



Photo Credit: Canva.com

ASCC 2045: Low-wage Labour Migration and AI

Danielle Lynn Goh

The ASEAN Community Vision 2045 outlines the region's aspirations to develop resilience, innovation and people-centredness amid a changing and more fractured global order. As part of its ambitious strategy to address existing and future 'megatrends', the vision looks to position the region to bolster its relevance as a global player. In the coming decades, labour migration will continue to form an integral role in realising the ASCC 2045. Of the emerging 'megatrends' identified, artificial intelligence (AI) will have a large impact on the future trajectory of work, and on labour migration.

Labour migration is a key driver of economic development in the region, and deeper integration across ASEAN can address issues of labour shortages, unemployment and poverty reduction. This is demonstrated through the emphasis of [ASCC 2045](#) on the protection of migrant workers.

Migrant workers play a vital role in the economies of both origin and destination countries. ASEAN member states hosted [11 million](#) migrants, with 7 million from across the region, a large proportion of whom are low-wage workers.

Southeast Asia's Approach to Labour and AI

The ASCC 2045 frames artificial intelligence (AI) as an integral part of the 'digital and technological transformation' and the growth of the digital economy. Within the plan, there was also an acknowledgment that the implementation of AI may give rise to challenges such as "widening digital divide and cybersecurity concerns". However, the ASCC 2045 does not explicitly link AI adoption and its impact on work and labour migration.

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The 2024 ASEAN Guide on AI Ethics and Governance provides a more comprehensive engagement of AI and its implications on labour. While regional guidelines are non-binding in nature, several ASEAN member states, including Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei are working toward the establishment of formal [AI laws](#). More recently, in March 2026, [Vietnam](#) passed a regulation to address the risks posed by generative AI. Southeast Asia's current approach to AI and labour are less fixated on the protection of jobs or workers, but rather on upskilling and addressing the misuse of AI such as deepfakes and in misinformation.

With the acceleration of AI adoption in the region, there have been concerns and anxieties about job displacement. However, the reality on the ground has demonstrated that there is no clear evidence yet that AI adoption has led to job losses on a large-scale in Southeast Asia. AI exposure is also unevenly distributed, depending on the region, sector and jobs. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), only [3.3 percent](#) of employment have the highest levels of exposure to generative AI. Occupations with high generative AI exposure are more [concentrated](#) on clerical industries, data entry and in finance sectors, affecting work that can be largely automated. Conversely, AI can be used to augment jobs and as tools to enhance work processes and create new employment opportunities in the development of AI technologies, however these gains are likely to be available to high-skilled workers.

Impact of AI on Low-wage Migrant Labour

The workforce has already been shaped by the emergence of AI. With increasing AI adoption, the implications of its use extend across the board of both high-skilled and low-skilled jobs. What has been less discussed are the implications of AI on low-wage migrant workers, with a significant number working in domestic work, manufacturing and construction.

Low-wage migrant workers in these industries, particularly in construction and domestic work, are unlikely to be affected by job displacement, as compared to other sectors. However, the acceleration of AI, may aggravate the digital disparity that low-wage migrant workers face. Low-wage migrant workers are particularly at risk amid technological shifts, and this may result in a widened skills gap, as the new roles or skillsets driven by AI innovation require resources and educational background that low-wage migrant workers may lack. Access to AI training or upskilling programmes could also be limited or unavailable to low-wage migrant workers, resulting in an exacerbation of the digital divide which disproportionately impacts them. Already, low-wage migrant workers face precarity with high recruitment fees, limited job mobility and wage stagnation.

At the same time, work that involves repetitive tasks such as product assembly, packaging and call centres are more exposed to the risk of automation. A 2025 [UNDP report](#) cautioned that AI could widen inequality between lower-income and higher-income countries and highlighted that

women and youth are disproportionately impacted by automation, for example in factories, call centres and the garment industry.

Way Forward

AI adoption in the region has accelerated rapidly and is bound to shape the workforce and low-wage labour migration. The ASCC 2045 reflects the need for greater regional cooperation and national efforts to AI governance. Taken together with the 2024 guidelines, AI governance needs to be informed by a people-centred approach, considering the issues related to ethics, labour and social protections, and to pay closer attention to the impacts on low-wage migrant workers. To prevent a further widening of the digital gap, more opportunities should be made available for AI upskilling and reskilling. As ASEAN countries gradually build up their AI governance infrastructure, inclusivity of low-wage migrant workers in these discussions is necessary to ensure that there are sufficient legal protections and safeguards that will prevent further harms to their livelihoods, dignity and well-being.

SUGGESTED READINGS

ASEAN. *ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics*. Jakarta: Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2024.

International Organization for Migration (IOM) and International Labour Organization (ILO). *Advancing Skills Mobility, Recognition and Development in ASEAN: Unlocking Opportunities for Migrant Workers through the Vientiane Declaration*. Geneva: IOM and ILO, 2025.

Kristina Fong. "What Is Shaping Artificial Intelligence (AI) Governance Policies in Southeast Asia?" *ISEAS Perspective* 2026, no. 13 (February 23, 2026). ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.

Pei Chin Tay, Sahara Sadik, and Kendrick Chan "Augmenting Intelligence: Shaping the Future of Work in South-East Asia." *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change*. July 24, 2025.



CLIMATE CHANGE



Photo Credit: Freepik.com

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

World Bank to abandon goal to devote 45% of lending resources to climate change projects

The World Bank Group said on June 29 it will “retire” its previous goal to devote 45 per cent of its annual lending resources to projects with climate co-benefits, but extend its longstanding Climate Change Action Plan that was due to expire on June 30.

Reuters

The Straits Times | 30 June 2026

Farming worries after India records driest June in over a decade

India’s driest June in 12 years and the fifth-driest across 125 years has raised concerns over progress of crop sowing this year. With millions of farmers reliant on seasonal monsoon rains, this shortfall could have major impacts on outputs, including rice and oilseeds. Simultaneously, government interventions are actively seeking to curb these trends.

Abhishek Dey

BBC | 1 July 2026

Asia-Pacific ministers adopt new roadmap to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution together

Governments across the Asia-Pacific have agreed on a new regional agenda which tackles climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution through more coordinated action. Through a new Ministerial Declaration and Regional Action Programme, countries are encouraged to better align policies, financing and institutions to seek solutions that have cross-sectoral benefits.

UNESCAP | 3 July 2026

Western Europe has hottest June on record

An extraordinary heatwave in Europe has shattered numerous temperature records and had major impacts on human health, ecosystems, agriculture, infrastructure and labour productivity. With extreme heat occurring at increasing frequency, intensity, and duration amid a changing climate, more than 1,300 excess deaths across the continent were recorded between 21-28 of June.

World Meteorological Organization | 9 July 2026

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Fossil fuel emissions have rapidly worsened European heatwaves in just a few decades

Heatwaves cause more deaths in Europe than all other natural hazards combined. As temperatures continue to rise, ageing populations, growing prevalence of chronic illness, and uneven access to cooling and heat-resilient housing are increasing vulnerability, placing mounting pressure on health systems.

Theodore Keeping, et al.

World Weather Attribution | 2026

Global heat stress intensification and its expanding footprint on the human population

The study assesses heat stress globally since 1950, examining daytime extremes, nocturnal heat and compound daytime–nighttime events, revealing a pronounced, multidimensional intensification. Extreme ‘feels-like’ temperatures have become more frequent on every continent, and the spatial footprint of hazardous heat has expanded, exposing previously unaffected regions.

Rebecca Emerton, et al.

Nature Climate Change | 2026

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Climate Week 4

Organised by United Nations Climate Change, Climate Week 4 provides a structured yet flexible space for dialogue, capacity-building, and showcasing innovative solutions to support the inter-governmental process and urgent, inclusive, and coordinated climate action.

Baku, Azerbaijan

7 - 11 September 2026

ENERGY SECURITY



Photo Credit: Adobe Firefly Generated Images

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Lack of public understanding of nuclear energy in S-E Asia a challenge: IAEA chief

IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi hoped that Singapore's 2027 ASEAN chairmanship will help to deepen dialogue between the IAEA, which he heads, and the region, where people often mix up nuclear energy with nuclear weapons.

Shabana Begum

The Straits Times | 15 June 2026

Renewable energy transition: An imperative for Southeast Asia

The immediate policy responses of countries in the region, such as the Philippines and Malaysia, focus on alleviating the economic costs of the crisis through fuel subsidies, price controls, and support measures to cushion the pressures on households.

Danielle Lynn Goh

RSIS Commentary | 19 June 2026

The Iran War turned Asia's fragile energy dependence into an emergency

Nuclear power is getting a serious second look across the region. The search for alternative oil suppliers has also intensified. Regional leaders are also taking renewables seriously now.

Joshua Kurlantzick

Council on Foreign Relations | 22 June 2026

Renewables are now the clear solution to Asia's energy trilemma

Countries with substantial renewables investment have experienced less severe economic impacts from geopolitical instability. Clean energy is proving crucial to energy security and economic resilience.

Ramnath N. Iyer

Institute for Energy Economics & Financial Analysis | 9 July 2026

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

From path dependence to path creation: How China's incumbent power generators navigate the energy transition?

China's power generation sector offers an instructive case. It combines partial power market reform with strong state direction, placing incumbent SOEs under hybrid objectives of commercial performance and public service delivery, including expanding renewables while maintaining reliable supply.

Sixuan Liu, Jing Wu, and Xiao Wang

Energy Research and Social Science, Vol. 138 | 2026

National industrial involvement to support a nuclear power programme

This IAEA document outlines how industrial participation can support every phase of a nuclear power programme and the full plant life cycle — from national decision making through construction, operation and decommissioning.

International Atomic Energy Agency | 2026

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Impacts of the Energy Crisis on Southeast Asia: Perspectives on Indonesia and Malaysia

In this webinar organised by the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Dr Alloysius Joko Purwanto, Mr Putra Adhiguna, and Professor Leong Yuen Yoong discussed the region's energy security vulnerabilities in light of the Strait of Hormuz crisis and explored potential paths forward, with case studies on Indonesia and Malaysia.

Recorded Webinar

25 June 2026

FOOD SECURITY



Photo Credit: Adobe Firefly Generated Images

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Beyond the harvest: Indonesia's quest for lasting food security

The article examines Indonesia's pursuit of lasting food security beyond achieving rice self-sufficiency. While record harvests and strategic reserves enabled the country to halt rice imports, sustaining these gains will require stronger irrigation, improved agricultural technology, climate resilience and greater diversification beyond rice to build a more resilient and sustainable national food system.

Anton Santoso

Antara Indonesian News Agency | 20 June 2026

Timor-Leste's unique agricultural resilience

Timor-Leste's recent entry into ASEAN offers a new opportunity to strengthen regional food security by offering a glimpse of alternative models for food resilience, especially amid ongoing disruptions to chemical fertilizer supplies stemming from the conflict in the Middle East.

Jose Ma. Luis Montesclaros and Kayven Tan

RSIS Commentary | 23 June 2026

What the Iran war taught the world about food security

The Iran war exposed the global food system's dependence on vulnerable fertiliser supply chains, particularly through the Strait of Hormuz. While the easing of tensions offers temporary relief, governments should seize this opportunity to strengthen resilience by diversifying supply chains, investing in strategic reserves and enhancing early warning systems to better withstand future geopolitical and climate-related disruptions.

Maximo Torero

Eco-Business | 24 June 2026

High-nutrition S'pore tomatoes and fish could soon be on the menu on flights, in schools, for NSmen

A two-year partnership between SATS and Temasek Life Sciences Laboratory aims to commercialise locally developed, nutrient-rich food innovations. By leveraging SATS' large-scale production and distribution capabilities, the collaboration seeks to strengthen Singapore's food security, reduce import dependence, and expand access to locally produced foods through airlines, schools, defence and retail markets.

Chin Hui Shan

The Straits Times | 24 June 2026

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Integrating food, environment, and land: A systematic policy mapping of China's food security framework

This policy review extracts and organizes China's policy measures from 1971 to 2025, and finds a steady policy transition toward sustainable and resilient food systems. It has expanded towards a more holistic and sustainable food systems transformation pathway, providing valuable insights and references for other countries seeking similar integrated governance.

Yawen Kang and Ainhua González Del Campo

Food Security | June 2026

Exploring potential food self-sufficiency across alternative dietary futures

This piece provides evidence on the potential for self-sufficient production of multiple food groups and nutrients in 70 regions by 2050. It further assesses the viability of self-sufficiency under a more sustainable "Planetary Health Diet" (PHD). It finds that trade will likely fall, but a PHD self-sufficient diet would be more sustainable than business as usual practices.

Laura Gerwien, et al.

Global Food Security, Vol. 49 | June 2026

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Straight Talk Southeast Asia EPI36: Food Security in Southeast Asia amidst the Iran War

This episode examined food security in the context of the changing weather conditions and the Iran war, highlighting variation in risks across the region and potential policy responses.

Podcast

15 May 2026



Photo Credit: Adobe Firefly Generated Images

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

‘Diseases, unfortunately, do not sleep’: How CDA is using AI to lead S’pore’s infectious diseases fight

Singapore’s Communicable Diseases Agency is adopting artificial intelligence to improve disease surveillance and outbreak detection. Established in 2025, the agency focuses on strengthening pandemic preparedness, monitoring global threats, and protecting public health through timely, informed policy decisions.

Zhaki Abdullah

The Straits Times | 28 June 2026

Healthcare and social sectors say technology should ease workloads, not replace human touch

Singapore is adopting AI in healthcare and social services to automate tasks and reduce staff burnout. However, experts emphasise technology must focus on people, supporting professionals rather than replacing essential empathy and interaction.

Chloe Teo, Germaine Wong, and Calvin Yang

Channel News Asia | 3 July 2026

Detained Gaza doctor almost unrecognisable after injuries in Israeli jail, lawyer says

Amidst the ongoing conflict, Gaza’s health security is systematically under threat. A prominent Gaza doctor faces severe injuries from Israeli detention, while a sick Palestinian baby passed on 5th July after checkpoint delays blocked his family from reaching a waiting ambulance, highlighting the importance of humanitarian health security during conflicts.

Emma Graham-Harrison, Lorenzo Tondo, and Sufian Taha

The Guardian | 6 July 2026

Air pollution linked to DNA changes in sperm, research shows

A major study reveals air pollution, including common air pollutants, alters sperm gene function, highlighting a critical intersection of environmental pollution and reproductive health. This raises significant concerns regarding male fertility and biological impacts of poor air quality, which subsequently links to poor fetal development.

Hannah Devlin

The Guardian | 7 July 2026

SELECTED PUBLICATION

From siege to spillover: how Gaza’s health crisis threatens global infection spread

Armed conflict and collapsed health systems, as seen in Gaza, create ideal conditions for rapid viral evolution and spread. Overcrowding and malnutrition accelerate mutations, posing severe regional and global health security risks that demand urgent humanitarian intervention.

Muna Abed Alah and Peter Valentine Coyle

International Journal of Epidemiology, Vol 55, No. 3 | 20 May 2026

Baby busts and growth booms: Demographic change and the macroeconomy

Declining birth rates boost GDP per worker by spurring automation, countering pessimism fuelled by ageing populations and rising healthcare costs. Furthermore, the study notes that increased life expectancy accompanying these shifts may spur complementary institutional and human capital investments..

Daron Acemoglu, et al.

National Bureau of Economic Research | July 2026

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Global Tipping Points Conference 2026

The Global Tipping Points Conference 2026 in Kuala Lumpur will be a landmark gathering on climate risk, resilience and systems transformation. The conference will convene leaders from science, finance, culture and policy to explore how positive tipping points can be unlocked across South and Southeast Asia and beyond.

Sunway University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

12-15 October 2026

BIOSECURITY



Photo Credit: Adobe Firefly Generated Images

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

African Swine Fever Tightens Its Grip Across Asia-Pacific as Outbreaks Persist Into 2026

In India, African swine fever (ASF) has now been officially reported in 22 of 28 states and the National Capital Territory since the disease first emerged in Assam in January 2020. New outbreaks are actively spreading. In 2024 alone, more than 150,000 pigs died or were destroyed due to ASF across India.

Global Biodefense

18 June 2026

Iloilo vet calls for calm, strict biosecurity measures amid ASF cases

The Office of the Provincial Veterinarian in Iloilo is calling on swine farmers not to panic and to strictly observe biosecurity measures amid new confirmed cases of African swine fever.

Perla Lena

Philippine News Agency | 23 June 2026

DCIR Convenes One Health Conference to Strengthen Biosecurity

The conference brought together policymakers, scientists, public health experts, biosecurity specialists, veterinarians, and academic to discuss key issues at the intersection of health security and biosecurity. Discussions centred on translating national and global frameworks into practical strategies for resilient health systems, cross-ministerial coordination, and enhanced pandemic preparedness.

South Asian Herald

2 July 2026

New biosecurity advice for egg producers as bird flu testing continues

New advice recommends states and territories encourage free-range producers to keep their birds indoors where practical. The measure aims to reduce contact between commercial flocks and wild birds to reduce the spread of H5N1 bird flu.

Jacinta Counihan

ABC News | 4 July 2026

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

The Dark Web as a biosecurity risk enabler and how to counteract it

As encryption and anonymity on the internet get easier, digital ecosystems are becoming a way to distribute methods of and materials used in biochemical attacks. This paper recognises the role of digital ecosystems in the progression of these security threats and examines the dark web as an enabler of biochemical security risk.

Shravishtha Ajaykumar and Soumya Awasthi

Observer Research Foundation Occasional Paper, No. 559 | 2026

Strategies to strengthen biosecurity regulation in the ASEAN region and the United States: Approaches and implications

This paper examines current biosecurity laws in three ASEAN countries: Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore. It discusses the main problems and opportunities related to legal changes in biosecurity laws and compare these laws with those in the United States.

Noor Dzuhaidah Osman and Mohd. K. Abdullah

Journal of Biosafety and Biosecurity, Vol. 8, No. 2 | 2026

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Introduction to Animal Research for Biosafety Professionals

This course provides a thorough introduction to routine hazards commonly encountered in animal programs that utilise rodents, small animals, nonhuman primates, aquatics, and agricultural species, with a primary focus on identifying and managing biological, chemical, radiological, and physical hazards.

The Association for Biosafety and Biosecurity

19-26 August 2026

MIGRATION



Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Anxious over unpaid wages, some migrant workers go on job hunts, others mull returning home

More than 100 migrant workers sought help at the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) due to unpaid salaries and housing arrangements. Singapore's National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) and the Migrant Workers' Centre (MWC) have supported those affected to connect them with new work opportunities.

Natasha Ganesan

CNA | 26 June 2026

South Korea abuse hotline opens to flood of reports from migrant workers

Reports of human rights abuses involving migrant workers in South Korea increased more than sixfold in the first month after the government opened a dedicated multilingual hotline. The hotline allows foreign workers to report unpaid wages, sexual harassment or assault, passport confiscation, forced labour and other abuses in 20 languages.

Park Han-na

The Korea Herald | 5 July 2026

The overlooked factor in Australia's migration debate that's keeping figures high

The debate on migration in Australia has become increasingly polarised. While migration is essential to the workforce and economy, others have argued it has contributed to pressures on housing affordability and public services with that narrative driving a wave of anti-immigrant sentiment.

Josie Harvey

SBS News | 6 July 2026

Germany turns to skilled migration as workforce ages

Germany is accelerating efforts to attract skilled foreign workers, including from Indonesia, as rapid population ageing threatens its labour force. Bilateral programs aim to address worker shortages while expanding training and technology partnerships.

Rahmad Nasution

Antara Indonesian News Agency | 7 July 2026

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Beyond Control Signalling: Designing integration policies for better outcomes and public trust

This report suggests practical ways to rebuild public trust through integration policy reforms that go beyond control signalling and balance immediate pressures with a long-term view. It analyses policies in various high-income destination countries, including whether they are likely to boost public confidence and how they may affect integration outcomes.

Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan, Meghan Benton, and Abigail Goldfarb

Migration Policy Institute | 2026

Bridging skill gaps for the future: New jobs creation in the AI Age

The demand and supply of new skills—especially in IT and AI—are reshaping labour markets, impacting wages and hiring. About 1 in 10 job vacancies in advanced economies demands at least one new skill. These skills boost average wages and employment but deepen polarization.

Florence Jaumotte, et al.

International Monetary Fund | 2026

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Transnational Families and Future-Making in Looming Crises

This roundtable will explore how crises affect futures and future-making of transnational families, considering the multiple movements across borders and boundaries involved. The discussion will include empirical and ethnographic case studies from across Asia including Indonesia, Myanmar, Singapore, Vietnam and Burundi.

Asia Research Institute

4 August 2026