.2. Creating community: Demonstrating collective power

5.2.1. Introducing the collective

Somewhere close to the beginning of each meeting or activity, the facilitator/s should provide an overview of the group goals and objectives, emphasizing the participatory nature of the group. To focus the meeting, the facilitator should support participants to collectively identify the specific goal or objective of each meeting. In time, these processes will become organic and can be maintained without the engagement of the facilitator/s, by assigning a participant to deliver these activities. Routine, as determined by the facilitator, will be important to early meetings and will establish some processes that participants can carry forward.

Part of bringing together migrant women and women who have been affected by migration is to draw on the shared experiences and concerns that these women are likely to have. Sharing individual experiences and seeing how these relate to the experiences of others in the group is an important tool for building unity and cohesion in the group, and an important step in determining what the shared goals for the group might be in future.

Exercises suggested in this section demonstrate the power of the group and can be used to motivate future collective action.

5.2.2. Determine our group values

Suggested exercises: Shared expectations



Time: 10–15 minutes



Number of participants: Any



Tools needed: Display paper, markers



Objective: To determine some “ground rules” for creating a shared space, and outline some of the values that might be reflected in the rules. For example, “being on time” is a rule that might demonstrate the value of “respect for others’ time” and so on.



Method: Ask women to consider what kinds of behaviours make them feel respected, or disrespected. Explain that the group wants to create a space of respect; so to do so, what rules could the group agree on? If necessary, start them off with some suggestions as shown in figure 9.

► Figure 9: What are our values?

1. Everyone's contribution is valuable
2. Don't talk over people
3. Maintain respect for every individual's opinion and experience
4. Bring positivity and a sense of shared purpose to the group
5. As much as possible, be on time
6. Be engaged (and not on your phones)
7. Maintain confidentiality – what is said in the group, stays in the group (except with permission)
8. _____
9. _____

5.2.3. Building trust

Suggested exercises: Trust walk

-  **Time:** 30 minutes
-  **Number of participants:** Any
-  **Tools needed:** Material to be used for blindfolds, space where women can move around
-  **Objective:** This exercise will help to nurture the team spirit within the group during (and after) the activity.
-  **Method:** Ask the women to form pairs and explain that they will be going on a “trust walk”. Ask one woman to volunteer to be the guide, and another to be blindfolded so she cannot see. Once this is done, ask the blindfolded women to begin walking around, with the guide explaining the surrounding environment to her blindfolded partner. After five minutes, ask them to switch roles and complete the walk around again. Gather the group together and lead a discussion on how they felt at the start of their walk, and as they adapted to the situation, both guided and being unable to see. Ask them how they developed confidence in their partner, and also how they experienced being the leader, and being responsible for their partner. Highlight the importance of establishing confidence, trust and leadership both as individuals and group members, and how the group activities will mirror both of these experiences.

5.2.4. Exploring migration journeys

Suggested exercises: Negative/positive

-  **Time:** 10–15 minutes
-  **Number of participants:** Two or more people
-  **Tools needed:** None
-  **Objective:** Participants discover together how to reframe negative situations into learning experiences, and give ideas as to how the women can use their negative experiences to share lessons with other potential migrant women.
-  **Method:** Divide the group into pairs. Partner A shares something negative that happened in their migration experience with Partner B. It can be a personal or work-related memory, but it has to be true. Then Partner A discusses the same experience again, but focuses only on what lessons might have been learned, or how the experience can be framed in a more positive way. Partner B helps explore the opportunities or positive learnings to be derived from the bad experience. Afterward, they switch roles. In plenary, emphasize how these learnings and reframings could benefit other potential migrant workers or women in similar situations.

5.2.5. None of us is as strong or as smart as all of us together!

Suggested exercise: Weaving links

-  **Time:** 15–30 minutes
-  **Number of participants:** 8–20 people
-  **Tools needed:** None

 **Objective:** This game for team building relies on good communication and teamwork. It also can demonstrate how much stronger individuals are as a group, and demonstrate how links can build solidarity – and be harder to unravel!

 **Method:** Have everyone stand in a circle facing each other, shoulder to shoulder. Instruct everyone to put their right hand out and grab a random hand of someone across from them. Then, tell them to put their left hand out and grab another random hand from a different person across the circle. Within a set time limit, the group needs to untangle the knot of arms without releasing their hands, by moving their bodies around. If the group is too large, make multiple smaller circles and have the separate groups compete. When the exercise is complete, ask women to reflect on the strength of the links and how difficult it was to untangle such large group of women, drawing parallels with the group's strength in their community.

Suggested exercise: Lessons from many teachers

 **Time:** 45 minutes to 1 hour (or longer with additional outreach planning)

 **Number of participants:** 4–15 people

 **Tools needed:** Display paper or whiteboard and markers

 **Objective:** This exercise shows how multiple minds working together can be a powerful force in developing communication messages and encouraging peer learning. Throughout the exercise, the facilitator should remind the group that one person could not and would not have had all the ideas that are being shared.

 **Method:** Facilitate discussion questions as below (go around the circle):

1. From where did you migrate? How did the migration process go?
2. What were some of the challenges you encountered?
3. If you have one, how did you come to get your current job?
4. Do you feel that you chose the safest way to find employment? If so, how? If not, why did you choose a method that was potentially dangerous?
5. Was this experience different because you are a woman? Do you think a man would have had the same experiences?

Pause and reflect on these experiences, and then pose the below questions for group reflection:

1. What have you learned since your migration?
2. Would you do things differently/have you done things differently since?
3. How would you communicate these lessons to others who might be in a similar situation to you?

Write or draw the “lessons learned” on a big display paper as they are shared. Note that this exercise can easily transition into the group planning and outreach or information session, or even a media appearance or article, to share the lessons they learned.

Suggested exercise: Teamwork makes it happen!

 **Time:** 15–20 minutes

 **Number of participants:** 6–8 people (or create two groups if you have more participants)

 **Tools needed:** A towel, blanket, tarp or mat that people can stand on, and flip over.

 **Objective:** This activity is designed show how teamwork relies on cooperation, compromise and coordination. The exercise will force the group to think of creative solutions and truly work together in achieving the common goal. It will also highlight the problems that pop up if any team member refuses to cooperate, creating a dilemma for the others. The exercise is also very useful for facilitators to see who takes on leadership roles, and who might be less inclined, or disagreeable.

 **Method:** Ask 6–8 participants to huddle together and stand on the blanket/towel/tarp, leaving a quarter of the material empty. Challenge the group to flip over the tarp/blanket so that they are standing on the other side of the blanket/towel/tarp, without anyone getting off the blanket or touching the ground outside the blanket/towel/tarp.

5.2.6. Speak up, speak out

Suggested exercise: What I wish someone said

 **Time:** 30–45 minutes

 **Number of participants:** 4–20 people

 **Tools needed:** Individual pieces of paper, markers, pencils or crayons (enough for the whole group)

 **Objective:** This activity is designed to encourage women to “speak up, speak out” on behalf of other women, both in the group and more broadly. It aims to demonstrate that when women “speak up, speak out” on others’ behalf, it may make it easier in future to “speak up, speak out” when the individual needs to. The activity should be a noisy one, and women should be encouraged to make their voices heard!

 **Method:** Distribute paper and something to draw with (pencil, pen, crayon, etc.). Ask participants to draw an image of themselves and their role in their community.

Facilitate discussion questions (go around the circle):

1. Why did you draw this image?
2. What differences do you see between your picture and those of the other participants? Similarities?

Encourage participants to consider community on several different levels – family, extended family or village, commune, province and nation. Use concentric circles to explain these levels if needed. Ask participants to consider if their experiences – in different villages – could be the same.

Separate the group into pairs. Ask the Partner A to think of a time where they felt that they had experienced discrimination, or a situation where they felt mistreated and share it – confidentially – with Partner B. Partner B will need to think of a verbal response to the situation that they can share openly with the group, without sharing the problem. For example, if Partner A shares that she had experienced discrimination, Partner B might formulate the response “I deserve to be treated the same” or “My rights are not less important”. Switch roles and repeat. Bring the group back together in a plenary session, have participants yell out their partners’ responses – and make it loud! See how many of these are the same or similar, demonstrating the need for collective voices and the importance of the same messages being heard within those concentric circles of community.



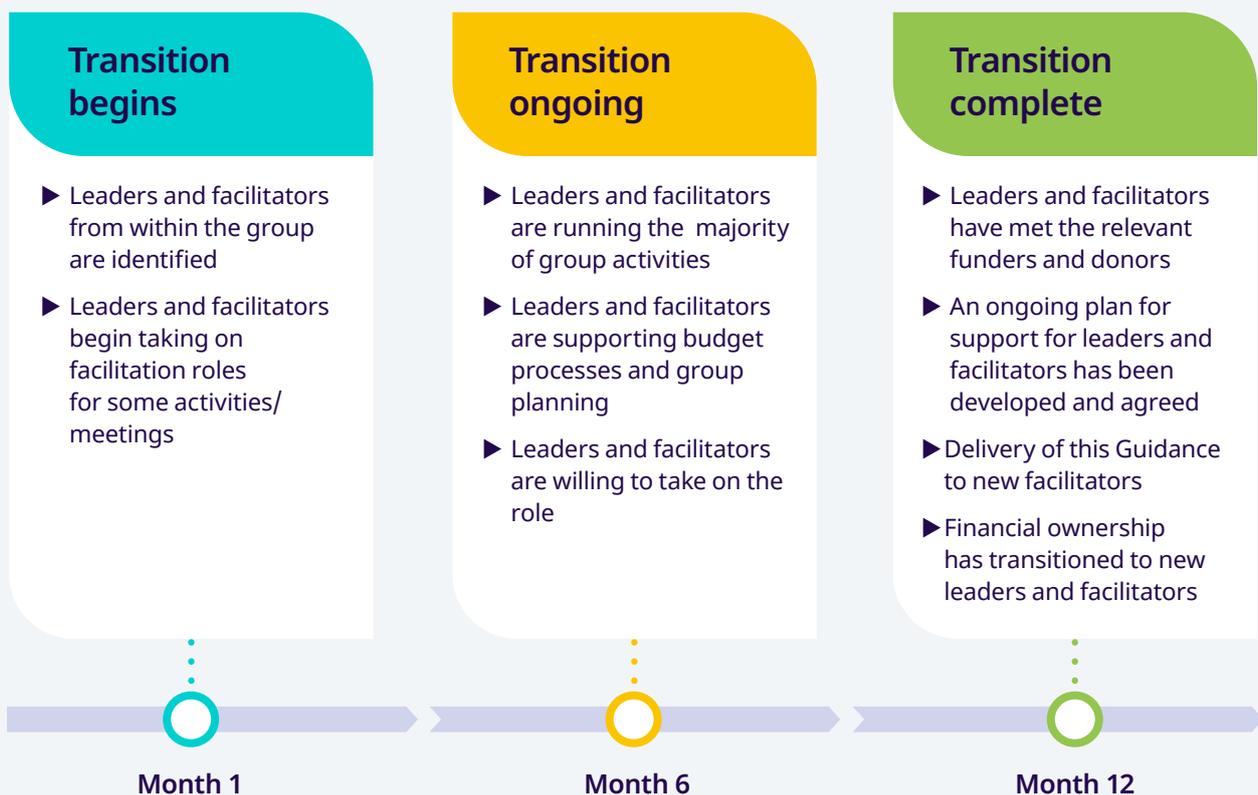
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6. Fostering sustainability: Identifying and harnessing resources

▶ 6.1. Transitioning ownership

The ultimate goal of network or group building is to facilitate the building of an independent and sustainable group that contributes to the community in which it is located. As a gradual process, the facilitator/s should transition ownership of the group when the foundation of the collective is strong, and a leader or leadership group from within the group members has been identified. Several factors will need to be considered when initiating a transition of facilitation roles to these leaders, and the development of a timeline for transition is recommended, with an example below. This process would begin in stage 3 as shown in figure 6 above (section 3.3).

▶ Figure 10: Sample timeline for transition towards becoming an independent group



The budget and financial support should be secured or considered during this transition, and the development partners engaged in the process need to ensure that expectations are managed and that new contact and focal points are linked to funders and donors supportive of a women-owned group. Potentially, a new financial flow will need to be arranged, and maybe even a new financial entity will need to be created. Support for these processes and for the new leaders from the original facilitator should be built into the transition timeline.

Beyond the financial aspects, community and human resources should be considered during the transition phase. Emerging leaders and facilitators will need to build networks in their communities to ensure ongoing support for group activities. The final stage in this transition will be the delivery of this guidance to the leaders and facilitators, putting in their hands the ability to continue to grow and support groups using this model.¹²

6.1.1. Identifying needs, individuals and paths

Similar considerations for identifying the original facilitator will need to be taken into account when identifying new leaders and facilitators from within the group. A group of facilitators is often a good option, as it will allow women to take on roles that may speak to their particular skills and interests, and will lessen the load on any one individual. As this is not likely to be a paid role, it is important to reduce the demands on any individual's time.

Suggested exercise: Assigning tasks and roles



Time: 1–2 hours



Number of participants: Any



Tools needed: Paper and markers (for facilitator/s only)



Objective: The goal of this exercise is to determine which group members may be well-suited to take forward facilitation or leadership roles in the transition of the group. The exercise will allow individuals to determine their own strengths, and situate these strengths within the context of the needs of the group now and into the future.



Method: Ask the women to sit in a group and be ready to move when they identify themselves in a statement that is delivered as a prompt by the facilitator. Place papers on the floor with pictures and writing identifying the groups listed below. Ask the women to go and stand near the area that they most identify with. Use prompts like “Are you a people person? Or do you like working with numbers? Can you communicate well with words and writing?”, etc. to cover all the areas. You may want to add or remove from the list below:

1. People (supporting the group members, growing the group, delivering outreach or peer learning);
2. Numbers (budgeting and finance support for the group, monitoring group activities);
3. Words (writing project proposals, reports or advocacy messages, creating materials for peer learning);
4. Actions (delivering and planning activities for the group or in the community, strategies for advocacy);

¹² For more information on transitioning women's groups into independent operations, see, among others:

- ILO, *Organizing Women Migrant Workers: Manual for Trade Unionists in ASEAN* (forthcoming).
- Annemijn E.C. Sondaal et al., “Sustainability of Community-based Women's Groups: Reflections from a Participatory Intervention for Newborn and Maternal Health in Nepal”, *Community Development Journal* 54, No. 4 (2019), 731–749.
- Paul Anand et al., “Can Women's Self-help Groups Contribute to Sustainable Development? Evidence of Capability Changes from Northern India”, *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 21, No. 2 (2020), 137–160.

5. Support (playing a supportive role in delivering any of the areas in the list);
6. Practical planning (getting things done, including booking spaces, buying materials/snacks/food).

When the women have grouped around the areas, ask them what tasks they think someone engaged in delivering this aspect of group management would do. Allow a free-flowing conversation to see if women identify themselves or others within the group to take the lead in particular areas. No roles need to be formalized during this exercise, but it is a way to begin thinking about how to transition the various tasks of the original facilitator to the group members.

Suggested exercise: Brainstorming our focus



Time: 1–2 hours (depending on whether further activity planning will be conducted)



Number of participants: Any



Tools needed: A4 paper, markers, bag of beans/rice/stones for indicating priorities



Objective: This activity aims to determine a shared focus for the group in ongoing programming and activity planning. It is a good activity during the transitional phase, as it will allow new facilitator/s to determine and then respond to the identified focus, demonstrating the facilitator/s commitment to the collective will. Of course, the group may have several focuses, or may even split into smaller groups for concentrating on particular areas going forward.



Method: In a plenary session, introduce several issues for consideration for future group activities. These could be:

Financial literacy, budgeting and numeracy training

- ▶ Learning about budgets, profit and loss and how to separate household and business finances.

Skills and language training

- ▶ Sharing skills among women in the group, or engaging a trainer or teacher for specific skills.

Advocacy and policy work

- ▶ Determining and sharing messages with the broader community, possibly even officials.

Business and entrepreneurship training and activities

- ▶ Discussing market opportunities for products, business planning and forecasting.

Community development

- ▶ Determining community needs and exploring how to meet these needs, outreach activities and information sharing.

Peer networking and sharing lessons

- ▶ Connecting the group to similar groups around the country or the region, including Women's Exchange.

Developing public messaging or communication

- ▶ Drafting messages and seeking avenues for broadcasting them, through media or outreach.

Ask women to add more ideas, or sub-ideas or activities on each of these themes, and draw or write these on pieces of paper that are distributed on the floor around the room. Distribute an equal amount of rice/beans/stones to each woman in the group and explain that women will be able to indicate their priority areas by placing their rice/beans/stones on the papers that describe a particular priority area. Explain that women can split up their rice/beans/stone across multiple priority areas or put all of their share onto one area. At the end of the activity, determine the top three group priorities for ongoing work. This can be a good moment to launch into further activity planning.

Suggested exercise: Developing a vision and mission statement



Time: 1-1.5 hours



Number of participants: Any



Tools needed: Display paper or whiteboard, markers



Objective: This activity is designed to determine how the group wants to situation itself within its community, and what it wants to achieve. The goals identified are intended to be value- and reputation-centred, and be complemented by goals related to output or activities.



Method: Bring the group together in plenary and facilitate a discussion around the “vision” and “mission” of the group. Explain the goals of the activity and the difference between the vision (the “what” question) and the mission (the “how” question).

Use prompts to begin the conversation on vision, for example, “What would a successful migration look like?” or “What do you want for women migrant workers in the future?” Draw or write these ideas on a display, and refine the statement as more input is gathered. Reach a consensus naturally once the ideas are all incorporated and the group settles on a “vision”. An example might be, “Our vision is a community where women are supported to migrate overseas to good jobs, and recognized on their return.”

Once a vision is established (this does not need to be a final version, but a working statement), redirect the group to the “mission” statement. Explain to the group that the “mission” or “how?” statement can comprise three major areas, as below:

1. The target – Who are we going to serve? Us? The community? Women migrant workers?
2. Contribution – What will we offer to this target? Support? Training? Community events?
3. Distinction – How will our offer be different? Why would people be interested?

An example mission statement could be, “This group shares our own migration experiences with our community to ensure that people understand the real risks and opportunities of migration.”

Discuss and reach consensus on the mission statement as well. Allow participants to practice saying the vision and mission statements to each other, in preparation for explaining the group to others. Consider printing the statement in some fun way for display at meetings or activities, or even on publicity materials, if appropriate. The vision or mission statement may also be incorporated in the rituals of the group, for chanting or affirmations at the start or end of activities.

► 6.2. Completing the circle: Delivering this guidance

The last – and perhaps most important! – aspect of the transition is for the facilitator/s to finalize handing over ownership to the new group facilitators and leaders by delivering the messages and tools in this guidance. Putting this information in the hands of the new facilitator/s will complete the cycle of group formation and provide the new facilitator/s with this tool to continue their group work.

The original facilitators may seek to deliver this information over several sessions or may wish to host a dedicated session or event with the new facilitator/s. While it is hoped that many of the lessons will have been ingrained by the new facilitator/s already, delivering this guidance can be an important milestone. A ceremony or similar could be considered to mark the transition – this should be a moment of celebration!



7

7. Conclusion and looking to the future

Once a returned women's migrant group is established and ownership has transitioned to the women participants – now facilitators themselves – the options are virtually limitless. Women's groups have become political parties, civil society organizations, businesses, even schools and universities! The women's group established should be encouraged to think big and continue to further group goals.

Specific roles for the group could emerge as it progresses, including savings groups, advocacy roles, training or a business circle – either women supporting other women in their own ventures, or a joint business idea. The original facilitator/s and service provider should remain engaged to direct the group to the resources that taking these ideas forward may require. There are a number of training tools/kits available that can help the groups develop within the area in which they want to deepen their knowledge, including many in local languages. Groups can also reach out to local civil society organizations, United Nations agencies and government bodies to see what support might be available within their specific area of interest.

Opportunities for provincial, national and international meet ups with other groups should also be sought. Experiencing solidarity beyond the community can be invigorating, and can bring new ideas and motivation to the group – and can be a lot of fun! Linking to the annual Women's Exchange Get Together would be a wonderful opportunity to foster regional women's solidarity.

For the future, to support the inclusivity and accessibility of the group, the facilitator/s may like to consider also utilizing technology to establish an online support group, for example, through WhatsApp, Line or Facebook. The establishment of a digital women's group would need to be done following an assessment of its likely uptake, including whether women are interested in such a platform and whether they have access to the technology required. The digital nature of the group means that there are more opportunities for supporting women who may be planning to remigrate or for women who are already overseas, providing an invaluable platform through which women could support each other. To ensure the provision of consistent and accurate information, service providers hosting digital networks should also ensure ongoing presence within the online group, subject to the approval of group members. In addition, a digital group may be useful for other service providers who are not yet able to establish physical groups in their provinces, or where women are less likely to be able to attend physical meetings. The underlying principles in the digital group should reflect those outlined in this guidance.

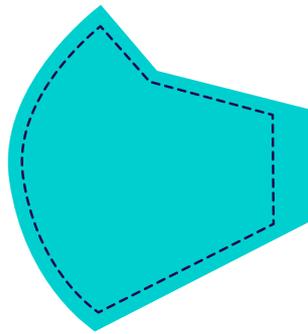
When women work together, the possibilities are endless. To bring them together in a returned migrant women's group is an honour and an achievement.



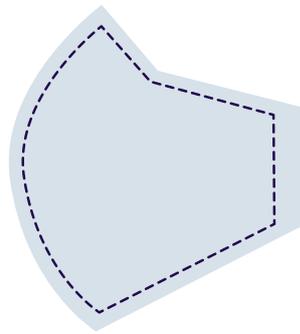
▶ Annex I.

Annex I. Face mask pattern and instructions

► Face mask tutorial

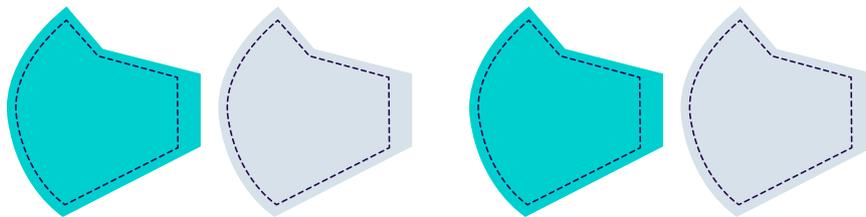


Fabric right side



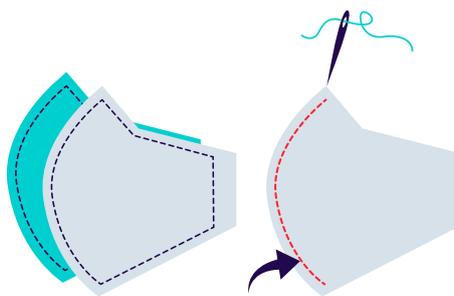
Fabric wrong side

Step 1: Cut 4 pieces from your fabric of choice

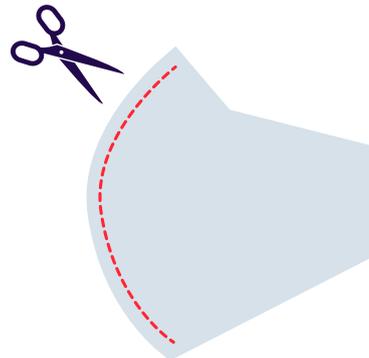


Two pairs of fabric, one fabric right side with one fabric wrong side make a pair, you can also add a middle layer of antibacterial fabric to make it more protective.

Step 2: Sew them together

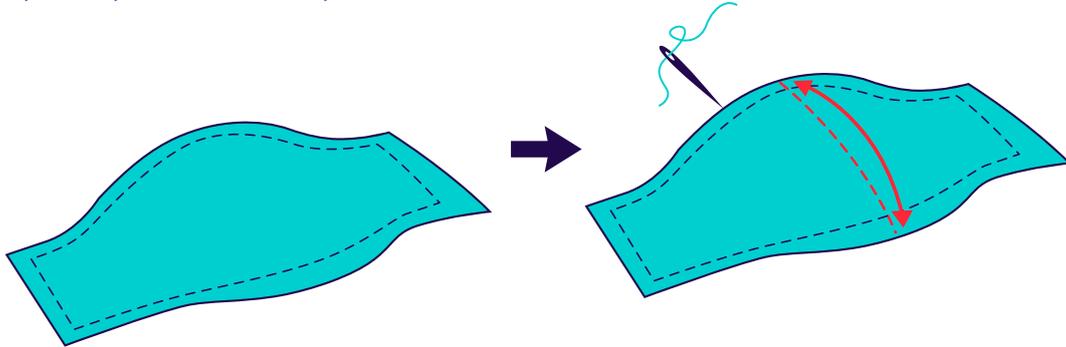


Pick two pieces, align them right side facing each other. Sew along the red dashed line (0.5cm from the edge).

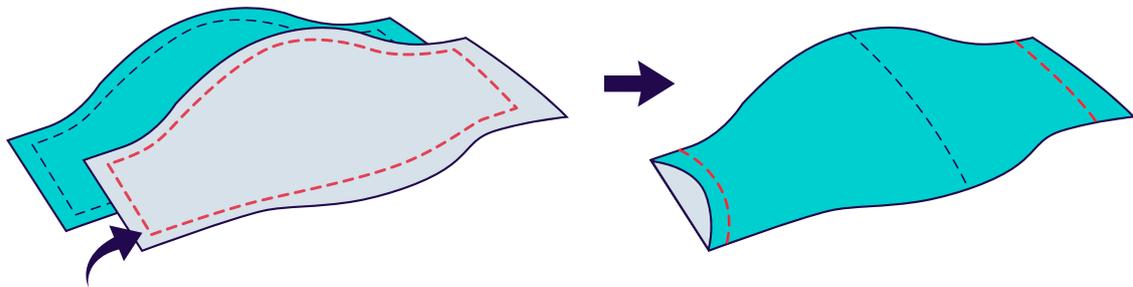


Step 3: Clip the curved edge

Step 4: Open the sewn piece and sew a flat felled seam.



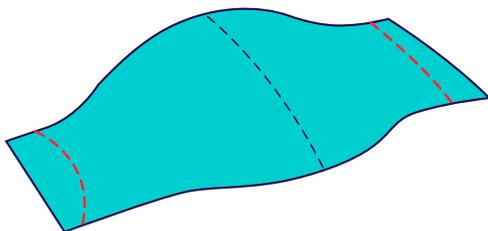
Step 5: Put the two pieces right side facing together and sew along the long edges, leaving the short edges open



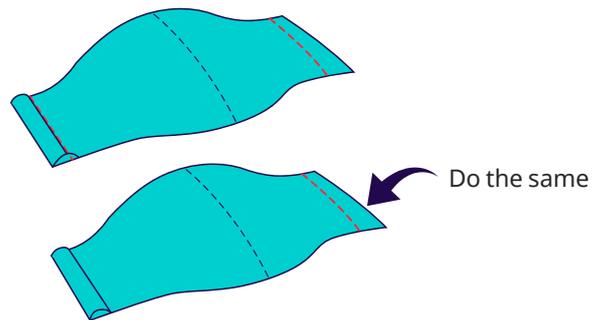
Sew the long red lines (Seam allowance)

Turn the fabric inside out

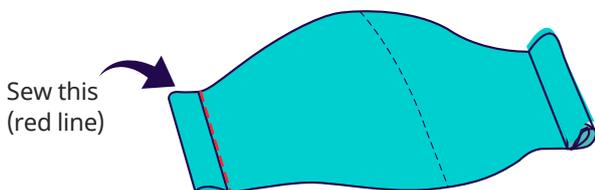
Step 6: Sew along the edge to make it sharper and tighter to cover the face



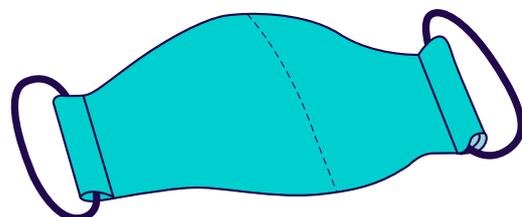
Step 7: Fold the short edge two times (to hide the raw edge).



Step 8: Make a loop to thread the elastic band



Step 9: Thread the elastic band through the loop and tie it



Hide the knot inside the loop

For women, by women: Guidance and activities for building women migrant workers' networks

This guidance draws on lessons learned over years of supporting women's groups. It outlines how migrant women's groups can be catalysed; what expectations service providers, donors and the development community should have for network building; and how to best spark the beginnings of women's collective action. The guidance reflects the goals and ethos of women's equality and empowerment, and highlights the voices of women migrant workers themselves, to help service providers to best serve these women.

The guidance includes specific activities and exercises to be used in group building, and summarizes some key considerations for those beginning a journey to create women's groups.

The ILO's TRIANGLE in ASEAN programme, supported by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), recognizes that support for return and reintegration through women's groups is crucial to realizing the potential development benefits of migration. This guidance outlines how TRIANGLE in ASEAN supports women migrant workers who have returned home to build communities and networks, as well as their own resilience, confident that what emerges from these collectives will be the most efficient, sustainable and supportive intervention possible.

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