Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development

SEEKING JUSTICE FOR WOMEN MARRIAGE MIGRANTS IN ASIA:

REALITIES, STRUCTURAL AND LEGAL HURDLES

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We also extend our gratitude to the many researchers, community members and women marriage migrants who generously shared their time, experiences and insights. Their voices and commitments are at the heart of this report, shaping its analysis and strengthening our collective call for justice and rights for women marriage migrants in Asia and beyond.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This regional report synthesises the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)'s 2024 research on women marriage migrants in Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, South Korea and Taiwan. It shows that marriage migration is not merely an individual or romantic choice, but a structural outcome of patriarchy, neoliberal labour export regimes, demographic shifts and global care inequalities.

Marriage migration parallels labour migration and is deeply rooted in structural forces. It arises from world-systems inequalities, where peripheral countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia institutionalised labour export, while semi-peripheral states including South Korea, Taiwan and Malaysia turned to women marriage migrants in response to rural bachelorhood and fertility decline. At the same time, austerity measures and weakened welfare systems produced a crisis of reproduction, generating care deficits that increased demand for migrant women to sustain households. Patriarchal marriage systems further reinforced these dynamics, as working-class men sought foreign wives when excluded from local marriage markets, while women from poorer countries entered transnational unions as one of the few viable mobility routes. These processes were facilitated and intensified by brokerage industries, where matchmaking agencies and local intermediaries commodified women's reproductive labour, often under exploitative conditions.

Key Findings of the multi-country research include:

- **Structural dependency:** Visas and welfare tied to husbands' status leave women vulnerable to deportation, exclusion from pensions and care, and custody loss.

- **Systemic discrimination:** Police dismiss domestic violence as 'family matters'. Language interpretation support, reintegration programmes and consular support are weak.

- **Stigma and invisibility:** Returnees are labelled 'failures' or 'opportunists', and are excluded from reintegration schemes available to labour migrants.

- **Resistance and agency:** Women assert rights through court cases, mutual aid, media and advocacy, linking marriage migration to broader feminist and labour struggles.

This report proposes four priorities to guide governments, civil society and regional actors in advancing justice and dignity for women marriage migrants:

1. Independent legal status and fair residency/citizenship pathways;

2. Accessible justice via enforcement, translation and broker regulation;

3. Cultural change through dismantling stereotypes and embedding cultural competence; and

4. Movement-building and solidarity with sustainable funding and cross-border alliances.

Recognising women marriage migrants as rights-bearers and agents of change, this report calls for feminist and rights-based governance that dismantles structural inequalities and ensures autonomy, dignity and justice for all.

Table of Contents

ACRONYMS

AHRLIM	Alliance of Human Rights Legislation for Immigrants and Migrants
AMMORE	Alliance of Marriage Migrants' Organisations for Rights and Empowerment
APWLD	Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CESCR	Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
CFO	Commission on Filipinos Overseas
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DV	Domestic Violence
FF	Family Frontiers (Association of Family Support & Welfare Selangor & KL)
GABRIELA	General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality, Leadership, and Action (Philippines)
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GCM	Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration
GBV	Gender-based Violence
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
ICMW	International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KABAR BUMI	Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia

KOCUN	Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy
LTC	Long-Term Care
LTSVP	Long Term Social Visit Pass
MCR	Multi-Country Research
MOGEF	Ministry of Gender Equality and Family
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NTB	Nusa Tenggara Barat (Indonesia)
NTT	Nusa Tenggara Timur (Indonesia)
PCP	Peer Counselling Programme
PDO	Pre-Departure Orientation
PDOS	Pre-Departure Orientation Seminar
PGFM	Patriarchy, Globalisation, Fundamentalisms, Militarism
PR	Permanent Residence
PRC	People's Republic of China
RP	Resident Pass
TASAT	TransAsia Sisters Association, Taiwan
TIPs	Trafficking in Persons
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
VAW	Violence Against Women
WB	World Bank
WTO	World Trade Organisation

CHAPTER ONE

TRENDS AND REALITIES

As marriage migration has become increasingly prevalent in Asia, APWLD[1] launched in 2024 a Multi-Country Research (hereafter MCR) initiative entitled, '*Assessing Legal Policies and Practices Affecting the Human Rights and Access to Justice of Women Marriage Migrants in Asia*'. Partnering with member organisations from Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, South Korea and Taiwan—spanning both origin and destination countries—the research documents the lived realities of women marriage migrants, the discriminatory laws and policies that shape their lives, and the strategies they employ to defend their rights and access justice. By centering women's voices, it strengthens APWLD's structural analysis of the barriers and challenges they face, while identifying opportunities for advocacy and movement-building to protect their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

This regional report consolidates the stories, findings, analyses and recommendations from the MCR, amplifying grassroots voices to influence decision-making at national, regional and global levels. Grounded in APWLD's *Patriarchy, Globalisation, Fundamentalisms and Militarism* (PGFM) framework, it situates the experiences of women marriage migrants within the intersecting forces of neoliberal globalisation, cultural and religious fundamentalisms and increasing militarisation—all of which, underpinned by patriarchy, restrict women's autonomy and deepen inequality. From tracing migration pathways to examining legal regimes in both origin and destination countries, the regional report not only exposes violations but also documents acts of resistance—from organising and advocacy to litigation and community leadership. It is both an evidence-based resource and a political call to action: to dismantle the systems that marginalise women marriage migrants and to work towards a future where migration is a choice made in freedom and human rights are guaranteed for all.

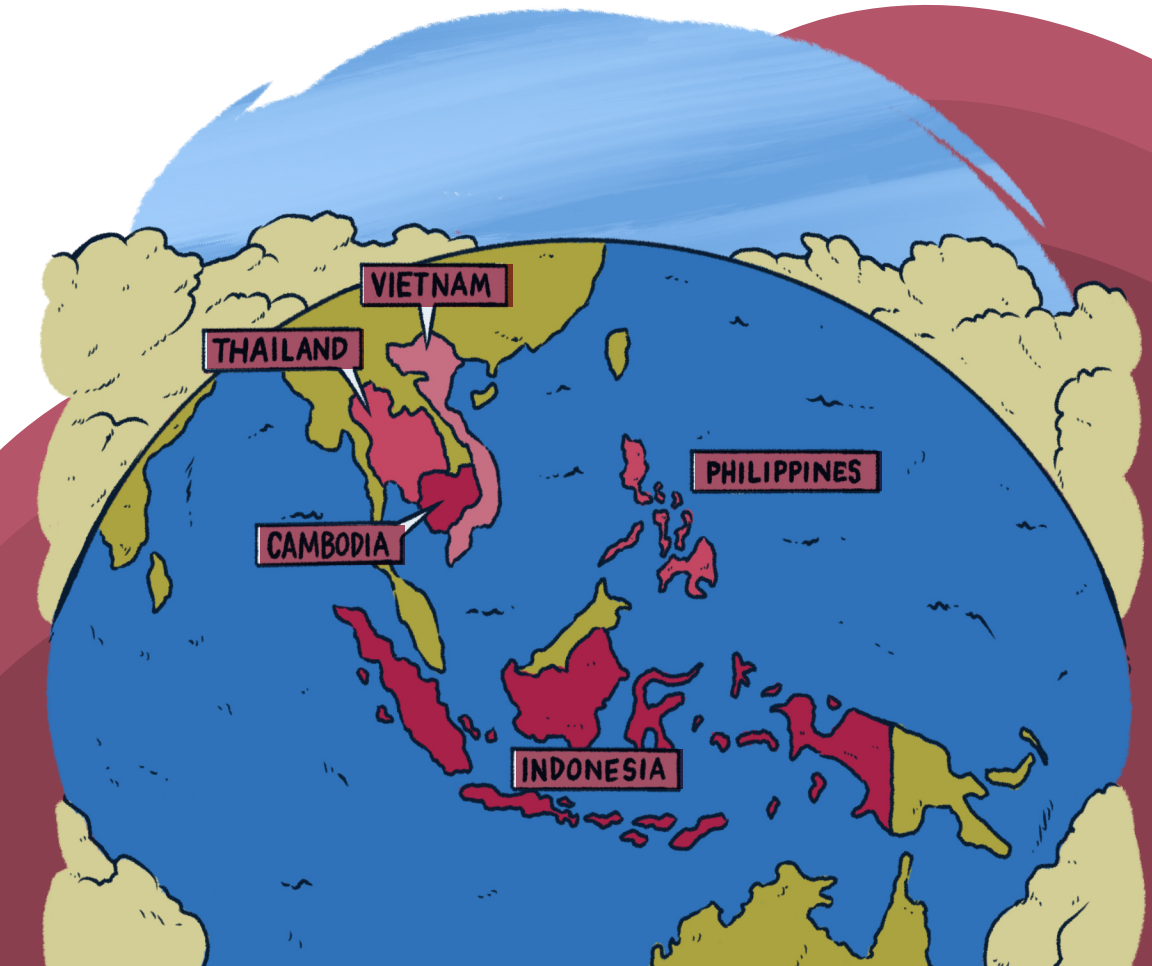
[1] Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) is Asia Pacific's leading feminist, membership driven network, representing diverse women from more than thirty countries and territories in the region. For over 38 years, APWLD has been empowering women to use law as an instrument of change for equality, justice, peace and development. For more information, please check www.apwld.org

1.1 A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF MARRIAGE MIGRATION IN THE REGION

1.1.1 Patterns and dynamics of marriage migration in Asia

Marriage migration in Asia has evolved through distinct yet intersecting historical trajectories, with different countries experiencing their own turning points at different moments, but often sharing patterns of growth, decline and policy change. These trajectories have been shaped by structural economic shifts, demographic changes, cultural norms and policy regimes in both origin and destination countries.

As documented in Taiwan's MCR report from TASAT, marriage migration to Taiwan began in the mid-1980s, when rural and working-class men, facing economic decline and fewer marriage prospects, increasingly sought wives from Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand and Cambodia) and the People's Republic of China (hereafter PRC), often through commercial matchmaking agencies. Official statistics have been available since 1998, when cross-border marriages accounted for 16 per cent of all registered marriages.



Numbers rose rapidly, peaking in 2003 at 32 per cent of all marriages. This surge reflected both the expansion of commercial matchmaking and the high demand for so-called 'foreign brides' in rural areas. In 2004, however, the government began to tighten border controls—particularly for Vietnamese spouses—through measures such as stricter entry interviews. This policy shift caused a steep decline, after which the proportion stabilised between 13 per cent and 20 per cent from 2005 to 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a further drop from 2020 to 2022, but by 2023, numbers had returned to pre-pandemic levels, maintaining the lower, post-2004 pattern.[2]

Similarly, according to Korea's MCR report, marriage migration emerged in South Korea in the 1990s, driven by rural depopulation and the difficulties rural men faced in finding local spouses. Local governments and private brokers began arranging overseas marriage trips, initially targeting Korean-Chinese communities but soon expanding to Vietnam, the Philippines, Cambodia and other Southeast Asian countries. Numbers climbed sharply in the early 2000s, partly due to Taiwan's tightening of visa policies in 2005 for women from developing countries, which diverted flows to South Korea.

International marriages peaked in 2005 at over 42,000, representing 13.6 per cent of all marriages that year, before dropping and stabilising in the 2010s at 20,000–25,000 annually. By 2023, there were 174,895 marriage migrants holding marriage migration-related visas, 80.3 per cent of them women. PRC (34.3 per cent), Vietnam (22.8 per cent), Japan (9.0 per cent) and the Philippines (7.2 per cent) remain the largest origin or source countries, though the composition has shifted: Vietnamese spouses rose from 0.6 per cent in 2000 to over 20 per cent in recent years, while Chinese spouses' share has declined. Overall, flows have remained steady over the past decade, with stable inflows from Southeast Asia and growing diversity in origins.[3]

Cross-border marriages have long been part of Malaysia's social fabric, shaped by its history as a regional trading hub and a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society. As Malaysia's MCR report documents, historical ties are especially strong with neighbouring Indonesia and the southern Philippines, where shared Malay ethnicity, the widespread use of Bahasa Melayu, and common Islamic faith have facilitated unions. In recent decades, these marriages have increasingly involved women from other Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries such as Vietnam and Thailand, driven by economic opportunities and cultural compatibility.

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[2] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*.https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[3] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

Currently, binational marriages account for at least 10 per cent of all registered unions, with the proportion much higher in border states such as Sabah. Marriages between Malaysian men and Indonesian women remain the most common, followed by unions with women from Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam. While the overall number has been stable over the past decade, the countries of origin have diversified since the early 2000s, with more spouses from Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia, alongside earlier flows from the Philippines and Indonesia. COVID-19 border closures caused a temporary drop in 2020–2021, but numbers rebounded by 2022.[4]

According to the Philippines' MCR report, as a sending country, the Philippines has experienced a decades-long evolution in marriage migration, beginning with post–World War II 'war brides' to the United States and Japan. A major shift occurred in the 1970s when the government institutionalised a labour export policy, which also facilitated marriages abroad, particularly to Japan, South Korea and Western nations. Between 1989 and 2022, Philippine Statistics Authority data recorded over 109,000 marriages between Filipino women and foreign nationals. While overall trends have been stable, annual numbers fluctuated with policy changes in destination countries, peaking in the mid-2000s when registrations exceeded 5,000 per year. Japan, the United States, South Korea, Australia and Canada have been the main destinations, with Singapore and Malaysia emerging more recently.[5] Japan has been especially significant.

After World War II, rural Japan's population decline led to the so-called 'bride famine', threatening family and community survival. In 1985-1986, local governments of Asahi Town and Okura Village arranged matchmaking trips to the Philippines for Japanese bachelors. The system spread, making Filipina-Japanese marriages common in other rural places.[6] Additionally, as documented in MCR report), in the 1980s and 1990s, many unions involved Japanese men and Filipino women working in Japan under the 'entertainer visa', linked to service-sector labour demand. By the early 2000s, such marriages averaged over 1,500 annually, and from 1989 to 2022, more than 39,000 were recorded—making Japan the single largest cumulative destination of Filipina marriage migrants. Return migration has also grown in recent years, including 'reverse' moves where foreign husbands retire in the Philippines.[7]

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[4] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[5] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

[6] Umeda, Y. (2009). *Filipina intermarriage in rural Japan: An anthropological approach* (Doctoral dissertation). London School of Economics and Political Science.

[7] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

In Indonesia, marriage migration—particularly from West Kalimantan—dates back to the 1980s, initially involving women of Chinese descent marrying men from Taiwan and China. West Kalimantan, located on the island of Borneo, has long been home to a significant ethnic Chinese population, many descended from 18th- and 19th-century migrants from southern China who settled as traders and miners. These shared ethnic and cultural ties, including language and kinship networks, facilitated early cross-border marriages as a form of 'ethnic return'. Over time, economic motives overtook ethnic return as the primary driver, and the practice expanded to Dayak and Malay women in the region.

Between 1980 and 2007, around 27,000 residents from three districts migrated to Taiwan through marriage, with over 2,000 Indonesian women marrying Taiwanese men annually since 1992. Flows to PRC also increased, with several hundred women migrating each year by the mid-2000s. These movements have been sustained by well-organised broker networks linking women to foreign men, and while no official national time-series data exist, local government and diplomatic sources confirm that flows to both Taiwan and PRC have continued steadily.[8]

To sum up, marriage migration in Asia has unfolded in overlapping phases, with countries experiencing their own turning points yet remaining connected through shared regional patterns.

Timeline of marriage migration in Asia:

Post–World War II to 1970s

Flows were modest, often rooted in wartime unions or long-standing ethnic, linguistic or religious ties. The Philippines sent 'war brides' to the United States and Japan, while Malaysia's cross-border marriages reflected regional Malay and Islamic connections.

1970s–1980s

In the 1970s–80s, the Philippines' labour export policy expanded both labour and marriage migration to Japan, South Korea and the North American and West European countries.

In West Kalimantan, ethnic Chinese women married Taiwanese and PRC men through kinship ties, while some Taiwanese rural men

[8] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/ marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

wed women from PRC and Southeast Asia. In Japan, rural depopulation created a so-called 'bride famine', and by the mid-1980s municipalities launched matchmaking trips to arrange marriages with Filipina women.

1990s

Marriage migration accelerated across the region. South Korea turned abroad to address rural bachelor surpluses, first through Korean-Chinese connections and then to other Southeast Asian countries. In Indonesia, economic motives overtook ethnic return, broadening marriage migration to include Dayak and Malay women. The Philippines strengthened links to Japan through the 'entertainer visa' route, and Taiwan's inflows expanded rapidly through commercial matchmaking.

Early 2000s

Multiple countries reached peaks in marriage migration, fuelled by commercial matchmaking, rural demographic shifts and policy spillovers between states. Malaysia began diversifying beyond Indonesia and the Philippines to other ASEAN countries. In Indonesia, flows extended from Taiwan to the PRC.

Mid-2000s to 2010s

Policy tightening and brokerage regulation brought numbers down from their peaks but stabilised flows in most countries. While volumes plateaued, origins diversified and long-standing migration corridors persisted.

2020s

COVID-19 border closures caused a temporary drop in all destinations. Flows rebounded by 2022–2023, with established migration channels remaining resilient. Return migration, including 'reverse' moves to sending countries, became more visible in some contexts.

Across the MCR reports in five countries, marriage migration has followed broadly similar rhythms—emerging or accelerating in the late 20th century, peaking in the early to mid-2000s, and then stabilising at lower but sustained levels after policy tightening. While timelines vary, a recurring driver has been the imbalance in national and transnational marriage markets created by unequal development. Men in economically disadvantaged regions—whether rural, semi-urban, or less industrialised—face shrinking local marriage prospects, while women from poorer countries or regions view transnational marriage as a route to economic security and mobility.

These intertwined trajectories are closely linked to the region's history of labour migration, drawing on similar recruitment infrastructures and economic logics. Policy interventions—ranging from stricter visa controls to regulation of brokers—have altered flows but not erased the structural forces sustaining them. Together, they reveal how marriage migration is not an isolated personal choice but part of a regional mobility system shaped by structural inequalities, policy regimes and transnational labour demands. This structural embeddedness underscores its connection to broader forms of forced migration in Asia, where economic precarity, gendered expectations and restrictive migration regimes intersect to limit agency in cross-border unions.

1.1.2 Push and pull of marriage migration

Marriage migration in Asia is not merely the outcome of individual choice or romantic aspiration; it is a structural phenomenon shaped by the interplay of capitalist globalisation, patriarchy, state-controlled migration regimes and transnational inequalities. Using APWLD's PGFM framework—Patriarchy, Globalisation, Fundamentalisms, and Militarism—this analysis examines the 'push' and 'pull' factors driving marriage migration, the role of intermediary actors and how these dynamics reproduce gendered power relations across borders.

1.1.2.1 Root causes of marriage migration under patriarchal-capitalist globalisation

Marriage migration in Asia must be understood as structurally embedded in the dynamics of capitalist globalisation. Like labour migration, it represents a gendered form of forced migration, not simply the outcome of individual choice. As H.-C. Hsia argues, marriage migration is a by-product of capitalist development, one way men and women cope with distorted and marginalised social structures shaped by unequal development.[9]

[9] Hsia, H.-C. (2004). Internationalization of capital and the trade in Asian women: The case of "foreign brides" in Taiwan. In D. Aguilar & A. Lacsamana (Eds.), *Women and globalization.* (pp. 181–229). Humanity Books.

From the perspective of world-systems theory,[10] the global economy is stratified into core, semi-peripheral and peripheral zones. Core states such as the United States, Japan and Western Europe dominate capital, technology and global markets. Semi-peripheral states such as Taiwan, South Korea and Malaysia occupy an intermediate position, simultaneously exploiting peripheral countries while remaining dependent on the core. Peripheral states such as the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam are subordinated as exporters of cheap labour and raw materials. Marriage migration emerges precisely through these structural inequalities, linking households across different positions in the world-system.

H.-C. Hsia provides a systematic framework to trace how capitalist accumulation produces marriage migration as summarised in the following: One defining feature of capitalist development in the core and semi-periphery is the relentless search for expanded accumulation through cost reduction and new markets.[11] To secure cheap labour, developed states both import workers from the periphery and export capital to peripheral economies. Through international trade and financial institutions, like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), core states pressure the periphery to open markets and restructure domestic economies. Peripheral states, in turn, pursue distorted development either by creating climates favourable to foreign investment or by exporting surplus labour abroad. Both strategies intensify capital internationalisation and labour liberalisation.

These dynamics destabilise rural livelihoods in both periphery and semi-periphery. Agricultural sectors collapse under import dependence and falling commodity prices, while industrial workers face plant closures and unemployment as production relocates. In patriarchal marriage systems where men are expected to hold higher social status than their wives, downwardly mobile agricultural and blue-collar men in semi-peripheral economies find themselves excluded from local marriage markets. Similarly, in peripheral economies, men's economic precarity constrains their marriage prospects, while women are increasingly drawn into migration to sustain families. Brokers step into this gap, connecting marginalised men in receiving societies with women from sending countries, thereby institutionalising marriage migration.

For receiving states, marriage migrants function as both reproductive labourers and cheap workers. They provide unpaid domestic labour, childbearing and elder care, thereby reproducing the labour force, while also entering low-wage employment

[10] Wallerstein, I. (1974). *The modern world-system I: Capitalist agriculture and the origins of the European world-economy in the sixteenth century*. Academic Press.

[11] Hsia, H.-C. (2004). Internationalization of capital and the trade in Asian women: The case of "foreign brides" in Taiwan. In D. Aguilar & A. Lacsamana (Eds.), *Women and globalization.* (pp. 191-194). Humanity Books.

themselves. For sending states, migrant women's remittances and the fees extracted by recruitment and travel agencies feed into primitive accumulation and relieve unemployment pressures.

1.1.2.2 Crisis of reproduction and the global care chain

H.-C. Hsia extends the analysis of capitalist globalisation by theorising the 'crisis of reproduction'.[12] Just as the restructuring of production in the 1980s relocated industries to lower-wage economies, globalisation has reorganised the realm of social reproduction. In patriarchal capitalist societies, reproductive labour has historically been performed by women without pay. As capitalist globalisation intensifies, the welfare state is in crisis and many services, such as community child-care centres, are eliminated. As a result of rising living costs combined with the lack of a comprehensive social welfare system, women in more developed countries seek cheaper surrogates to take care of household needs. Therefore, many countries have established policies that allow for the importing of migrant domestic workers to resolve the crisis of reproduction which leads to 'the restructuring of reproduction', in which women from less developed countries migrate to perform household labour for the families of the more developed countries—that is, in the reverse direction of the restructuring of production. Scholars describe this as the 'international transfer of caretaking'[13] and the formation of 'global care chains'.[14]

However, as H.-C. Hsia points out, these policies of importing migrant domestic workers serve only as 'Band-Aid' solutions.[15] They did not resolve the deeper reproduction crisis generated by the rising costs of childrearing, insecure employment, housing pressures and entrenched gender inequality. The result is a care deficit, manifesting in dramatically declining fertility rates: Fertility rates have plummeted across East Asia—Taiwan (1.09), South Korea (1.11), Japan (1.39), Hong Kong (1.23), and Singapore (1.10)—far below the replacement level of 2.1.[16]

Moreover, while middle class families can resort to hiring migrant domestic workers, small farmers and working class cannot afford to hire this type of labour. Consequently, working-class and rural men in the more developed countries follow

[12] Hsia, H.-C. (2015). Reproduction crisis, illegality, and migrant women under capitalist globalization: The case of Taiwan. In S. Friedman & P. Mahdavi (Eds.), *Migrant encounters: Intimate labor, the state and mobility across Asia* (pp. 160–183). University of Pennsylvania Press.

[13] Parreñas, R. S. (2001). *Servants of globalization: Women, migration, and domestic work*. Stanford University Press.

[14] Hochschild, A. R. (2000). Global care chains and emotional surplus value. In W. Hutton & A. Giddens (Eds.), *On the edge: Living with global capitalism* (pp. 130–146). Jonathan Cape.

[15] Hsia, H.-C. (2015). Reproduction crisis, illegality, and migrant women under capitalist globalization: The case of Taiwan. In S. Friedman & P. Mahdavi (Eds.), *Migrant encounters: Intimate labor, the state and mobility across Asia* (pp. 160–183). University of Pennsylvania Press.

[16] Central Intelligence Agency. (n.d.). *Country Comparisons: Total Fertility Rate*. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/total-fertility-rate/country-comparison/

the flight of capital to neighbouring, less developed countries in search of brides. This created a reverse flow: while capital moved outward in the restructuring of production, reproductive labour was imported inward, embodied in migrant women's paid and unpaid work.[17]

1.1.2.3 State migration regimes and labour export policies

Labour export policies often channel women into temporary and precarious migrant worker schemes—such as domestic work, care work and entertainment visas—where they face exploitative contracts, debt bondage and deportability. By contrast, the migration regime governing marriage migrants, though fraught with patriarchal regulation and dependence on the husband's legal status, offers comparatively greater stability than labour migration.

Consequently, some women turn to arranged marriage as a pathway to mobility. For example, blue-collar women from Southeast Asia who are excluded from Taiwan's list of labour-sending countries cannot enter as workers, but they may enter as 'foreign spouses'. While their residency remains conditional and can lapse into illegality if spousal ties dissolve or visas expire, the foreign spouse status still appears less precarious than that of migrant workers. Women report entering arranged marriages to avoid exploitative recruitment agencies, to secure longer-term residency rights or simply because marriage migration was the only viable channel available to them given restrictive labour import policies. In this way, state migration control effectively pushes certain women toward marriage as the only avenue to transnational mobility, highlighting how global care chains are sustained through the unequal restructuring of both production and reproduction, as well as patriarchy and women's subordination in marriage.[18]

1.1.2.4 Brokerage systems and transnational intermediaries

Marriage migration is sustained by a transnational brokerage industry that links the push from sending countries to the pull from receiving countries. Brokers—ranging from licensed matchmaking agencies to informal intermediaries—commodify women's reproductive labour and bodies, arranging matches often within days and with minimal informed consent.

MCR reports document the roles of brokers in the formation of marriage migration. In Indonesia, brokers (*moyingin/mak comblang*) operate across rural districts and

[17] Hsia, H.-C. (2015). Reproduction crisis, illegality, and migrant women under capitalist globalization: The case of Taiwan. In S. Friedman & P. Mahdavi (Eds.), *Migrant encounters: Intimate labor, the state and mobility across Asia* (pp. 160–183). University of Pennsylvania Press.

[18] Hsia, H.-C. (2015). Reproduction crisis illegality, and migrant women under capitalist globalization: The case of Taiwan. In S. Friedman & P. Mahdavi (Eds.), *Migrant encounters: Intimate labor, the state and mobility across Asia* (pp. 160–183). University of Pennsylvania Press.

border areas, sometimes using coercive practices such as debt bondage.[19] Taiwan's industry similarly thrives on connecting rural bachelors with women from poorer Asian countries.[20] Similarly, In South Korea, 'marriage tours' allow men to select brides during short overseas trips.[21] In Japan and PRC, local intermediaries and cross-border networks facilitate the recruitment of women from Southeast Asia,[22] underscoring the regional integration of this marriage market.

1.1.2.5 National case studies of push–pull dynamics

Empirical evidence from the five country reports illustrates these dynamics. The Philippines demonstrates this process most clearly. Since the 1970s, labour export has been institutionalised as national policy, supported by state licensing, pre-departure training and remittance systems. Women now constitute the majority of overseas migrants, concentrated in domestic and care work. A key feminised route was the entertainer visa to Japan, promoted by the Philippine state and private agencies during the 1980s–2000s. Officially categorised as cultural performers, tens of thousands of women were in fact employed in hostess bars and karaoke clubs, where they provided intimate service labour. Many subsequently married Japanese men, especially in rural or small-town areas where bachelorhood was acute. Thus, labour export and marriage migration were directly linked, as the state profited from remittances while families relied on daughters' transnational marriages for survival.[23]

Indonesia followed a similar trajectory. Labour exports accelerated in the 1980s and women became the majority of migrants—70 per cent in 2019, and 61 per cent in 2023, most employed as domestic workers. Brokerage agencies in Java, Sumatra and West Kalimantan managed both labour and marriage migration, often overlapping in recruitment networks. In West Kalimantan, ethnic Chinese women married Taiwanese and PRC men through kinship networks that paralleled labour brokerage. Here, too, marriage migration functioned as a survival strategy amid rural dispossession, while the state treated women's transnational mobility as a tool to manage unemployment and generate foreign exchange.[24]

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[19] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

[20] Hsia, H.-C. (2004). Internationalization of capital and the trade in Asian women: The case of "foreign brides" in Taiwan. In D. Aguilar & A. Lacsamana (Eds.), *Women and globalization.* (pp. 191-194). Humanity Books.

[21] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[22] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

[23] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

[24] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

In Taiwan, capitalist restructuring created one of the most acute reproduction crises in the region. Rapid industrialisation and neoliberal reforms marginalised agricultural and working-class households, while fertility plummeted to 1.09.[25] By the 1990s, rural men—especially farmers—were increasingly excluded from local marriage markets, as women migrated to cities or sought higher-status partners. Private brokers facilitated marriages with women from Vietnam, Indonesia and PRC. Migrant wives became essential to sustaining rural households: providing heirs, performing care work for ageing in-laws, supporting agricultural production and entering low-wage sectors. While the government did not have policies to recruit marriage migrants, unlike in Japan and South Korea, marriage migration in Taiwan was folded into national demographic and economic strategies as a way to manage both rural bachelorhood and the reproduction crisis.[26]

South Korea experienced similar pressures. Industrial restructuring and neoliberal reforms undermined rural livelihoods, while fertility collapsed to 1.11 by 2023. By the late 1990s, marriage migration surged as brokers and local governments arranged marriages for farmers and working-class men with women from Vietnam, the Philippines and PRC. The Korean state justified these unions as solutions to rural bachelorhood and national demographic decline, embedding them into population policy. Migrant wives bore children, cared for elderly in-laws, worked in agriculture and entered low-wage sectors, sustaining both households and the economy while remaining structurally vulnerable due to their dependent visa status.

Japan, an earlier industrialiser, also confronts a reproduction crisis. Fertility fell to 1.39 in 2024, and rural depopulation marginalised working-class men. The state facilitated feminised migration through the entertainer visa (*geinō* visa) regime, which brought tens of thousands of Filipinas annually from the 1980s to early 2000s. Officially cultural performers, they worked in the entertainment industry, where many developed relationships with Japanese men and transitioned into marriage. Private brokers also linked rural bachelors to these women, embedding labour migration into the marriage market. Migrant wives thus sustained households by providing elder care, childbearing and service labour, while their precarious status exposed them to exploitation.[27]

In Malaysia, the restructuring of reproduction is evident in the state's reliance on migrant domestic workers to offset care deficits produced by neoliberal retrenchment of welfare. Since the 1980s, Malaysian households—especially middle-class urban

[25] Central Intelligence Agency. (n.d.). *Country Comparisons: Total Fertility Rate*. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/total-fertility-rate/country-comparison/

[26] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*.https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[27] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

families—have turned to migrant women from Indonesia and the Philippines to meet childcare and domestic needs. When diplomatic tensions or bans disrupted these labour flows, Malaysia extended recruitment to Cambodia, Vietnam and Sri Lanka, though these arrangements were unstable and often marked by reports of exploitation and subsequent suspensions.[28]

Woven together, the five MCR reports show how marriage migration is rooted in the contradictions of capitalist development. In the periphery, labour export policies institutionalised women's transnational mobility, feeding remittance economies. In the semi-periphery and core, reproduction crises created structural demand for reproductive labour. Brokers and municipal programmes connected these dynamics, moving women from lower-income economies into households of higher-income economies facing care deficits and demographic decline. Migrant wives contribute to capital accumulation by maintaining labour (domestic and care work), renewing labour (childbearing and rearing) and supplying cheap labour.

In summary, marriage migration is not merely a personal or romantic choice; it is a structural response to a reproduction crisis created by austerity, privatisation and global inequality. It 'restructures reproduction' by transferring care from poorer to wealthier households via the global care chain, embedding economic, racial and gender hierarchies into intimate life. Each stage of the migration cycle—pre-departure, destination and return—reveals gender-specific vulnerabilities rooted in exclusion from rights, recognition and resources. Addressing these requires rights-based, gender-transformative and transnational policy reforms that delink social rights from marital or citizenship status, regulate brokerage and guarantee protection and reintegration support for migrant women.

1.1.3 Control over body, mind and income

Marriage migration in Asia reveals a systematic pattern of bodily regulation, gender subordination and economic exploitation, shaped by intersecting structures of global capitalism, religious and cultural fundamentalisms and entrenched patriarchy. Through the PGFM framework, this section examines how these forces collectively construct marriage migrant women's bodies and labour as sites of control, commodification and dependency, drawing on evidence from the five national reports—Malaysia, the Philippines, South Korea, Indonesia and Taiwan—as well as documented migration flows to Japan and PRC.

[28] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

1.1.3.1 Marriage as economic strategy and loss of autonomy

In sending countries, women's bodies are often treated as resources to be mobilised for household survival. The KABAR BUMI report shows that in rural West and Central Java, marriage migration is actively promoted not only by families seeking remittances, but also by brokers and village officials who frame it as a legitimate strategy for poverty alleviation and social mobility. As MN's story documented in the report reveals, *'MN, a Dayak woman living in Landak Regency, West Kalimantan Province…has been divorced according to customary law. The divorce made MN's life difficult because she had to support her children and family…Her boss, LG, introduced MN to a matchmaker named WW…WW persuaded MN to marry a Chinese man…Although initially hesitant, especially because of her love for her children and fear of the distance that separates them… finally gave in and agreed'*.[29]

Similar dynamics emerge in the Philippines, where GABRIELA notes that the cultural norm of women as breadwinners creates a moral imperative to marry foreigners if it promises economic stability. As Celeste explained, *'I left my studies because I wanted to support my family as breadwinner. I went to Japan but did not have any plan to marry a Japanese. I just fell for the Japanese who pursued me. I thought that marrying a foreigner will help my family'*.[30]

In both Indonesia and the Philippines, marriage migration routes extend not only to South Korea, Taiwan and Malaysia but also to Japan and PRC. Recruitment for Japanese rural bachelors—highlighted in the Philippines report—often occurs through online platforms and personal referrals, while Indonesian women are introduced to PRC rural men via informal brokers. In both cases, the promise of financial security is frequently accompanied by incomplete or misleading information about the living and working conditions abroad, blurring the line between voluntary migration and trafficking.

1.1.3.2 Cultural and religious patriarchy in destination countries

In destination countries, cultural traditions and religious norms interact with state policies to intensify women's subordination within marital households. In South Korea, Confucian family hierarchies relegated migrant wives to unpaid domestic roles. As one Vietnamese woman recalled: *'I mostly spent my time doing housework. I handled most of the household chores on my own since my husband, mother-in-law and niece were usually out during the day'*.[31]

[29] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished]. (pp.19-20).

[30] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished]. (p. 27).

[31] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished]. (p.27).

In Taiwan, immigration and welfare policies tethered women's status to their husbands, reinforcing marginalisation inside families and households. One Cambodian woman explained, *'My mother-in-law had dementia for some time, but in the beginning, the family believed that it was my responsibility to take care of her. No one paid attention to my requests for help'.*[32]

Malaysia presents a similar pattern of dependency, rooted in the intersection of civil and Sharia law. Family Frontiers highlights that migrant wives' residency and work rights remain fully dependent on their Malaysian husbands.[33] As noted in the CEDAW 2018 Concluding Observations: *'foreign women who are married to men who are nationals of Malaysia are dependent on their husbands to maintain their legal status in the country…foreign wives with long-term social visit passes are prohibited from engaging in any form of employment, which creates further dependence on their husbands'.*[34] Testimonies illustrate the consequences of this dependency. One woman explained, *'He didn't want to do my visa (…) that's my problem now (…) so if you [the husband] don't want to do my visa, then how? I had already overstayed that time'.*[35] Another widow recounted, *'I've been told because it's connected to my long-term social pass, now that my husband's not around, they're going to cancel my PR application as well'.*[36]

In Japan, Filipina women were constructed in the marriage market as submissive caregivers, with promotional materials claiming: *'Filipinas do not mind differences in age. They would devote themselves in taking care of elderly people, as they believe it is a duty of the "bride"'.*[37] Such stereotypes shaped lived arrangements. One Filipina recalled: *'I was introduced by my aunt to our neighbour who was married to a Japanese man who was a promoter in Japan. His firm had just set up several entertainment bars in Japan. I was just 17 at that time'.*[38]

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[32] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan. https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[33] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[34] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. (p.60). https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[35] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*.(p.42). https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[36] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. (p.42). https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[37] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished]. (p.23).

[38] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished]. (p.17).

Indonesian wives placed in rural areas of the PRC also reported confinement and isolation that reflected patriarchal household structures. MR, a Dayak woman from Landak, recounted that after marrying a Chinese man in Indonesia, she was taken to *'the rural area of Hubei Province'* in 2018. Once her father returned home, *'things started to change; her husband was busy playing games, not working and her needs depended on her in-laws… it was difficult to communicate because it was difficult to get a SIM card, and worse, she had no money so she could not send money to her children and family'.*[39] YR's testimony echoed this vulnerability: *'I was also locked in a room for making a mistake, sleeping outside without a blanket… not being given food for a day, only drinking tap water'.*[40]

Beyond households, cultural and religious discourses projected by state institutions and media reinforce the subordination of women marriage migrants. In Taiwan, they were historically labelled *'foreign brides'* and associated with *'inferior population quality'.*[41,42] In South Korea, stereotypes depict migrant wives as submissive or opportunistic, with their children facing bullying tied to racialised stigma.[43] In Malaysia, police and Syariah officers often trivialise abuse as a *'family matter'*, reflecting cultural expectations that non-citizen wives endure violence to preserve marriage.[44]

Taken together, these examples illustrate how patriarchy—anchored in cultural and religious frameworks and reinforced by state structures—systematically entrenches women's dependency and subordination. Marriage migration thus reproduces unequal gender relations across households, communities and institutions in destination societies.

1.1.3.3 Economic control and labour exploitation

Across destination countries, women marriage migrants perform extensive unpaid reproductive labour—childcare, elder care and household work—yet their contributions remain unrecognised and unprotected. At the same time, laws, policies and family practices constrain their access to secure employment, reinforcing economic dependency.

[39] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished]. (p.24).

[40] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished]. (p.21).

[41] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan. https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[42] Hsia, H.-C. (2007). Imaged and imagined threat to the nation: The media construction of "foreign brides" phenomenon as social problems in Taiwan. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, *8*(1), 55–85.

[43] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[44] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

KOCUN notes that in South Korea, women marriage migrants are disproportionately burdened with unpaid household labour. They are expected to shoulder responsibilities for raising children, caring for elderly in-laws and maintaining the home, which leaves them with limited time and energy for paid employment. As several returned women marriage migrants in Vietnam recalled: *'I told my husband that I wanted to work outside, but he didn't allow it. He said I shouldn't work because I couldn't speak good Korean and I was pregnant. Even when I expressed my desire to work, my mother-in-law didn't let me work'.*[45]

Furthermore, women marriage migrants face systemic barriers in the labour market, including workplace discrimination and language limitations, which confine them to low-wage and insecure forms of employment. These structural constraints both exploit their labour and deepen their economic vulnerability, creating long-term dependence on their husbands and families. KOCUN reports that, *'the monthly wage of marriage migrants and naturalised citizens is significantly lower than general wage workers… 80.4 per cent… stay below the income category below 2.5 million KRW, the median income in South Korea for 2021'.*[46] Employment support is also limited, as noted by an Non-government Organisation (NGO) representative in Seoul: *'…employment support services appear limited to specific job types such as Baristas and interpreters'.*[47]

In Taiwan, women marriage migrants are structurally channelled into family caregiving roles, often with devastating economic consequences. Lai Ching, supervisor at an NGO providing services, noted that many women marriage migrants begin caring for elderly in-laws from a young age and continue for over a decade, sacrificing their own careers and personal development. When elders pass away, these women hope to re-enter the workforce but often find themselves left behind, facing a significant skills gap and economic pressures after years away from paid employment. Professor Frank Tseng-yung Wang of Social Work highlights how structural barriers—immigration status, language and educational background—confine them to caregiving roles, unlike local women who have more employment options. As Wang explained, *'This poverty is not just about not having a job now; it will continue into their old age, resulting in lower or even zero national pension benefits… Engaging in family caregiving is essentially a pathway to poverty'.*[48] This confinement extends beyond households into state policy: non-naturalised women are excluded from Taiwan's Long-Term Care (LTC) system and

[45] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished]. (p.29).

[46] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished]. (p.27).

[47] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished]. (p.28).

[48] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*. (p.26). https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

cannot access its benefits despite being directly involved in caregiving,[49] making older women marriage migrants even more vulnerable.

In Malaysia, the Long-Term Social Visit Pass (LTSVP) explicitly restricts non-citizen wives from working, pushing them into dependency and informal or insecure employment. One newly married Filipina explained: *'I've been staying here for 5 months, and I've been looking for a job for 5 months…Despite all the working experience that I have…I was never called for an interview, because…I am holding a spouse visa'.*[50] Highly skilled women face the same barriers. Hanna, a geologist with a Master's degree and 15 years in the oil and gas industry, recalled: *'I applied for the spouse visa, and it has been very tough for me to get a job because oil and gas companies always check my visa, and it clearly states that I cannot work. For about two to three years, I was unemployed. I couldn't work formally because no company would hire me while I was on a spouse visa. Even though I have a Master's degree and over 15 years of experience in the oil and gas industry, I couldn't contribute financially to support my husband'.*[51] These testimonies reveal how the LTSVP entrenches women's economic dependence on Malaysian husbands, regardless of their skills or work experience, and leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and financial insecurity.

In Japan, many Filipina women entered through the *entertainer visa* system, where their labour was tightly controlled and exploited. Filipino women who obtained visas to work via marriage brokers (i.e., fixed marriages), known as *tarento* (talent), *'do not receive their earnings fully despite strict sales quotas…monthly earnings go directly to the brokers, who then allocate about ¥60,000–¥80,000…while the rest are divided to the broker, pub owner and "husband"'.*[52] These women were also coerced into 'wifely duties' and kept under surveillance: *'Some are compelled by the husband to perform wifely duties, including having sexual relations…strictly enforced by the brokers, who pay them random visits'.*[53] Facing expiring visas and precarious livelihoods, many turned to marriage as their only path to stability. Yllang recalled: *'I was a single parent…Then one of my persistent clients from a bar in Tayoma visited me in Manila and offered marriage. He promised to adopt my daughter and bring us to Japan'.*[54] These accounts show how

[49] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan. https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[50] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. (p.45). https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[51] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. (p.46). https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[52] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished]. (p.21).

[53] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished]. (p.22).

[54] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished]. (p.19).

exploitation in the entertainment industry carried into marriage, where women were expected to give up paid work and assume unpaid caregiving, reinforcing cycles of dependency. This continuity from entertainment work to marriage underscored how economic dependency and stigma were reproduced, not overcome.

In the PRC, Indonesian women recruited through brokers often found themselves in highly exploitative situations, including forced labour and sexual exploitation. One account described the case of *A*, who was promised a better life through marriage but instead was trafficked into a prostitution network: *'Instead of living together as a husband and wife as a marriage should, she was placed in a terrible place, it is a prostitution network. In that place of residence, A was forced to work as a commercial sex worker without being given a single cent of compensation…There was no freedom, no right to choose and no legal protection expected in that place'.*[55] Other women reported being compelled to undertake harsh physical labour or being sent back to Indonesia once they became ill, demonstrating that their worth was measured solely by their capacity to generate income for husbands, in-laws or trafficking networks. These testimonies highlight how Indonesian women marriage migrants in rural China were trapped in systems of economic exploitation, with little protection from either PRC authorities or the Indonesian Embassy, reinforcing cycles of dependency and abuse.

Collectively, these accounts illustrate how across South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Japan and PRC, women marriage migrants' economic lives are systematically shaped by exclusion and exploitation. Whether through discriminatory visas, exclusion from pensions and long-term care, concentration in low-wage work or outright trafficking, women's labour is extracted while their autonomy is denied—producing a continuum of economic control that reinforces patriarchal subordination and long-term poverty.

1.1.4 Policies to control and subordinate women

Marriage migration regimes in Asia institutionalise women's dependency through a combination of immigration law, family law and social policy. These frameworks operate simultaneously in origin and destination countries, reinforcing women's subordinate position within households while restricting their access to legal protection, services and independent livelihoods. Far from safeguarding women's human rights, state policies often use immigration status and family-based regulations to exert surveillance and control, leaving marriage migrants highly vulnerable to exploitation and violence.

Across the region, immigration and consular systems function not merely as bureaucratic mechanisms but as securitised apparatuses of control that subordinate

[55] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished]. (p.24).

women marriage migrants. In Malaysia, non-citizen wives on the LTSVP remain under constant surveillance by immigration officers and risk deportation when sponsorship is withdrawn.[56] In South Korea, women on F-6 spouse visas face residency insecurities when marriages break down, as renewal depends on proof of an ongoing relationship, custody of children or documented abuse, conditions that many survivors cannot meet.[57] In Taiwan, access to welfare and care is filtered through local officials whose discretionary practices exclude non-citizen spouses despite formal eligibility.[58] In Indonesia, syndicates of brokers and village authorities exercise quasi-state authority in arranging marriages and regulating women's mobility.[59] And in the Philippines, embassies often act less as protectors than as disciplinary institutions, withholding interpretation and support from battered women abroad.[60] These practices reflect how border regimes operate with militarised logics of surveillance and control, echoing the 'militarism' pillar of the PGFM framework and reducing women marriage migrants to monitored dependents rather than rights-bearing individuals.

1.1.4.1 Immigration status, citizenship and legal dependency

Across all observed destinations, women marriage migrants' residency is tethered to the husband's citizenship.

- **Malaysia:** A spouse visa is conditional on the husband's sponsorship. Divorce, abandonment or widowhood can immediately render a woman undocumented. Women risk arrest and detention in immigration facilities if they lose status. Several cases documented husbands threatening to withdraw sponsorship to silence women who reported violence.[61]

- **Taiwan:** Women marriage migrants without citizenship remain dependent on their husbands for residency. Divorce or widowhood before naturalisation, especially those without minor children, can result in the loss of legal status, health insurance and access to social services. Older women marriage migrants without Taiwanese

[56] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[57] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[58] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*. https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[59] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

[60] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

[61] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

citizenship, despite years of residence, are excluded from government's long-term care and other social protection services, reflecting structural legal dependency.[62]

- **South Korea:** Women marriage migrants' residencies are tied to marriage, with visa renewal dependent on either proof of an ongoing relationship or the presence of Korean children. Women leaving abusive marriages may apply for independent residency, but only with sufficient evidence of violence—a burden many cannot meet due to limited resources. The report of KOCUN also highlights cases where husbands retaliated against women who reported abuse, exploiting their stronger legal position to intimidate them.[63]

- **People's Republic of China (PRC):** The KABAR BUMI report underscores how trafficking intersects with marriage migration, particularly for Indonesian women migrating to rural provinces of PRC. Many enter these marriages through unregulated brokerage systems that promise stability or employment but instead expose women to coercion and confinement. Once married, their residency permits are tied exclusively to their husbands, excluding work rights and rendering them legally and economically dependent. This structural dependence facilitates trafficking-like exploitation: women are pressured into unpaid domestic and reproductive labor, monitored by in-laws, and denied mobility. Because local authorities routinely classify these cases as 'private family matters' rather than trafficking, women are denied access to protective mechanisms, shelters or justice. By treating such cases as legitimate marriages rather than exploitation, the state effectively legitimises trafficking within marriage migration regimes.[64]

- **Japan:** According to the GABRIELA report, Filipina wives in Japan face immigration rules that directly tie their residency to their husbands' status. Divorce or separation often leads to immediate loss of legal residence, pushing women into irregular status. This dependency not only deters them from leaving abusive marriages but also makes them vulnerable to threats of deportation used by husbands as a form of control. Beyond the legal framework, GABRIELA highlights that many Filipina women in rural communities are drawn into unpaid agricultural and household labour under their in-laws' supervision. While such labour is framed as part of family obligation, the lack of independent legal recognition and income-generating rights structurally entrenches their subordination within both family and community life.[65]

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[62] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan.* https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[63] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[64] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

[65] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

1.1.4.2 Gender-based violence and structural subordination

Across all five reports, a central pattern emerges: the legal dependency of women marriage migrants does not simply restrict their rights but actively facilitates conditions in which Gender-based Violence (GBV) and coercive control can thrive. By tying residence status to the husband, the state legitimises a power imbalance that husbands and their families can weaponise. Threats of deportation, withdrawal of visa sponsorship or loss of custody are repeatedly used to silence women's complaints and to keep them in situations of abuse.

The reports show how patriarchal cultural expectations and religious or customary norms interact with state law to reinforce women's subordination. Women marriage migrants are often expected to accept caregiving roles for in-laws, to prioritise family harmony and to perform unpaid domestic and reproductive labour. Such expectations make it difficult for them to resist violence, since refusal risks being cast as 'disobedient' or 'disharmonious', with legal consequences for their residency. In some contexts, dual legal systems or patriarchal adjudication processes mean that non-citizen women have little chance of securing custody, inheritance or access to shelters, rendering them dependent on the very perpetrators of abuse.

The vulnerability extends beyond domestic violence into other forms of gendered harm. Some women experience marital rape, confinement or surveillance by extended family. Others are coerced into reproductive roles, pressured to bear children to secure their place in the household or to justify their continued stay. The Family Frontiers and GABRIELA reports emphasise how structural impunity operates: authorities often dismiss violence as a 'private matter' or encourage reconciliation rather than protection, effectively denying migrant wives meaningful access to justice.[66,67]

In this way, immigration regulations, family laws and patriarchal norms converge to normalise violence against women marriage migrants. What appears as a private arrangement within households is deeply structured by public policy choices that construct dependency as the legal condition of women's existence.

1.1.4.3 Limited access to justice, resources and reintegration

Despite the existence of formal protections in law, structural barriers systematically limit women marriage migrants' access to justice and resources. Dependence on husbands for visa sponsorship creates a climate of fear: women often hesitate to

[66] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[67] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

report domestic violence or seek shelter because their legal status can be withdrawn at any moment.[68,69,70] In contexts where immigration enforcement is tied to police or welfare systems, this fear of arrest, detention or deportation silences complaints and reinforces women's subordination.[71]

Even when independent residency pathways exist, as in South Korea, the evidentiary burden placed on women—such as the demand for medical certificates to prove abuse—effectively excludes many from relief. Without financial or legal resources, survivors are left exposed to retaliation from husbands who wield stronger legal standing.[72] Similar dynamics in Taiwan, where residency remains conditional on marital continuity until naturalisation, discourage women from leaving abusive marriages.[73]

The absence of culturally sensitive and accessible support services further entrenches exclusion. Language barriers, limited interpretation and bureaucratic discretion often push women into informal negotiations or 'reconciliation', prioritising family unity over women's safety and rights.[74,75]

Consular protection is similarly weak and inconsistent. KABAR BUMI documents Indonesian women in rural PRC who, when seeking help, consular officials offered little assistance beyond basic documentation.[76] In South Korea and Japan, KOCUN and GABRIELA note that embassies and consulates often fail to intervene effectively in cases of domestic violence or trafficking, leaving women isolated and dependent on their abusive families-in-law.[77,78] This institutional inaction underscores how both

[68] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[69] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan.* https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[70] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[71] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[72] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[73] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan.* https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[74] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan.* https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[75] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[76] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

[77] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[78] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

origin and destination states abdicate responsibility, leaving women marriage migrants trapped between jurisdictions.

For those who return to their countries of origin, the structural neglect continues. Women returning to Indonesia or Vietnam after failed marriages are met with stigma, often accused of dishonouring their families.[79,80] In the Philippines, returnees are cast as opportunists or moral failures, rather than as survivors of systemic exclusion.[81] Crucially, none of the origin-country reintegration programmes that exist for labour migrants extend to marriage migrants, leaving women without legal aid, livelihood alternatives or psychosocial support.[82,83] KOCUN also notes that even pre-departure orientations fail to prepare women for the realities of life abroad, deepening their vulnerability both overseas and upon return.[84]

These patterns reveal a continuum of control: destination states deny independent rights and tie women's legal personhood to marital status, while origin states stigmatise returnees and withhold reintegration support. Caught between these two poles, women are trapped in cycles of dependency, exclusion and re-marginalisation.

1.2 GAPS IN POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Although marriage migration has become a central feature of regional mobility, the five reports show that women in transnational marriages remain positioned as dependents rather than as rights-holders. The five reports demonstrate how gaps occur at three levels: international legal instruments, national laws and frameworks across the migration life course and implementation practices.

1.2.1 International legal instruments: Weak commitments and selective compliance

At the international level, marriage migration sits uneasily between family law and labour migration regimes, leaving women inadequately covered by existing treaties and protections. Yet several key international instruments affirm equal rights within marriage and the family, forming an important normative framework against which state practices can be evaluated.

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[79] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

[80] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[81] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

[82] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

[83] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

[84] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

1.2.1.1 Equality in marriage under human rights treaties

Foundational instruments affirm equal rights in marriage. Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that 'men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family', and that they are 'entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution'.[85] Similarly, Article 23 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights declares that 'the right of men and women of marriageable age to marry and to found a family shall be recognised', and that 'no marriage shall be entered into without the free and full consent of the intending spouses'.[86] These provisions were among the first human rights norms to explicitly affirm women's equal status within the family, recognising that rights in marriage and family life are central to women's autonomy and capacity to make voluntary, informed reproductive choices.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women elaborates these principles more comprehensively. Article 16 obliges states to 'take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations' and guarantees, on a basis of equality with men, 'the same right to enter into marriage', 'the same right freely to choose a spouse', 'the same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution', 'the same rights and responsibilities as parents' and 'the same rights with regard to ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment and disposition of property'.[87]

Article 9 of CEDAW further guarantees that women 'shall have equal rights with men to acquire, change or retain their nationality' and that 'neither marriage to an alien nor change of nationality by the husband during marriage shall automatically change the nationality of the wife'. It also ensures women equal rights with men 'with respect to the nationality of their children'. These provisions, building on the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women,[88] affirm that women have an independent right to nationality and family life, separate from their husbands.

1.2.1.2 Reservations and weak enforcement

In practice, however, state reservations and uneven enforcement undermine these commitments. Family Frontiers shows that Malaysia ratified CEDAW but entered

[85] *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 10 December 1948, https://www.ohchr.org/en/universal-declaration-of-human-rights

[86] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 16 December 1966, https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights

[87] Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 18 December 1979, https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women

[88] Convention on the Nationality of Married Women, 20 February 1957, https://treaties.un.org/doc/treaties/1958/08/19580811%2001-34%20am/ch_xvi_2p.pdf

reservations to Articles 9(2) and 16, limiting women's equal rights in family and nationality law.[89] By contrast, KOCUN highlights that South Korea ratified CEDAW without such reservations, yet enforcement remains inadequate.[90] Women on F-6 spousal visas remain legally dependent on their husbands, with independent residency granted only under narrow conditions such as custody of children or documented abuse. KOCUN documents a case in which a Vietnamese woman endured marital rape and years of unpaid caregiving but was denied visa renewal because she lacked the official documentation required to prove abuse.[91] Such evidentiary burdens directly contradict CEDAW's intent to guarantee equal protection against discrimination and violence.

1.2.1.3 Exclusion from labour migration conventions

Labour migration instruments provide another layer of exclusion. The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families establishes a wide range of rights for migrant workers, including pre-departure training, standard contracts, insurance and government monitoring.[92] Yet marriage migrants are excluded because they are classified as 'family members' rather than 'migrant workers'.[93,94] As a result, they cannot access the safeguards designed to prevent exploitation and abuse.

This blind spot is compounded by the limited ratification and enforcement of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189, 2011), which recognises domestic and care workers as workers entitled to fair employment conditions and protection from abuse. Many marriage migrants perform intensive caregiving and domestic labour in their households or extended families, yet their labour remains invisible and unrecognised as employment, placing them outside the scope of such protections.

A similar pattern of exclusion appears in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.[95] While the GCM is celebrated as the first global framework on migration

[89] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[90] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[91] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[92] International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, 18 December 1990. https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-convention-protection-rights-all-migrant-workers

[93] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

[94] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

[95] Global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration, 19 December 2018, https://www.iom.int/global-compact-migration

governance, its focus lies mainly on labour mobility, recruitment and irregular migration. Marriage migrants are only indirectly mentioned under 'family reunification' and are thus treated as dependents rather than autonomous migrants. This labour-centred framing neglects feminised migration pathways such as marriage and care migration, leaving marriage migrants outside key protections related to decent work, abuse and exploitation prevention.

1.2.1.4 Double invisibility

Taken together, selective compliance with women's rights treaties and exclusion from labour migration frameworks create a *double invisibility* for women marriage migrants. They are positioned as mere dependents under family laws, while their labour contributions are relegated to the private sphere and therefore unrecognised, leaving them without meaningful protection under either regime.

1.2.2 National laws and policies: Women marriage migrants are forced into precarious and dependent lives

1.2.2.1 Pre-departure: Excluded from labour safeguards; Assimilation without rights

Before leaving their home countries, women entering marriage migration lack the protective scaffolding available to overseas workers. For instance, the Philippine state regulates marriage migration primarily through the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO). According to the CFO, *'Filipino emigrants or those leaving the country to settle permanently abroad are required to register with the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO), and attend the Pre-Departure Orientation Seminar (PDOS) or Peer Counselling Programme (PCP)'.* [96] Marriage migrants fall under this category and are thus mandated to attend PDOS before departure.

However, GABRIELA documents that these seminars are inadequate in both content and scope. While the state requires women to attend PDOS, the sessions rarely provide practical knowledge about host-country laws, protections against violence or support services abroad. Participants in GABRIELA's research stressed the need for PDOS to include information on family and immigration laws in destination countries, women's rights under anti-violence legislation and directories of NGOs offering shelter and assistance.[97]

From the perspective of destination countries, most governments do not provide pre-departure orientation programmes for women marriage migrants. South Korea stands out as an

[96] Commission on Filipino Overseas. (n.d). *Pre Departure Orientation Seminar (PDOS)*. https://cfo.gov.ph/cfo-hybrid-frontline-services-for-pre-departure-orientation-seminar-pdos-or-peer-counseling-program

[97] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

exception. According to KOCUN, the Pre-Departure Orientation (PDO) programme was first initiated in 2007 and later expanded with funding from the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MOGEF) to countries including Vietnam, the Philippines, Mongolia, Cambodia and Thailand. Yet the design of these PDOs reflects a state-driven assimilationist agenda, which emphasises cultural assimilation and the reinforcement of traditional gender roles within the household. While the PDOs provide basic information on settlement, they omit rights-based content such as protection against domestic violence, access to legal aid or independent residency, thereby normalising dependency even before migration.[98]

1.2.2.2 Early arrival: Residency tied to marital status

In the early years of settlement, national frameworks consistently tie women's legal status to marriage, creating precarious residency. In Malaysia, the LTSVP is the main pass issued to non-citizen spouses of Malaysians, but it is conditional on continuous marital cohabitation and the sponsorship of the Malaysian spouse. The Malaysian spouse must be physically present during both the application and renewal, and must provide proof of income.[99]

This dependency makes women's status precarious when marriages collapse. One woman noted, *'because it's connected to my long-term social pass, now that my husband's not around, they're going to cancel my PR application as well'.*[100] Others described being detained as overstayers: *'I even had to stay in prison for one night… The way Immigration treated me, like a prisoner'.*[101] Another survivor of domestic violence, issued a temporary 'abused wife' pass, was later reported by her husband and *'arrested and detained in the lock-up for two weeks'* after missing a renewal.[102] These cases show how immigration policies, by tethering residency to marriage, can swiftly turn women into overstayers or detainees once sponsorship is withdrawn.

In South Korea, women's residency under the F-6 visa is tied to their marital relationship, creating a precarious status. KOCUN notes that after divorce or separation, women marriage migrants are divided into two categories: those eligible to extend their visas and those

[98] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[99] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. (p.33). https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[100] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. (p.42). https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[101] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. (p.43). https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[102] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. (p.43). https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

ineligibles, under Article 25-2 (Special Rules for Marriage Migrants) of the Immigration Act.[103] Independent renewal is generally only possible when women have custody of minor children or can prove their spouse's culpability in the divorce. For women without children, establishing fault requires substantial documentary evidence, which is often difficult to obtain in abusive or unsafe situations. As a result, many face denial of visa extension and are left with few alternatives beyond becoming undocumented or returning to their home countries without preparation

In Taiwan, marriage migrants' rights remain tightly bound to their marital status. Under the Immigration Act, a marriage migrant's residency is conditional on her marriage; upon divorce, she risks termination of residency unless she can prove custody of minor children or falls within limited exceptions. The Nationality Act further requires foreign spouses to obtain household registration as a prerequisite for naturalisation. Without this status, marriage migrants remain excluded from core welfare protections.

1.2.2.3 Older ages: Invisible caregivers, excluded care recipients

Ageing reveals the long-term consequences of exclusion for marriage migrants in Taiwan. The Long-Term Care Services Act formally prohibits discrimination by nationality or other statuses. Yet as TASAT observes, *'Taiwan's social welfare system is entirely based on household registration records…those with residency or permanent residency status cannot have a household registration, which will affect their access to social welfare resources'.*[104] In practice, this means older marriage migrants without citizenship are often unable to access LTC subsidies, respite services or institutional care.

At the same time, decades of unpaid caregiving within households are disregarded as labour. TASAT highlights that women are treated as *'free caregiving resources within the family structure'.*[105] Because this work generates no contributory employment records, even naturalised women remain outside protections under the Labour Insurance Act and Labour Pension Act. As a result, older marriage migrants are doubly invisible: denied recognition as workers during their productive years, and denied recognition as care recipients in old age—while the burden of their eldercare shifts onto their adult children.

1.2.2.4 Return and reintegration: Stigma and state neglect

For marriage migrants who return, reintegration is marked by both legal neglect and social stigma. As the KABAR BUMI report underscores, *'Indonesia does not have a regulation that*

[103] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[104] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*. (p.19).https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[105] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*. (p.18).https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

specifically regulates marriage migrants. The few cases of marriage migrants that have been handled were enforced according to Law Number 21 of 2007 concerning the Crime of Trafficking in Persons (TIPs)'.[106] Because they fall outside any protective regulation, marriage migrants returning from failed marriages are left without institutional reintegration support. Survivors must rely on families and communities that often treat their return as a source of shame. As the report notes, *'survivors who return to Indonesia face strong social stigma from society, as well as difficulties reintegrating into their communities…Social reintegration is a major challenge for women who are survivors of a marriage migrant'.*[107] Branded as having 'dishonoured the family', returnees are denied livelihood support and reintegration assistance, exposing how state neglect and patriarchal norms reinforce one another.

Similarly, in the Philippines, returnees from failed marriages confront exclusion from state reintegration programmes and social stigma. The GABRIELA report emphasises that the women who participated in its research were predominantly returnees—divorced, widowed or separated marriage migrants who had come back from Japan, the US, and Europe. Unlike overseas workers, marriage migrants are not covered by reintegration and livelihood programmes, leaving them in what the report describes as a legal and social void. Instead of being recognised as rights-bearing migrants, returnees are stigmatised as opportunists or moral failures. The study highlights how this stigmatisation compounds their exclusion: *'They do not care for the Filipino women who are sent abroad…When the women come back, there is no support given to them'.*[108]

In South Korea, the KOCUN report provides extensive evidence that women marriage migrants who divorce face visa insecurity and precarious choices. As it notes, *'women marriage migrants who face a denial of a visa extension are left with limited alternatives: either staying undocumented or returning to their home countries without proper preparation'*, and '35.7 per cent reported having experienced undocumented stay'.[109] These women often return without finalised divorce papers, which *'...compels women marriage migrants to depend on their husbands to finalise the divorce process, exacerbating the challenges they encounter while struggling to reintegrate'.*[110] Economic hardships compound these problems. KOCUN's survey found that 77.1 per cent earned less than 5 million VND a month, while 'Korean husbands rarely bear child-support responsibilities after divorce or separation, forcing many mothers into informal, low-paid work merely to survive'.

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[106] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished]. (p.5).

[107] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished]. (p.v).

[108] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished]. (p.39).

[109] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished]. (p.36).

[110] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished]. (p.37).

KOCUN further notes the absence of structured reintegration measures. Its legal advisors in Hai Phong observe that *'the government does not have specific support programmes for women migrant returnees to address their challenges'.*[111] To address this gap, KOCUN established the *Korea–Vietnam Together Care Centres* as good-practice models that offer legal counselling, psychosocial support, child-residency assistance and entrepreneurial training to returned women. However, the report emphasises that such initiatives remain limited in scope and depend on NGOs rather than state mechanisms. The lack of official data and transnational cooperation between Korea and Vietnam further obstructs policy development, forcing returnees to navigate complex legal systems alone.

Across Indonesia, South Korea and the Philippines, returnee marriage migrants are thus doubly marginalised—excluded from migration governance and bilateral reintegration frameworks while burdened with patriarchal stigma that frames their return as personal failure rather than as the structural consequence of state neglect and gendered citizenship regimes.

1.2.3 Implementation and practices: Everyday failures that strip protections

Even where protective provisions exist in law, the five reports show that they are undermined by weak enforcement, narrow institutional mandates and discriminatory state action. Across contexts, protection erodes in four recurring ways: 1) language and communication barriers, 2) state responses that reinforce dependency, 3) slow or discriminatory law enforcement and 4) institutional limits of support structures.

1.2.3.1 Language and communication barriers

Barriers in language access consistently silence women marriage migrants in various sectors.

- **Legal and justice settings.** Professional interpretation is often absent in courts, police stations and immigration procedures, severely restricting women marriage migrants' equal access to justice. Women are frequently forced to rely on husbands, in-laws or acquaintances for translation, a practice that compromises both confidentiality and accuracy. Where interpretation is provided, it is often carried out by untrained volunteers rather than professionals. KOCUN further critiques that Multicultural Family Support Centres, the main state institutions serving marriage migrants, frame their role narrowly around cultural assimilation through language and parenting classes. By explicitly avoiding legal intervention, these centres leave women without confidential, rights-based support when facing abuse or disputes.[112]

[111] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished]. (p.39).

[112] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

- **Welfare and care settings.** TASAT highlights that interpretation barriers in Taiwan are particularly acute in welfare and care institutions. Key information on welfare policies is rarely translated comprehensively, leaving many marriage migrants unaware of available programmes and services. Older women, in particular, encounter staff in pension offices, hospitals and LTC facilities who lack multilingual capacity. In the absence of professional interpretation, they must rely on family members—often their children—to communicate with officials, undermining both confidentiality and autonomy. This dependency reinforces structural inequality within the family and restricts women's ability to exercise their social rights independently.[113]

1.2.3.2 State responses that reinforce dependency

When women marriage migrants attempt to leave abusive relationships, state practices often drive them back into dependency rather than offering protection. Family Frontiers documents how immigration officers and Syariah court officials in Malaysia frequently urge women experiencing domestic violence to 'forgive and reconcile' with abusive husbands, rather than enabling independent legal status. In other cases, once a husband cancels his sponsorship, women immediately lose their visa status and risk being detained as overstayers. Instead of being recognised as survivors, they are treated as immigration violators.[114]

By framing violence as a private matter and punishing women who leave, state institutions reinforce structural dependency on the husband's sponsorship and deter women from escaping unsafe marriages.

1.2.3.3 Slow or discriminatory law enforcement

Protective laws in origin countries exist but are implemented in ways that stigmatise or exclude marriage migrants. In the Philippines, though the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act (RA 9208, as amended) has been applied in sham marriage cases, yet investigations are slow and bureaucratic. Survivors face moral judgment from officials, who often portray them as opportunists or blame them for failed marriages.[115]

In Indonesia, the Law on the Elimination of Sexual Violence (UU TPKS) formally covers all women, but in practice women marriage migrants rarely access its protections. Stigma, lack of legal literacy and jurisdictional confusion when abuse occurs abroad limit its reach. Local police often deflect responsibility, leaving survivors without effective remedies.[116]

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[113] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*.https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[114] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia.* https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[115] GABRIELA. (2024). From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country [Unpublished].

[116] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

1.2.3.4 Institutional limits of support structures

Support programmes for women marriage migrants frequently frame their assistance in terms of integration or social support rather than rights protection. According to KOCUN, the Multicultural Family Support Centres, presented as flagship state institutions in South Korea, focus narrowly on language classes, cultural orientation and parenting programmes. Staff explicitly avoid providing confidential legal support, leaving women without safe avenues to address abuse.[117]

In Taiwan, TASAT observes that welfare programmes are similarly framed as integration or assistance, treating exclusion and dependency as individual or family issues rather than structural discrimination. This framing shifts responsibility away from the state and leaves systemic barriers unchallenged.[118]

In summary, thematic analysis of the five country reports shows that gaps are rooted not only in legal omissions but also in the structural positioning of marriage migrants as dependents rather than autonomous rights-holders. International instruments offer limited binding coverage; national frameworks institutionalise dependency; and weak, biased implementation entrenches barriers to justice. These gaps expose women marriage migrants to systemic violence, economic precarity and social exclusion—conditions that require not only legal reform but a fundamental reframing of migration governance toward rights-based, gender-just approaches.

[117] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[118] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*. https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

CHAPTER TWO

WOMEN MARRIAGE MIGRANTS CHALLENGE UNEQUAL SYSTEMS TO DEFEND RIGHTS AND ACCESS JUSTICE

Despite systemic legal dependency, cultural isolation and structural discrimination, women marriage migrants in Asia have developed a wide range of strategies to defend their rights. Their resistance—whether through individual legal action, collective organising or public advocacy—arises in deeply unequal legal and social environments but continues to create spaces for protection, solidarity and political visibility.

2.1 SECURING STATUS AND PROTECTION BEYOND THE HUSBAND

Women marriage migrants deploy a mix of law-based pathways, evidence-building, NGO legal accompaniment, administrative appeals, alliance advocacy and transnational protection to decouple their safety and residence from an abusive or absent spouse.

2.1.1 Leveraging spouse-independent legal pathways

Where rules permit, women use specific visa categories and statutory waivers that do not depend on the husband's cooperation. In South Korea, women marriage migrants invoke special rules under immigration/nationality law that allow retention or facilitation of status where the Korean spouse is missing, has died or domestic violence made married life impossible (Article 25-2 of Immigration Act; and Nationality Act waivers when there is Domestic Violence or a minor to raise).[119]

[119] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

In Malaysia, non-citizen wives apply for special LTSVP available to abused wives, divorcees and widows—noting the evidentiary items each category requires (e.g., police/medical reports for abuse; custody papers and a local sponsor for divorce; husband's death certificate for widowhood) and the government's own listing of these 'other types of LTSVPs' relevant to non-citizen wives. Some Malaysia-based women also pursue alternative passes (e.g., Student Pass) to lawfully remain after widowhood/divorce when LTSVP routes are closed.[120]

2.1.2 Building the evidence file and securing NGO accompaniment

Because status-retention routes often hinge on 'proof' of abuse or fault, women marriage migrants assemble multi-source evidence—police records, medical certificates, photos and chat logs—to satisfy immigration and court thresholds in South Korea.[121] Success rates rise with NGO legal support. The Malaysia report documents a woman who, with help from a local NGO, secured a three-year pass under the 'abused wife of a citizen' category after earlier barriers.[122] KOCUN similarly provides counselling and legal assistance—including post-separation documentation and advice—through dedicated centres for returned migrants and their children. .

2.1.3 Appealing exclusions from state protection and reforming the rules

Where safety and livelihood protections are tied to citizenship or household registration, women marriage migrants and their allies appeal denials and push for law reform so basic welfare is not hostage to marital status. In Taiwan, TASAT shows that non-citizen spouses (even with long residence) are excluded from key social assistance unless naturalised; these families often need civil-society help to file appeals when district offices reject applications under the Public Assistance Act.[123] TASAT's alliance-based advocacy (Alliance of Human Rights Legislation for Immigrants and Migrants, AHRLIM) previously won Immigration Act amendments (effective 2008) that secured the right of Domestic violence survivors to remain even if divorced—a pivotal shift in 'status beyond the husband'.[124] TASAT continues to lobby and brief legislators, hold press conferences and partner in multi-group coalitions to advance these protections.[125]

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[120] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[121] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[122] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[123] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*. https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[124] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*. https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[125] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*. https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

2.1.4 Activating transnational protection and shelter access

From the sending-country perspective, women draw on Violence Against Women (VAW) frameworks and shelters in destination states. For instance, according to GABRIELA ,[126] Filipina women marriage migrants in Japan and South Korea have relied on VAW frameworks and services in destination states as survival strategies. Under Japanese VAW legislation, women were able to access hospitalisation, shelters with their children and later employment opportunities. The report also documents how NGO- and church-run shelters provided crucial protection for migrants escaping abusive marriages.

2.1.5 Using origin-country legal tools and consular channels to exit abuse

Where women marriage migrants cannot stabilise status abroad, Indonesian advocates document strategies that prioritise extraction and legal redress: reporting to police, securing medical/legal documentation to substantiate violence and escalating to the Indonesian Embassy to trigger assistance and repatriation—often coordinated by grassroots groups when state response is weak.[127]

Across the reports, a consistent thread is the agency of women marriage migrants in navigating exclusionary systems. By invoking statutory carve-outs (such as DV or child-rearing provisions), compiling their own evidentiary dossiers, enlisting NGO representation, appealing administrative denials and mobilising alliances for law reform, women actively reconfigure their legal and social position. These practices exemplify processes of subjectivation: women who are institutionally cast as dependent spouses assert themselves as political and legal subjects capable of contesting state authority. In doing so, they move beyond the narrow role of 'wife' to claim recognition as autonomous rights-bearers with legitimate entitlements to residence, safety and welfare. This shift reflects not only individual resilience but also collective strategies that expand the boundaries of citizenship itself.

2.2 CLAIMING FAMILY AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Women marriage migrants' struggles for family and economic justice reveal how women resist being treated as appendages of their husbands and instead claim recognition as rights-bearing mothers, caregivers and contributors. By contesting custody, demanding pensions or survivor benefits, and pursuing child support across borders, they not only seek material security but also redefine the meaning of kinship and welfare rights within patriarchal and exclusionary legal systems.

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[126] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

[127] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

2.2.1 Contesting custody to assert maternal authority

Family Frontiers documents how non-citizen mothers in Malaysia have contested custody rulings in Syariah courts with NGO and legal support. Although courts often privilege Malaysian fathers, women's persistence in securing visitation or partial custody asserts them as rights-bearing parents rather than dependent spouses. Their interventions disrupt the prevailing assumption that nationality trumps caregiving bonds, insisting instead that parental authority derives from the lived practice of raising children. In this way, custody struggles become more than private disputes; they are acts of resistance against a gendered and nationalist legal order, reframing marriage migrant mothers as legitimate claimants to both familial belonging and legal recognition.[128]

2.2.2 Retaining residency through child-rearing provisions

KOCUN highlights that in South Korea, residency and naturalisation laws permit migrant women to remain after divorce or widowhood if they are raising minor children. Women strategically mobilise these provisions, compiling school records, medical documents and other evidence to prove their caregiving role. By turning private caregiving into a legal ground for independent status, they reframe motherhood as political agency. Yet the high evidentiary burden reveals how the state continues to condition migrant women's rights on narrow definitions of 'legitimate' care, even as women creatively use these rules to claim belonging beyond the husband.[129]

2.2.3 Pursuing transnational child support

GABRIELA documents how Filipino women returning from failed marriages in Japan and South Korea have sought child support from former husbands abroad. With limited access to formal legal remedies, women strategically present remittance slips, communication logs and financial receipts as evidence of paternal responsibility. This practice transforms private household transfers into publicly recognised claims of accountability, reframing abandoned wives as legal actors demanding recognition for their children rather than as dependents left behind.[130]

These struggles highlight the distinctively transnational character of marriage migrants' family claims. Unlike custody disputes in Malaysia, which are confined to Syariah courts and hinge on national citizenship or Korea's child-rearing provisions that tie residency to

[128] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[129] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[130] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

caregiving responsibilities, returnee Filipinas must negotiate jurisdictional gaps across borders. Weak enforcement mechanisms in Japan and South Korea often undermine their claims, forcing women to rely on NGO accompaniment and advocacy networks. Even so, the act of pursuing support itself asserts that paternal obligations extend beyond national borders, challenging the idea that divorce or abandonment severs responsibility.

Through these efforts, women not only seek financial relief but also reframe child support as a matter of transnational justice, positioning themselves and their children as rights-bearing subjects within an uneven global system of family law.

2.2.4 Contesting exclusion from social protection and long-term care benefits

The TASAT report shows that older women marriage migrants in Taiwan are systematically excluded from pensions, public assistance and LTC because eligibility is tied to citizenship. In response, TASAT and allied coalitions such as AHRLIM have organised campaigns to contest these exclusions, highlighting how welfare regimes devalue migrant women's decades of caregiving. By linking everyday denials to broader legal reform efforts, they press for amendments to the Public Assistance Act and LTC policies that would recognise marriage migrants as rights-bearing caregivers. In doing so, women marriage migrants reposition themselves from dependent spouses to contributors to household and national reproduction, insisting that their long years of caregiving entitle them to social protection.[131]

2.3 HOLDING BROKERS AND INTERMEDIARIES ACCOUNTABLE

Beyond family and welfare struggles, women marriage migrants also confront the exploitative brokerage system that facilitates cross-border marriages. Their strategies transform private harms into public claims against intermediaries, pressing local and national authorities to regulate recruitment and protect women from deception and abuse.

2.3.1 Exposing fraudulent matchmaking practices

KABAR BUMI documents how Indonesian women who experienced abuse in arranged marriages abroad shared testimonies in village-level forums. These collective truth-telling practices pressured local governments to act, resulting in municipal ordinances penalising unlicensed brokers. By mobilising survivor narratives, women reframed personal exploitation as a structural issue requiring state accountability.[132]

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[131] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*. https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[132] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

2.3.2 Filing trafficking complaints against sham marriages

GABRIELA reports that Filipina women have filed cases under the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act against recruiters who arranged sham marriages as a cover for forced domestic work. These legal actions expose the blurred line between marriage migration and labour trafficking and demonstrate how women and NGOs pursue criminal accountability for intermediaries, not just civil remedies.[133]

Together, these strategies show how migrant women and their allies use both community-based testimony and formal legal complaints to shift the burden of responsibility onto brokers and recruiters. By naming and challenging the intermediaries that profit from their vulnerability, they transform individual grievances into collective demands for structural reform in the governance of marriage migration.

2.4 EVIDENCE-BUILDING THROUGH DIGITAL AND COMMUNITY MEDIA

Because access to justice often depends on producing 'credible' proof, women marriage migrants have developed strategies to document abuse, mobilise evidence and make their experiences legible to legal and political institutions. These practices turn private suffering into public claims and create new forms of visibility.

2.4.1 Compiling digital evidence for legal protection

KOCUN highlights how women marriage migrants in South Korea assemble medical records, police reports, chat logs and children's testimonies to substantiate petitions for residency retention after divorce or abuse. These self-compiled dossiers are crucial in meeting the strict evidentiary thresholds set by courts, showing how women transform everyday traces into legal artefacts of protection.[134]

2.4.2 Using social media to pursue accountability

GABRIELA reports that Filipina women have presented screenshots of threatening messages and Facebook posts in court applications for protection orders. By leveraging digital platforms as proof, women convert tools of surveillance and intimidation into resources for safety and justice, reframing online interactions as evidence of abuse and coercion.[135]

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[133] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

[134] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[135] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

2.4.3 Producing community media as political testimony

TASAT describes how women marriage migrants in Taiwan engage in podcasts, theatre and picture-book storytelling that document exclusion from social protection and long-term care services, while also training second-generation youth in advocacy. These media practices double as political education and public testimony, giving women tools to narrate their struggles in legislative hearings and consultations.[136]

Together, these strategies show how women marriage migrants and their organisations contest silencing by creating their own evidence. Whether through digital traces, court-ready dossiers or community media, they reposition themselves as credible witnesses and political actors, challenging the bureaucratic standards that often disqualify their voices.

2.5 GRASSROOTS NETWORKS AND MUTUAL AID

Women marriage migrants have created grassroots infrastructures of support that operate outside formal state protection. These networks enable women to share knowledge, pool resources and build solidarity, turning individual survival strategies into collective resilience.

2.5.1 Returnee networks as legal knowledge hubs

KABAR BUMI describes how Indonesian women migrants organised regional associations of returnees that monitor cases, circulate legal information and track abusive brokers. By collectivising their experiences, these networks transform private hardships into community-based monitoring systems, enabling women to pressure local authorities for regulation.[137]

2.5.2 Informal solidarity, offline and online

Family Frontiers documents how women who first met in Malaysia's immigration detention centres later formed support circles to navigate paperwork, hearings and legal aid. Beyond detention, women also sustain one another through Facebook groups and online communities, which provide safe spaces to share information, reduce isolation and mobilise solidarity across geographic boundaries. Together, these offline and online circles function as informal infrastructures of mutual aid, filling the gaps left by state protection.[138]

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[136] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*. https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[137] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

[138] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

2.5.3 Community workshops and intergenerational learning

TASAT highlights how women marriage migrants in Taiwan engage in workshops, reading clubs, theatre and podcasts that build collective leadership and political awareness. These activities serve as mutual learning spaces where older women and second-generation youth share experiences and prepare testimonies for policy dialogues, turning community spaces into incubators of advocacy.[139]

2.5.4 Safe spaces and counselling centres

KOCUN documents migrant counselling and support centres in South Korea that provide legal advice, trauma counselling and after-school programmes for children of migrant women. These centres, often run by NGOs in collaboration with migrant women, serve as grassroots institutions of mutual care, offering both immediate crisis support and longer-term empowerment.[140]

2.5.5 Feminist organising and solidarity networks

GABRIELA shows how women marriage migrants are integrated into women's collectives and grassroots feminist organisations in the Philippines. These groups combine community organising, shelter referrals and political education, enabling returnee women to break isolation and reframe their experiences of abandonment or abuse as part of broader struggles against gendered migration regimes.[141]

Together, these networks show that even in contexts of exclusion, marriage migrant women create their own infrastructures of care and knowledge. Whether emerging from detention circles, online groups, returnee associations, counselling centres, grassroots organisations or feminist collectives, these initiatives share a common purpose: transforming private survival tactics into collective strength and political voice.

2.6 CAMPAIGNING FOR SYSTEMIC REFORM

Women marriage migrants and their allies extend their struggles beyond individual petitions and mutual aid into campaigns for systemic change. These efforts take multiple forms across different contexts, reflecting both the constraints women face and the creativity with which they mobilise.

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[139] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*. https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[140] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[141] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

2.6.1 Mobilising for visibility through diverse strategies

The MCR reports show that systemic reform does not look the same everywhere. In Taiwan, TASAT documents how marriage migrants engage in street demonstrations, press conferences and legislative dialogues to demand reforms. Their campaigns had once successfully amended several articles of Immigration Act (effective 2008) and Nationality Act (effective 2016). They currently campaign for recognition of caregiving in pension and long-term care policy and reforms to ensure that residency and welfare rights are not conditional on marriage.[142] In Malaysia, Family Frontiers (2024) shows that activism for women marriage migrants' rights often takes quieter forms: legal interventions by NGOs, collaborations with lawyers and online support via Facebook groups that contest discriminatory immigration and custody practices. These examples illustrate how women pursue visibility through different avenues—public protest in some settings, legal advocacy and digital organising in others—each adapted to local political realities.

2.6.2 Transforming testimony into legal and policy reform

Both the GABRIELA (2024) and KABAR BUMI (2024) reports show how women marriage migrants' personal narratives are strategically mobilised to push for systemic change. In the Philippines, returnee women's accounts of abandonment and struggles for child support have been brought into congressional hearings, where they inform debates on amendments to the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act. In Indonesia, KABAR BUMI documents how survivors publicly shared their experiences in village-level forums, compelling local governments to adopt ordinances regulating marriage brokers. In both contexts, testimony is not confined to private suffering but becomes a political resource, converting lived experiences into the basis for new laws and institutional protections, and transforming testimony into legal and policy reform.

2.6.3 Using legal mechanisms as tools of contestation

Even restrictive laws can be leveraged for reform. KOCUN (2024) highlights how migrant women in South Korea invoke statutory waivers in the Immigration Control Act and Nationality Act—for survivors of domestic violence or mothers of minor children—to petition for residency or naturalisation. Though evidentiary burdens are high, these cases demonstrate how legal petitions themselves become movement strategies, exposing systemic inequalities and pressing for change.

2.6.4 Alliances and transnational solidarity

Across the five reports, women marriage migrants' campaigns gain strength when they are embedded in broad coalitions at home and transnational networks abroad. These alliances

[142] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*. https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

ensure that struggles for welfare, custody and recognition are not treated as narrow or isolated issues, but as part of wider movements for migrant and gender justice.

At the national level, women situate their demands within multi-sector coalitions. In Taiwan, TASAT (2024) works through AHRLIM, which unites migrant associations, feminist groups, labour unions and legal advocates to press for reforms in welfare and immigration law. In Malaysia, Family Frontiers shows how collaboration with the Association of Women Lawyers and the migrant workers' organisation, Tenaganita, anchors marriage migrants' concerns within legal and labour rights struggles. These examples illustrate how coalition-building expands the reach of marriage migrants' campaigns by embedding them in established rights-based movements.[143]

The reports also highlight how advocacy is pursued through transnational solidarities. In the Philippines, GABRIELA not only frames marriage migration within a feminist critique of labour export and GBV, but also organises across borders. Returnee women's testimonies are presented in Philippine congressional hearings, and GABRIELA networks with NGOs in Japan and Korea to support women in custody disputes and cases of abandonment. This approach transforms marriage migration into a transnational justice issue, where obligations of care and accountability are claimed across borders.[144] KABAR BUMI describes how survivor testimonies in village-level forums in Indonesia were used to press for stricter regulation of brokers, while also forming the basis of bilateral advocacy with counterparts in China to protect Indonesian brides.[145] Similarly, KOCUN highlights returnee support centres in Can Tho and Hai Phong, Vietnam, which provide counselling, legal aid and vocational training. These centres represent a concrete form of transnational infrastructure, ensuring women remain supported even after returning from South Korea.[146]

Together, these examples show that systemic reform is not pursued by marriage migrants alone but through alliances that bridge sectors and borders. By linking with feminist, labour, legal and migrant rights movements, and by building infrastructures that extend across national boundaries, marriage migrant women amplify their voices and transform individual struggles into collective claims for justice and equality.

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[143] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[144] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

[145] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

[146] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

2.7 PERSISTENT CHALLENGES AND SUPPORT NEEDED

Despite the breadth of strategies described, women marriage migrants' movements remain constrained by recurring structural barriers. Language barriers and limited legal literacy repeatedly undermine access to justice. Both the KOCUN and Family Frontiers reports note that women are disadvantaged when interpretation is absent and procedures are opaque.[147,148] KOCUN highlights that migrant women often fail to meet the evidentiary thresholds for residency or naturalisation because they cannot produce police or medical certificates without NGO support.[149]

Similarly, Family Frontiers documents how non-citizen wives in Malaysia struggle in immigration and Syariah court proceedings unless accompanied by groups such as AWL or Tenaganita.[150] Equally pervasive is the threat of deportation and retaliation. Family Frontiers describes how abusive husbands weaponise spousal visa dependency by threatening deportation, while immigration authorities themselves use detention and removal as tools of control, silencing women's claims.[151]

The reports also converge on the challenge of resource precarity. TASAT observes that grassroots organisations and coalitions like AHRLIM depend on short-term grants and voluntary labour, limiting their capacity to sustain campaigns.[152] Likewise, KABAR BUMI notes that returnee associations in Indonesia rely on unpaid volunteers and minimal funding, restricting their reach and ability to organise.[153]

Another recurring theme is social stigma and isolation. GABRIELA reports that returnee women in the Philippines are labelled 'failures' or 'opportunists', discouraging them from seeking justice or engaging in advocacy.[154] KABAR BUMI similarly describes how Indonesian

[147] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[148] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[149] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[150] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[151] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[152] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*. https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[153] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

[154] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished]

returnees are blamed by families and communities for the breakdown of marriages, intensifying their marginalisation.[155]

To address these barriers, the reports emphasise the need for stable resources, legal aid, interpretation services and safe organising spaces. GABRIELA underscores the importance of cross-border solidarity with NGOs in Japan and Korea to support custody and child-support claims.[156] KABAR BUMI calls for bilateral agreements with PRC to regulate marriage brokers.[157] KOCUN highlights the role of returnee support centres in Vietnam, as examples of the infrastructures needed to ensure migrant women are not abandoned after failed marriages.[158]

Together, these findings underline that marriage migrants' resistance is a long-term struggle that requires sustained alliances, resources and legal reforms to move from survival to systemic transformation. To sum up, across Malaysia, South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia and the Philippines, women marriage migrants transform exclusion into resistance through a wide range of strategies: contesting custody rulings, mobilising child-rearing as a legal ground for residency, pursuing transnational child support, demanding access to pensions and long-term care, holding brokers accountable, producing their own evidence and building grassroots networks of solidarity. Collectively, these initiatives reveal how women refuse to remain confined to the role of dependent spouses and instead act as rights-bearing subjects in both legal and political arenas.

Their efforts also show that survival tactics—whether gathering documents, joining Facebook groups or sharing testimonies in returnee forums—can evolve into collective infrastructures of care, knowledge and advocacy. In this sense, everyday struggles do more than secure immediate relief: they reshape the terms of belonging and redefine who counts as a legitimate political actor. By converting private experiences of abandonment, caregiving and exploitation into public claims for justice, marriage migrant women not only defend their own rights but also expand the boundaries of citizenship, care and accountability across borders.

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[155] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

[156] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished]

[157] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

[158] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

CHAPTER THREE

RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAYS FORWARD

Marriage migration in Asia is governed by intersecting structures of immigration control, patriarchal family laws, neoliberal labour export regimes and gendered care economies. As the reports from Taiwan, South Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines show, women marriage migrants remain structurally dependent on their husbands for legal status, face systemic discrimination and encounter exclusion from welfare and justice. Yet, women marriage migrants and their allies also resist, demanding reforms that centre autonomy, dignity and equality. This roadmap synthesises their recommendations into four interlinked pillars.

3.1 SECURING LEGAL STATUS AND EQUAL PROTECTION

3.1.1 Decoupling residency from marital status

A core demand across reports is independent legal status for women marriage migrants. For example, in Malaysia, under the LTSVP, non-citizen spouses remain dependent on their Malaysian husbands' sponsorship. Family Frontiers documents that this dependency restricts women's employment rights, delays access to permanent residency and citizenship, and leaves divorced or widowed spouses vulnerable to loss of status and deportation.[159]

In South Korea, women on the F-6 spousal visa face residency insecurities when marriages break down. The KOCUN report highlights that divorce proceedings are often prolonged and complicated, leaving women without stable status before naturalisation. Survivors of abuse may be unable to secure residency during or after divorce, which obstructs reintegration and creates long-term precarity.[160]

These systems create coercive dependency. Legal reforms, including amendments of immigration, nationality and family laws, must establish autonomous residence permits, protect divorced or widowed spouses, and guarantee custody and inheritance rights free of religious or gender bias.

[159] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[160] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

3.1.2 Clear pathways to permanent residency and citizenship

Across the region, women marriage migrants face lengthy, uncertain, and exclusionary pathways to Permanent Residency (PR) and citizenship. Reports highlight that while residency permits may be available, the criteria for transition to secure status are opaque and discriminatory, leaving many women in prolonged legal limbo.

Advocates emphasise that clear timelines are essential. For example, in Malaysia, Family Frontiers documents how non-citizen spouses wait decades for PR approval and face indefinite delays in citizenship applications. The absence of transparent benchmarks—contrasted with the expedited procedures often granted to investors or high-income expatriates—underscores how current frameworks institutionalise inequality.[161]

Barriers also arise from exclusionary conditions tied to naturalisation procedures. TASAT shows how Taiwan's requirement that marriage migrants renounce their original nationality before naturalising prevents many long-term residents, especially older women, from accessing citizenship. This condition not only obstructs their path to formal membership but also entrenches exclusion from welfare schemes such as the Public Assistance Act and the LTC programmes.[162]

Together, these cases reveal a structural problem: women marriage migrants' eligibility for PR and citizenship is constrained either by arbitrary timelines or by unrealistic conditions that effectively deny access. Clearer, fairer and more inclusive pathways—without decades-long waiting or mandatory nationality renunciation—are necessary to ensure that marriage migrants can secure stable legal status and full social rights.

3.1.3 Legal recognition in sending countries

Marriage migrants remain invisible under Philippine and Indonesian migration laws. GABRIELA stresses that marriage migrants should be recognised as a distinct category, like overseas workers, entitling them to pre-departure counselling, legal aid and reintegration support.[163] KABAR BUMI echoes this, urging Indonesia to legislate protections against arranged-marriage trafficking and extend services for returnees.[164]

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[161] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[162] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*. https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[163] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

[164] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

3.2 GUARANTEEING ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND ESSENTIAL SERVICES

3.2.1 Enforcing laws and expanding coverage

Protective frameworks exist across the region but women marriage migrants often remain excluded in both law and practice. Reports show two recurring patterns: legal exclusion written directly into statutes and practical exclusion through discriminatory implementation.

Legal exclusion is evident in Taiwan's Public Assistance Act, which explicitly bars non-naturalised spouses from accessing social assistance, even after decades of residence and caregiving.[165] This entrenches dependency on husbands' citizenship and creates systemic welfare inequality.

Practical exclusion occurs where laws appear inclusive on paper but are undermined by administrative practice. In Taiwan, the Long-Term Care Services Act contains no citizenship restriction, yet TASAT documents that non-citizen marriage migrants are excluded from applying for services.[166] In Indonesia, the Anti-Trafficking Law (Law No. 21/2007) recognises arranged marriages as a form of trafficking, but KABAR BUMI shows that survivors receive little protection or rehabilitation in practice, facing weak enforcement, stigma and a lack of reintegration services. Comparable gaps emerge in other settings, where domestic violence and anti-discrimination laws formally apply but are inaccessible to marriage migrants because of evidentiary burdens, lack of interpretation or bias from frontline officials.[167,168]

These examples illustrate a structural pattern: legal frameworks may exist, but exclusion persists through discriminatory provisions and failures of enforcement. Reforms must explicitly guarantee marriage migrants equal coverage in domestic violence, anti-discrimination and welfare laws, while ensuring oversight and accountability so that implementation matches the spirit of inclusion.

3.2.2 Lowering evidentiary barriers and ensuring translation

Barriers to justice are reinforced by onerous evidentiary requirements and the absence of reliable interpretation. Across contexts, survivors describe losing legal status or foregoing services because systems demand documents they cannot safely obtain and operate only in majority languages they cannot access.

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[165] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*. https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[166] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*. https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[167] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[168] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

KOCUN shows that in South Korea, women marriage migrants seeking protection from abuse must often submit police reports, medical certificates or court rulings to renew or extend their visas—documents that many survivors cannot obtain. As a result, they lose legal status even when abuse is well-documented in their own testimonies. These barriers are compounded by limited translation in shelters and family centres, which undermines the accessibility of available services.[169]

Family Frontiers highlights a parallel barrier in Malaysia: police frequently dismiss women marriage migrants' complaints of domestic violence as 'private family matters,' urging them to reconcile rather than seek legal redress. The report recommends mandatory gender-sensitivity and anti-bias training for law enforcement and judicial officers. It also notes the absence of structured government language programmes for non-citizen spouses, which exacerbates difficulties in navigating the justice system.[170]

TASAT illustrates how these gaps extend to the welfare and care systems in Taiwan. While the Long-Term Care Services Act does not legally exclude marriage migrants, TASAT documents how lack of interpreter support at hotlines, assessments and service points leads to systematic denial of services. Instead of being institutionally guaranteed, interpreter provision is left to individual social workers, resulting in inconsistent access that disproportionately disadvantages older women marriage migrants.[171]

The GABRIELA report further notes that consular services often fail to provide interpretation; hospitals and social workers may notify embassies about battered Filipinas, yet women frequently receive no assistance—'not even an interpreter'.[172]

These reports underline that reducing evidentiary burdens is not enough; justice also requires institutionalised translation and interpretation. Reform should include:

- lowering proof standards for protection and residency (accepting sworn statements, NGO attestations or affidavits);
- guaranteeing state-funded interpreters at all stages of legal, welfare and immigration procedures;
- establishing accredited interpreter registers and multilingual hotlines; and
- embedding interpretation in consular protocols.

[169] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[170] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[171] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*. https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[172] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

Only by addressing both evidence and language can legal protections become genuinely accessible to marriage migrants.

3.2.3 Regulating brokers and preventing exploitation

Marriage brokers and recruitment syndicates continue to wield significant influence in shaping transnational marriages. The KABAR BUMI report documents how networks of brokers, village officials and foreign agencies profit from arranging marriages, often exposing women marriage migrants to exploitative or abusive conditions. It calls for stronger regulation and monitoring of marriage brokers and agencies, alongside strict sanctions for fraudulent or abusive practices.[173] Crucially, KABAR BUMI stresses that bilateral and regional cooperation is needed to ensure that transnational marriages do not become conduits for trafficking.[174]

The KOCUN report shows that South Korea has attempted to address problems in this sector through the Marriage Brokerage Act, which mandates transparent contracts and requires the provision of interpretation and translation services for women entering marriages. Yet, as KOCUN notes, implementation remains weak: women continue to face language barriers and unfair practices because monitoring and enforcement are insufficient.[175]

These findings show that while some legal frameworks exist, they are often poorly enforced, and in many countries broker syndicates remain unregulated. Strengthening state oversight, cross-border cooperation and accessible complaint mechanisms is essential to prevent brokers from profiting through exploitation and to ensure that women marriage migrants' rights are protected.

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[173] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

[174] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

[175] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

3.3 TRANSFORMING PUBLIC ATTITUDES AND INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES

Legal and policy reforms alone cannot dismantle the deep inequalities faced by women marriage migrants. Unless the stereotypes, prejudices and institutional biases that surround them are confronted head-on, even the best laws will fail in practice. The reports are clear: change must extend beyond statutes to the everyday spaces where women marriage migrants live, work and seek support. Shifting public discourse, amplifying migrant-led voices, and embedding cultural competence in frontline institutions are not optional add-ons but urgent conditions for realising rights and justice.

3.3.1 Confronting stereotypes and ending stigma

Reports show that women marriage migrants face entrenched stigma that undermines their rights and dignity. GABRIELA documents how Filipina returnees from failed marriages are stigmatised as 'immoral', 'opportunists', or as women who have 'failed' their families, reinforcing their exclusion from protection and reintegration support.[176] KABAR BUMI similarly records how communities in West Kalimantan reject women who return from failed or abusive marriages, marking them as dishonouring their families.[177]

In receiving countries, the pattern is echoed, where women marriage migrants are often perceived as social problems. For instance, in Taiwan, women marriage migrants used to be called 'foreign brides' who were linked to 'inferior population quality'.[178] TASAT shows that while the label of 'foreign brides' has been removed, women marriage migrants are still portrayed as dependents and burdens on welfare systems, while older women are rendered invisible through intersecting stigmas of gender, migration and ageing.[179] KOCUN documents that in Korea, women marriage migrants are stereotyped as *submissive* or *opportunistic*, and their children face bullying in schools rooted in racialised stigma. [180] Family Frontiers adds that in Malaysia, police and Syariah officers often trivialise domestic violence as a 'family matter', reflecting a stereotype that non-citizen wives should tolerate abuse to preserve marriage.[181]

To dismantle these stigmas, national media campaigns and school curricula must directly challenge racialised and gendered stereotypes that depict women marriage migrants as

[176] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

[177] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

[178] Hsia, H.-C. (2007). Imaged and imagined threat to the nation: The media construction of "foreign brides" phenomenon as social problems in Taiwan. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, *8*(1), 55–85.

[179] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*. https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[180] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[181] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

passive, opportunistic or undeserving. Instead, public discourse should affirm them as rights-bearing members of society, recognising their contributions to caregiving, families and communities.

3.3.2 Claiming voice and power: Women marriage migrants leading change

Countering stigma requires more than shifting public opinion; it demands that women marriage migrants themselves claim voice and exercise power in shaping the societies they live in. Across the reports, migrant-led organising and self-representation emerge as powerful strategies for transforming discourse and advancing justice.

KABAR BUMI highlights how Indonesian returnees form mutual aid groups to resist stigma, monitor marriage brokers and negotiate with local authorities. These forms of grassroots self-organisation enable survivors to reclaim dignity and hold power brokers accountable, even in contexts of rejection and discrimination.[182]

TASAT report shows how a grassroots association of women marriage migrants in Taiwan has built collective strength by combining organising with media production—from leadership training and policy advocacy to podcasts, theatre and public forums. These initiatives enable women marriage migrants to contest welfare exclusion, highlight their caregiving contributions, and act as political actors rather than passive subjects.[183]

GABRIELA underscores that empowerment must also be transnational. By situating women marriage migrants within broader feminist and anti-imperialist struggles, it insists that their experiences of violence, stigma and exclusion are not private matters but political issues tied to global labour export and gendered exploitation.[184]

Taken together, the reports affirm that women marriage migrants are not merely subjects of policy but agents of change. Claiming voice and power through storytelling, organising and leadership transforms them from being silenced or stigmatised into recognised rights-holders and political actors. To sustain this transformation, governments, donors and civil society must ensure long-term funding support, institutional recognition and sustained political engagement in regional and global platforms that allow women marriage migrants to continue leading change on their own terms.

3.3.3 Embedding cultural competence in institutions

Transforming attitudes also requires changing the practices of frontline institutions. Training in cultural sensitivity is vital for immigration officers, police, judges, teachers and

[182] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

[183] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*. https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[184] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

care providers who regularly interact with women marriage migrants and their families. Without such measures, stereotypes and bias continue to undermine women's access to justice and services.

Evidence from Taiwan illustrates the stakes: lack of interpretation in welfare and healthcare systems leaves many women unable to navigate procedures or claim entitlements, despite formal eligibility.[185] In South Korea, under-resourced family centers struggle to provide adequate linguistic support, limiting their role as bridges for migrant families.[186] In Malaysia, the tendency of police and Syariah officers to dismiss domestic violence as a 'family matter' demonstrates how deeply ingrained cultural assumptions shape enforcement practices, highlighting the need for gender-sensitivity and anti-bias training across justice institutions.[187]

Origin-country institutions also bear responsibility. Consular services frequently fail to meet even basic needs: battered Filipinas abroad are often left without assistance, not even an interpreter, when hospitals or social workers alert embassies.[188] Reintegration programmes in Indonesia likewise fall short, with returning women facing stigma and inadequate support from local officials. Building cultural competence into these reintegration mechanisms is essential to restore dignity and ensure protection.[189]

Embedding cultural competence across both destination and sending countries is thus a prerequisite for justice. From local welfare offices and police stations to embassies and reintegration programmes, the institutions that women marriage migrants encounter must be trained, resourced and held accountable to uphold dignity and equal treatment. Only through such systemic reform can women marriage migrants and their children participate fully and securely in society.

3.4 STRENGTHENING WOMEN MARRIAGE MIGRANTS' LEADERSHIP AND MOVEMENTS

3.4.1 Supporting grassroots organising

Marriage migrants are not passive victims but organisers who have built movements despite structural constraints. In Taiwan, TASAT and its allies in AHRLIM successfully campaigned for amendments to the Immigration Act, ensuring protection for survivors of

[185] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*. https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[186] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[187] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[188] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

[189] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

domestic violence and advancing migrants' right to assembly.[190,191] In Indonesia, KABAR BUMI organises returnees into self-help groups to monitor brokers and confront trafficking networks.[192] GABRIELA in the Philippines connects marriage migration to critiques of neoliberal labor export and violence against women.[193]

For migrant-led groups to thrive, governments and donors must guarantee legal recognition, long-term funding and protection from retaliation. Otherwise, their hard-won organising will continue to be fragile—dependent on short-term projects and easily silenced by state repression.

3.4.2 Building support systems for care, reintegration and dignity

Support systems must address the emotional strain, social isolation and reintegration challenges faced by women marriage migrants. In Taiwan, TASAT underscores the need for accessible psychosocial services to assist overburdened caregivers coping with long-term stress.[194] From Korea, KOCUN draws attention to the importance of reintegration counseling for women returning after failed marriages, helping them rebuild stability and confidence.[195] Meanwhile, in Indonesia, KABAR BUMI points to the urgent requirement for rehabilitation initiatives and stigma-reduction programmes to support survivors of trafficking.[196]

These forms of support are not peripheral but fundamental to sustaining women marriage migrants' leadership, restoring dignity and breaking cycles of exclusion and isolation.

3.5 BUILDING TRANSNATIONAL SOLIDARITY AND SHARED KNOWLEDGE

All five reports converge on a single message: cross-border solidarity is indispensable. In the Philippines, GABRIELA insists that struggles around marriage migration must be woven into broader feminist and anti-imperialist movements, refusing to let them be siloed as 'private' or domestic issues.[197] From Taiwan, TASAT pushes for transnational collaboration

[190] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*. https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[191] Hsia, H.-C. (2023). Incubating grounded transnational advocacy network: The making of transnational movements for marriage migrants. *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements*, *14*(1), 179–208.

[192] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

[193] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished]

[194] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*. https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[195] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[196] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

[197] GABRIELA. (2024). *From the Philippines to Japan: Marriage migration from the viewpoint of a sending country* [Unpublished].

on naturalisation and welfare, arguing that only by comparing models across borders can states be pressed toward more inclusive reforms.[198] KABAR BUMI adds a diplomatic dimension, urging bilateral engagement with destination states so that discriminatory laws and practices can be directly challenged at the policy level.[199] Meanwhile, both KOCUN and Family Frontiers stress the importance of systematic data collection and cross-border information exchange, warning that without shared evidence, advocacy risks fragmentation and governments can evade accountability.[200,201]

Marriage migration should be understood as a cross-border pathway that involves several distinct but interconnected stages—including pre-departure, migration and, in some cases, return and reintegration. Because this pathway spans multiple countries, it is essential to build strong and continuous cooperation between both sending and receiving countries at every stage. Such cooperation ensures that migrants are supported not only during their initial departure and settlement, but also if and when they return, helping to address social, legal and economic challenges in a more coordinated and sustainable way.

Solidarity, in this sense, is not an aspiration but a strategic necessity: linking movements, negotiating across borders and building common evidence are the foundations for effective advocacy. A vivid example of this kind of transnational organising is the Alliance of Marriage Migrants' Organisations for Rights and Empowerment (AMMORE).

Rooted in more than a decade of cross-border networking that began with a 2007 conference in Taipei, the alliance was formally established in Bangkok in 2017. Today, AMMORE connects grassroots groups from Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Hong Kong and Australia, while forging alliances with broader feminist and human rights movements.[202] Looking ahead, AMMORE demonstrates how sustained collaboration between sending- and receiving-country groups can generate the shared strategies, political leverage and solidarity needed to challenge discriminatory regimes and advance women marriage migrants' rights across the region.

As H.-C. Hsia illustrates, AMMORE demonstrates how local organising can scale up to regional networks:[203]

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[198] TransAsia Sisters Association. (2024). *Laws and policies affecting rights and welfare of older women marriage migrants in Taiwan*. https://2003tasat.org/policy_report/

[199] Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia. (2024). *Ordered bride/marriage migrant in West Kalimantan and several areas* [Unpublished].

[200] Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy. (2024). *Women marriage migrants in South Korea: Identifying challenges and support needed in all migration stages* [Unpublished].

[201] Family Frontiers. (2024). *Navigating borders, barriers, and belonging: The lived experiences of non-citizen wives in Malaysia*. https://familyfrontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Navigating-Borders-Barriers-and-Belonging-The-Lived-Experiences-of-Non-Citizen-Wives-in-Malaysia-2.pdf

[202] Hsia, H.-C. (2023). Incubating grounded transnational advocacy network: The making of transnational movements for marriage migrants. *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements*, *14*(1), 179–208.

[203] Hsia, H.-C. (2023). Incubating grounded transnational advocacy network: The making of transnational movements for marriage migrants. *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements*, *14*(1), 179–208.

- **Domestic transnationalism as foundation:** National alliances like AHRLIM in Taiwan created 'safe spaces' for women marriage migrants to develop subjectivity, gain legal literacy and build leadership, laying the groundwork for international networking.
- **Cross-border solidarity in practice:** AMMORE has coordinated petitions, simultaneous protests, exchange visits and comparative research (e.g., *For Better or For Worse*), amplifying local struggles through the 'boomerang effect'.
- **Reframing discourse:** It shifted terminology from 'foreign bride' to 'marriage migrant', later echoed in United Nations (UN) advocacy.
- **Collective empowerment:** Exchange visits and international forums have politicised women's experiences, transforming grievances into structural critiques of globalisation, labour export and patriarchal migration regimes.

The experience of AMMORE offers a glimpse of what the future could look like—sustained collaboration that bridges sending and receiving countries, and turns fragmented struggles into a collective force for rights and justice. Looking forward, transnational solidarity among marriage migrants must deepen in four ways:

- **Institutionalising regional platforms**–AMMORE and similar networks could evolve into formalised coalitions with secretariats or rotating hubs, ensuring sustainability beyond short-term projects;
- **Integrating intersectional struggles**–alliances should strengthen ties with migrant workers' unions, climate justice groups and care economy movements, situating marriage migration within global debates on labour, social reproduction and gender justice;
- **Leveraging digital spaces**–online campaigns, virtual assemblies and cross-border digital storytelling can expand participation of women unable to travel due to care responsibilities or immigration restrictions; and
- **Engaging supranational advocacy**–marriage migrant networks should coordinate shadow reports to CEDAW, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), ICCPR, and the Global Compact on Migration, while also pressing for recognition in ASEAN and other regional bodies.

By combining grassroots empowerment with regional and global advocacy, the future of transnational solidarity lies in scaling up without losing groundedness. The experience of AMMORE shows that alliances built from below can both transform national policies and reshape global discourse.

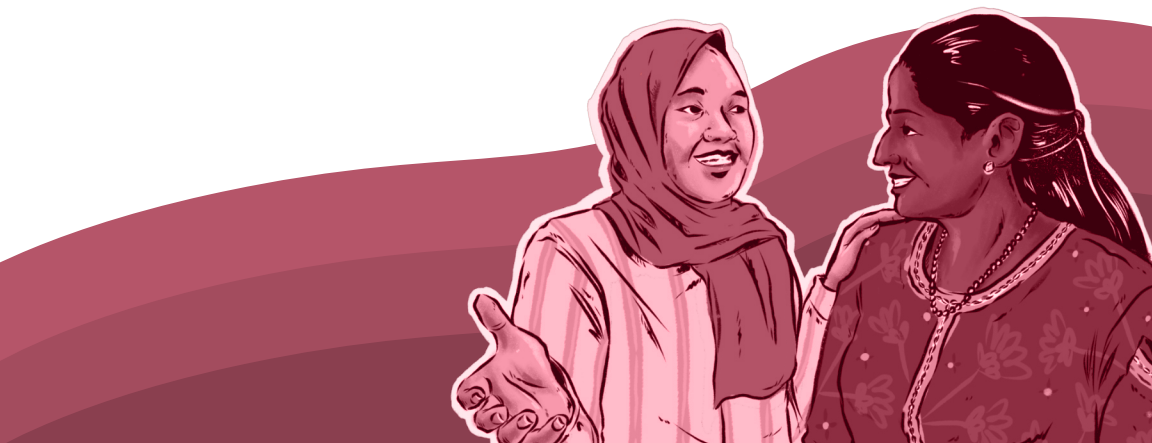
3.6 CONCLUSION: FROM FRAGMENTED STRUGGLES TO COLLECTIVE POWER

The five reports reveal a consistent truth: women marriage migrants stand at the sharpest edge of intersecting systems of exclusion, yet they also embody some of the region's most powerful sources of resistance and renewal. Across Taiwan, South Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, women marriage migrants remain constrained by dependent visa regimes, patriarchal family laws, discriminatory welfare systems and stigmatising social attitudes. At the same time, they have organised to claim voice and power, pressed governments to amend unjust laws and built movements that link everyday struggles with regional and global agendas.

The roadmap presented in this chapter is not a menu of optional reforms but a coherent strategy for feminist, rights-based governance of marriage migration. Securing independent legal status and equal protection is the foundation. Guaranteeing access to justice and essential services ensures that rights on paper translate into rights in practice. Transforming public attitudes and institutional cultures dismantles the stereotypes and biases that undermine reform. Strengthening leadership and movements consolidates women marriage migrants' capacity to act collectively. And building transnational solidarity turns fragmented battles into a regional force that cannot be ignored.

The lesson is clear: women marriage migrants are not merely vulnerable populations in need of protection—they are political actors and rights-bearers whose struggles reshape laws, institutions and discourse. Their organising—from local mutual aid groups to regional alliances like AMMORE—demonstrates how change is built from the ground up, then scaled across borders to influence national and international policy.

Moving forward, the challenge is to sustain and expand this momentum. Governments must enact reforms that guarantee autonomy and equality, donors must invest in long-term capacity rather than short-term projects, and regional and global bodies must recognise marriage migration as integral to debates on labour, care and human rights. Above all, movements must continue to insist that women marriage migrants speak for themselves, not as dependents or exceptions, but as protagonists of justice.



Description of multi-country research partners

The research partner organisations of this multicountry research are as follows:

1. **Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy (KOCUN),** established in 2005, works to enhance Korea's active role in the field of international human rights and further strengthen the UN's human rights reporting function by expanding the base of domestic awareness of UN human rights system, strengthening professional human capabilities and researching and developing UN human rights policy. KOCUN is actively promoting the human rights of women marriage migrants from Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines through Pre-departure Orientation (PDO) programmes prior to their departure for Korea, as well as for Vietnamese women and their children who have returned to their homeland after the dissolution of their marriage in Korea. Over the years, KOCUN conducted several research studies to find out the best way to support women marriage migrants.

2. **TransAsia Sisters Association, Taiwan (TASAT)** is the first nationwide civil organisation established in 2003 by women marriage migrants from Southeast Asia in Taiwan. It has the primary goal of empowering women marriage migrants, enabling them to break away from isolation and become active participants in society. TASAT focuses on three main tasks: grassroots organising, public education and policy advocacy. Over the years, TASAT has actively participated in various advocacy activities related to women marriage migrants, including collaborating with other organisations, collectively protesting unfair rhetoric and policies, submitting proposed amendments to immigration legislation and seeking support from legislative bodies.

3. **The Association of Family Support and Welfare Selangor & KL (Family Frontiers)** was stablished with the aim of advancing, promoting and strengthening the family unit so that no family is left behind. Family Frontiers, as a self-led feminist organisation, strongly advocates for gender equality through a multi-faceted approach, which includes serving 30,000 marriage migrants via online platforms and support groups, empowering individuals to advocate, lobbying policymakers, raising public awareness through media and parliamentary engagement, and engaging with UN mechanisms such as CEDAW, Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Universal Periodic Review (UPR), UN Working Groups and Special Rapporteurs. Family Frontiers currently leads the campaign for gender-equal citizenship reform in Malaysia for Malaysian mothers and their overseas-born children.

4. **Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia (KABAR BUMI),** established in 2015, is a grassroots organisation of returned migrants and the families of migrants in Indonesia. The founding members of KABAR BUMI were migrant activists and organisers in

different countries where they were working as migrant workers. To continue their activism for migrants' rights, they formed KABAR BUMI to support and organise returning migrant workers and their families. Currently, KABAR BUMI has 200 members and four chapters in Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT), Sumbawa-Nusa Tenggara Barat (NTB), Cilacap in Central Java, and Ponorogo in East Java.

5. **Gabriela Philippines** is a grassroots-based national alliance of women who believe that the freedom women seek will be brought about by the resolution of the problems of foreign domination, landlessness and political repression and in the changing of patriarchal value systems and structures in Philippine society. GABRIELA works to promote a positive social attitude toward women through cultural means and consciousness-raising and against issues that adversely affect women, such as landlessness, militarisation, the foreign debt crisis and the IMF-WB impositions, General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade-World Trade Organisation (GATT-WTO), anti-people development projects, the denial of women's health rights, violence against women and children, prostitution, trafficking in women and migration.

The **Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)** is the region's leading network of feminist and women's rights organisations and individual activists. For over 35 years, we have been carrying out advocacy, activism and movement-building to advance women's human rights and Development Justice.

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Based on the Multicountry Research reports on Marriage Migration of Family Frontiers in Malaysia, GABRIELA in the Philippines, the Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy (KOCUN) in South Korea, Keluarga Besar Buruh Migran Indonesia (KABAR BUMI) in Indonesia and TransAsia Sisters Association, Taiwan (TASAT).

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