



# **Graduate Employability in ASEAN**

## **The Contribution of Student Mobility**

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# Structure



Background

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# Background

- Enhancing intra-regional mobility and cross-border exchanges is believed to contribute to:
  - economic development
  - intercultural understanding
  - skilled labour development, and
  - the ASEAN community project
- Considering student mobility's potential for driving social and economic growth, the ASEAN has increased efforts to pursue student exchange within the region (Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Higher Education in 2015; Master Plan on Connectivity 2025)

# Background

- Student mobility also fosters **labour migration** through skills development and the acquisition of qualifications recognized in the host country
- Growing desire in ASEAN to foster labour mobility as ASEAN Member States move towards **knowledge-based economies** requiring greater **innovation** as well as the **changing demographics** requiring more efficient use of human resources through regional collaboration
- Despite the growing interest and investment in student mobility initiatives, the **empirical evidence** on **intra-ASEAN mobility's impact remains limited**, including on graduate employability

# General Objectives



- To examine the **perceptions** of students, employers, and labor market representatives on the **contributions of intra-ASEAN higher education student mobility** to **graduates' employability** in 4 countries (Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam) and three broad sectors (Engineering and ICT; Education; and Business, Social Sciences and Humanities)
- To provide a **preliminary understanding** of intra-regional mobility on graduates' career enhancement, serving as a **basis for future analyses** covering a wider geographical and sectoral scope in the ASEAN region

# Research Objectives



- #1** To provide an overview of intra-ASEAN student and labour mobility trends
- #2** To identify graduates' perceptions on the types of career-related resources they developed as a result of their intra-ASEAN mobility participation
- #3** To understand employers' perceptions of intra-ASEAN mobility graduates and their expectations of potential employees
- #4** To assess the similarities and differences between students' and employers' perceptions on the value of intra-ASEAN mobility on employability
- #5** To recommend lines of action on how to better align intra-ASEAN mobility programme offerings with labour market expectations

# Methods - Process and timeline



Literature Review

Interviews

Final Report Writing

September - October 2021

November 2021 - January 2022

May - October 2022

February 2022 - May 2022

# Databases used for mobility trends



## Literature Review

September - October 2021

Student and labour  
mobility trends

- The **UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS)** database for inbound and outbound student mobility
- **WorldBank EdStats Education Statistics**, for share of tertiary graduates by discipline
- **United Nations (UN) International Migrant Stock** by Origin and Destination 2019 (statistics available from 1990 to 2019) for total number and share of migrants within and beyond the ASEAN as well as their origin and destination countries
- **The ILO's International Labor Migration Statistics (ILMS)** in ASEAN 2017 for the share of migrant workforce by occupational level



# Participants



## 83 interviewees

- 43 graduates
- 40 labour market representatives

## 4 countries

- Malaysia
- Thailand
- The Philippines
- Viet Nam

# Participants



## 3 broad sectors

- Business, Social Sciences, and the Humanities
- Education
- Engineering and ICT

## 4 mobility schemes

- AIMS
- AUN
- SHARE
- UMAP



# Student and labour mobility trends



**According to UIS statistics, there has been a significant increase in intra- ASEAN student flows in recent decades, yet outbound mobility largely occurs towards non- ASEAN destinations.**

- The years 1999 to 2018 saw intra-ASEAN student mobility **grow by 270%** from 7,643 to 28,333.
- However, intra-ASEAN mobility still remains limited, accounting for **only 9.4% of the total outbound mobility** of higher education students from the ASEAN region which numbered 301,792 in 2018.
- In 2019, the top 3 destinations for higher education students from the ASEAN were **Australia, Japan, and the United States**. Together, these countries accounted for about 59% of ASEAN outbound student mobility.



# There has been a significant increase in intra- ASEAN student flows in recent decades.

Intra-ASEAN student mobility **grew by 270%** from 7,643 to 28,333 from 2010 to 2018

Top 3 hosts are **Malaysia, Viet Nam and Thailand**, which respectively received 13,318, 7,076, and 7,037 tertiary education students from within the region

(n.b. data from Cambodia, the Philippines, and Singapore unavailable from UIS)

To / From	Brunei Darussalam	Cambodia	Indonesia	Lao PDR	Malaysia	Myanmar	The Philippines	Singapore	Thailand	Viet Nam
Brunei Darussalam	a	...	12	n	842	n	...	...	8	n
Cambodia	n	a	25	48	145	n	...	...	1,550	695
Indonesia	58	...	a	n	9,902	5	...	...	410	8
Malaysia	116	...	1,745	n	a	n	...	...	245	13
Myanmar	n	...	20	9	428	a	...	...	2,690	46
Lao PDR	n	...	8	a	10	n	...	...	944	6,227
The Philippines	26	...	56	n	355	...	a	...	296	55
Singapore	29	...	57	n	750	n	...	a	31	n
Thailand	8	...	996	n	826	10	...	...	a	32
Viet Nam	n	...	55	235	60	n	...	...	863	a

... : missing data  
 n : nil or negligible  
 a : not applicable

13,318

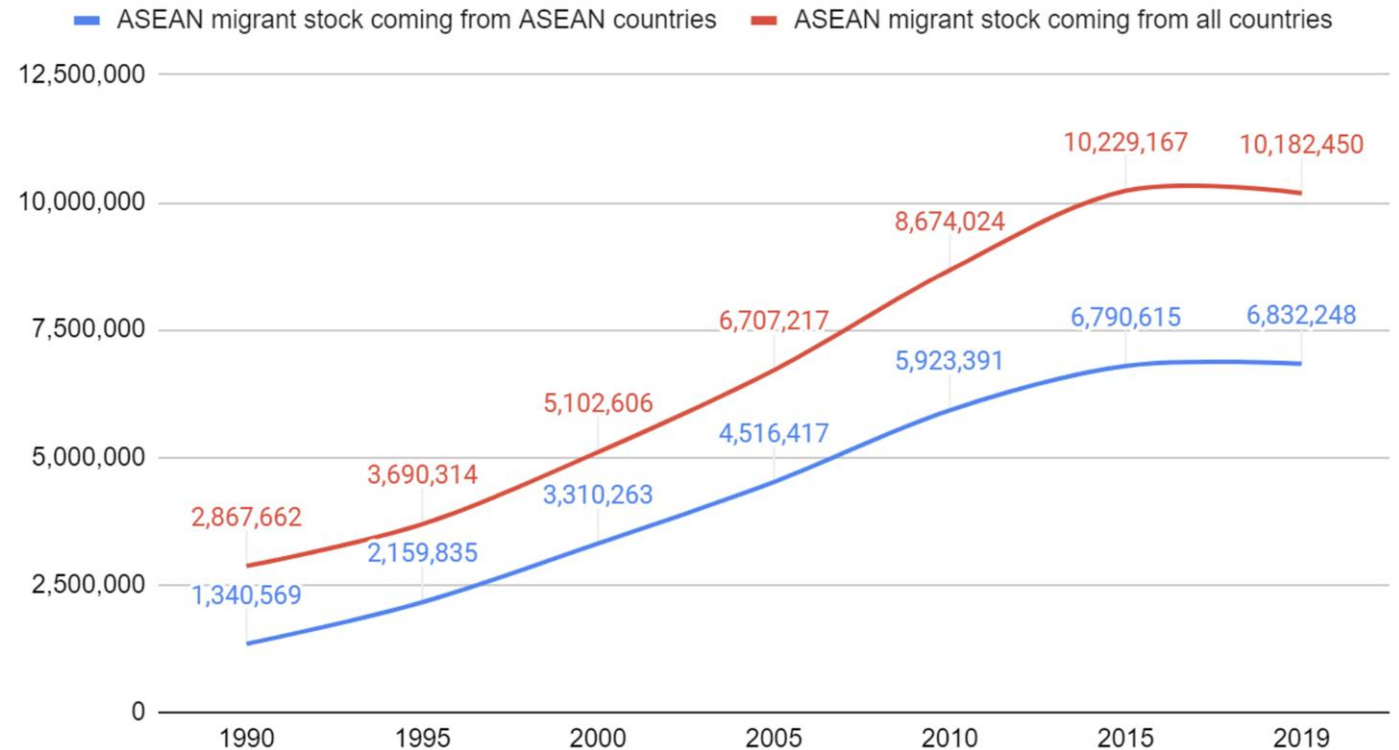
7,037 7,076

## There has also been a notable increase in intra- ASEAN labour mobility.

A total of **281 million international migrants** overall, showing an average of 2.4% annual growth over the last two decades (Migration Data Portal, 2021)

Total **migrant stock in ASEAN** region increased from 2.9 million in 1990 to **10.2 million in 2019** (UN, 2019)

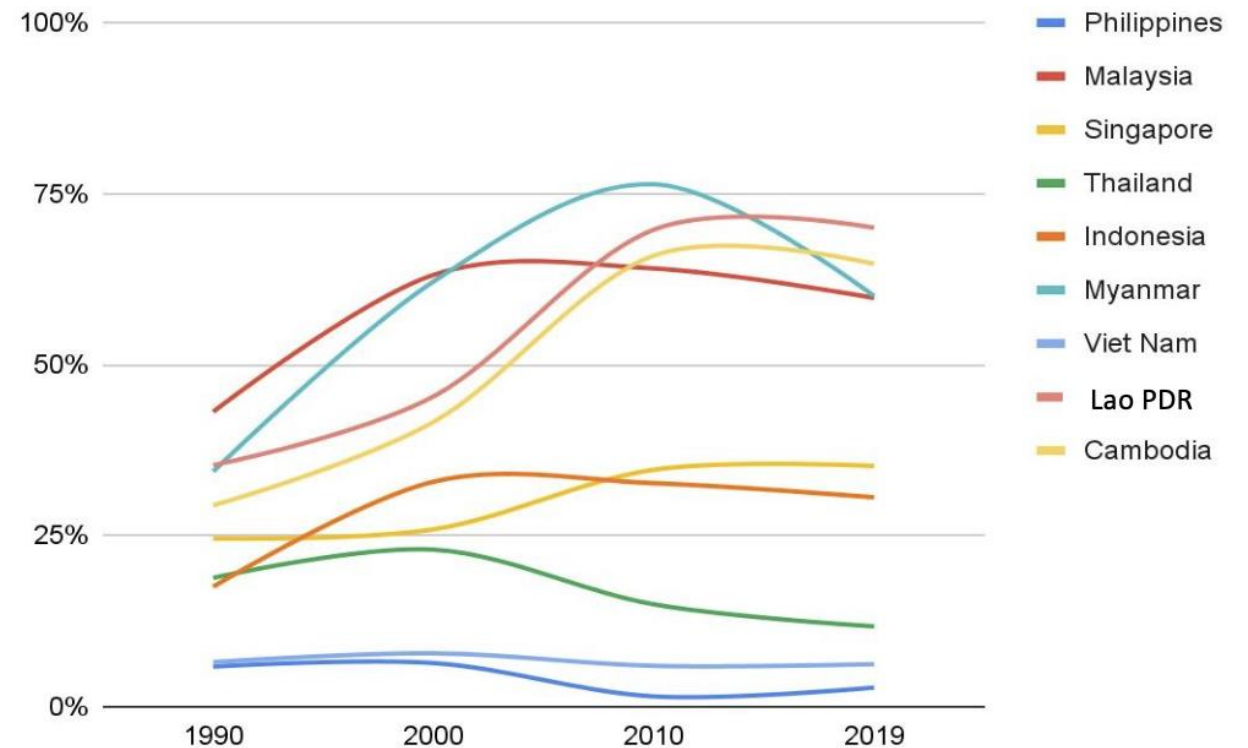
Total Migrant Stock in the ASEAN Region by Origin, 1990-2019 (UN<sup>16</sup>)



**There has also been a notable increase in intra- ASEAN labour mobility, yet it is concentrated in mobility corridors and low- or middle-skilled occupations.**

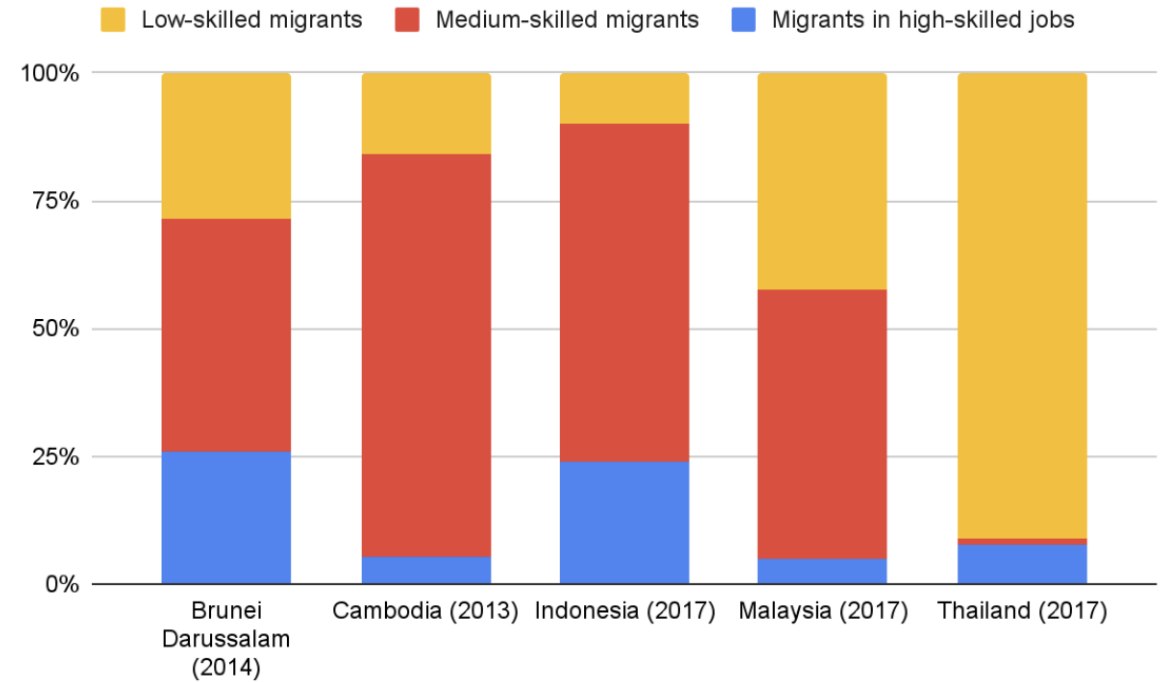
- Top intra-regional migrant hosts since 1995: **Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore** (90.5% of the total intra-ASEAN migrant share in 2019)
- While the **Philippines and Viet Nam** are among Asia's top origin countries of migrants worldwide, their contributions to intra-ASEAN mobility are among the **lowest** at 5.9% and 6.5% in 2019, respectively (UN)

Intra-ASEAN Share of Member States' Total Nationals Abroad, 1990-2019 (UN)<sup>7</sup>



# In general, intra-ASEAN migrant flows within the ASEAN region mainly involve low- and medium- skilled workers in the informal economy

In general, intra-ASEAN migrant flows within the ASEAN region mainly involve low- and medium-skilled workers in the informal economy (ILMS)







# Graduates' perceptions



**Most graduates perceive their intra-ASEAN mobility to have a positive impact on their careers, enabling them to develop career-related resources, professional contacts, and other ‘non- performance’ related benefits.**

- Graduates mostly cited improvements in **communication** (including **English language proficiency**), **intercultural competence, interpersonal skills, adaptability, and open-mindedness**
- Around **a third** of the respondents allude to gaining **friends, acquaintances, and contacts** during and through the programme, which suggests the formation of **‘weak ties’**
- Graduates also found their mobility experience as a gateway to **new career horizons and interests**
- Many graduates found that the skills they developed through their intra-ASEAN mobility experience were **relevant or useful** to their current or past work roles



# Employers' perceptions

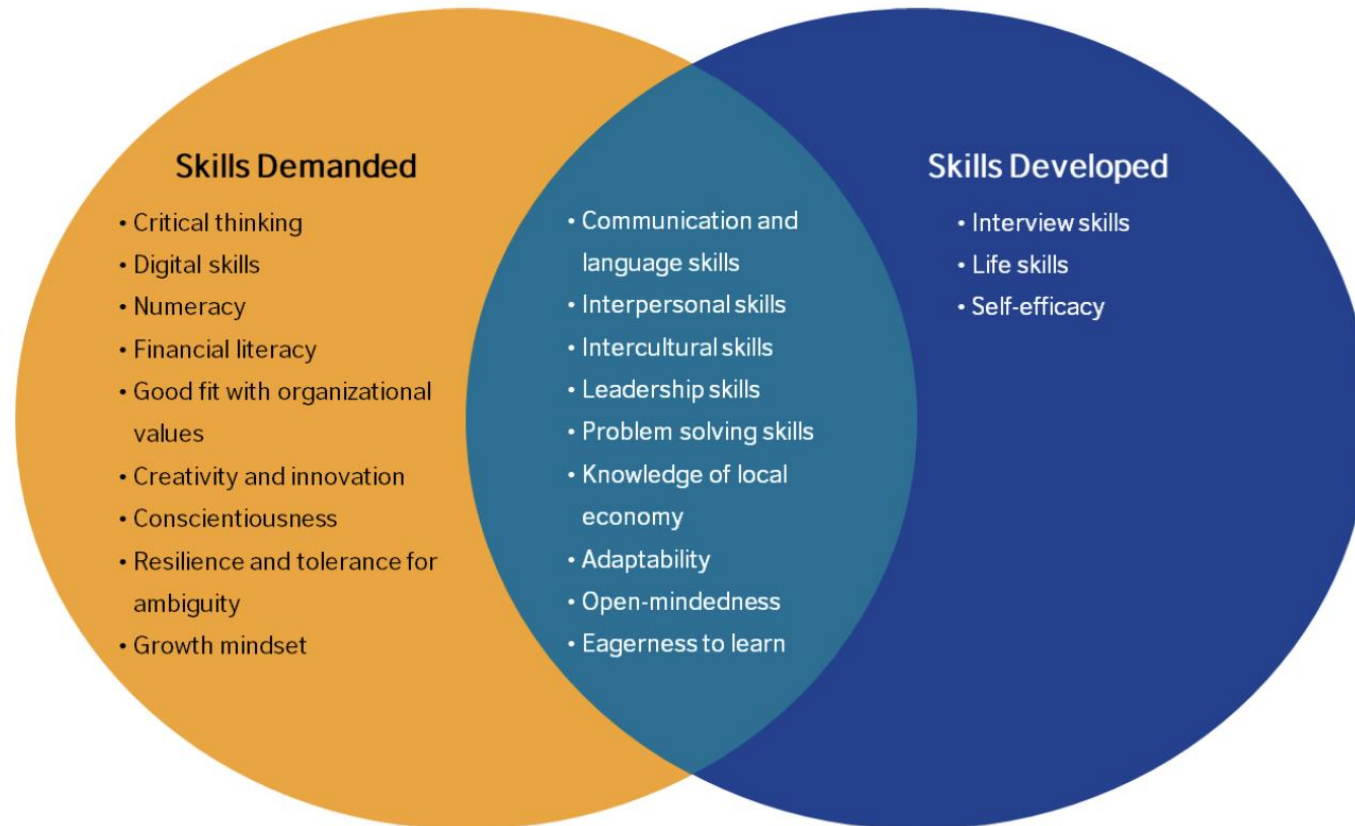
## Intra-ASEAN mobility appears to give candidates an edge in the labour market, with some caveats

- Employers generally hold a **positive view** of mobility, either **within or beyond the ASEAN region**
- Around **half of the LMRs** interviewed (n=20) report that study abroad gives a candidate **some advantage** in the hiring process, especially during the screening or interview stage
- Findings from the study also suggest that employers perceive formerly mobile graduates to possess a number of **desirable skills and characteristics** valued in the job market such as English skills, communication skills, open-mindedness, adaptability, autonomy and independence, interpersonal skills, resilience, and creativity and innovation



# Contrasting graduates' and employers' perceptions

**It appears that the soft skills demanded by employers closely align with those developed by graduates through intra-ASEAN mobility.**





## **Intra-ASEAN mobility appears to give candidates an edge in the labour market**

- Advantage of previous mobility experience:
  - when specific languages are required in the role
  - when employers are interested in expanding their presence to other countries in Southeast Asia, and
  - when the skill set or domain knowledge required for the job is not inherently available in the local context.



## **Most employers tend to evaluate mobility alongside a host of other criteria when deciding whether or not to hire a candidate**

- candidate's skills, mindset, and attitudes against the demands of the role
- relevance of the applicant's qualifications to the job role
- having prior work experience: value of academic mobility when it is coupled with practical experience
- candidate able to demonstrate a good fit between the candidate and the organisation
- reputation of host country and university regarding field specialisations
- perceptions around educational quality based on institutional rankings
- lack of awareness among employers on the existence of intra-ASEAN mobility schemes





# Policy Recommendations

- Embed the employability dimension into existing intra-ASEAN student mobility schemes through placements, internships, and career support for mobile students.
- Pursue structured university-industry collaborations and dialogues to enhance the intra-ASEAN student mobility brand and raise employers' awareness of their value in the labour market.
- Enhance intra-ASEAN students' networking opportunities with ASEAN companies and alumni to boost their long-term employability.

# Policy Recommendations (Continued)

- Develop mechanisms to monitor and ensure the attractiveness of intra-ASEAN student mobility programmes.
- Generate more robust data collection and registration on intra-ASEAN mobile students and the outcomes of exchange programmes in the region.
- Continue to enhance structural support towards the free movement of students, workers, and their skills in ASEAN.
- Explore avenues to ensure the accessibility and sustainability of intra-ASEAN student mobility programmes.



# Lines of Future Research

- A. Conduct more studies with a wider geographical, theoretical, and methodological breadth, possibly exploring the role of mobility characteristics and the differences in outcomes between countries and sectors.
- B. Conduct focused research on specific outcomes such as the development of job-specific skills, the mechanisms through which graduates develop soft skills, and the durability of intra-ASEAN mobility's signalling effect.
- C. Explore other forms of intra-regional mobility, including virtual and hybrid forms of mobility among teaching staff and researchers.
- D. Investigate the entrenched issues of privilege, inequality, and social justice around international student mobility and employability.



# Thank you



Report available here:

[https://www.share-asean.eu/sites/default/files/FINAL%20Digital%20Version%20-%20V1\\_221108%20REVISED\\_SHARE%20Employability%20Study\\_0.pdf](https://www.share-asean.eu/sites/default/files/FINAL%20Digital%20Version%20-%20V1_221108%20REVISED_SHARE%20Employability%20Study_0.pdf)