



Implementation of the EU Regional Multi-Annual Indicative Programme (RMIP) for  
Asia Pacific (2021 – 2027)  
**Follow Up Consultation**  
**12 September 2024**

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## Executive Summary

Within the framework of the [EU Regional Multi-Annual Indicative Programme for Asia and the Pacific \(2021-2027\)](#), together with the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Policy Forum on Development (PFD), hosted a consultation on 12 September 2024, for participants representing civil society organisations (CSOs), local authorities (LAs), and regional networks to discuss the Regional MIP's implementation and gather feedback and recommendations.<sup>1</sup> The discussion included a plenary session for updates on the regional programme and thematic group discussions focusing **Climate Change, Energy and Environment; Digital; Migration and Forced Displacement**.

The meeting opened with a welcome by **Peteris Ustubs**, Director of INTPA C, Middle East, Asia and Pacific, and was followed by a presentation by **Stéphanie Truillé-Baurens**, Team Leader, East Asia and Regional Unit C.3 East Asia and the Pacific, regarding the state of play of the regional MIP, its structure, and main achievements, and a presentation by **Jean-Louis Ville**, Head of Unit C.3, East Asia and the Pacific, addressing the mid-term review (MTR) process, which is expected to be concluded in October 2024. The assessment took into account the results of consultations on the regional MIP with relevant stakeholders.

The presentations were followed by a question and answer session. Issues raised included: the need for resources and strategies to assist smallholders; increased funding for CSOs; how to improve capacity to adapt to the EU Deforestation Regulation; and engaging with trade unions in the field of deforestation. Responses highlighted ongoing efforts to engage with CSOs, support smallholders, and address environmental challenges through various programmes.

Subsequently, the participants were divided into three thematic groups: **Climate Change, Energy and Environment; Digital; Migration and Forced Displacement**.

The conclusions of the thematic group on **Climate Change, Energy and Environment** included calls to:

- Better involve CSOs in policy reforms, not just with the EU, but across policy platforms and policy initiatives, to ensure that CSOs are heard more broadly.
- Simplify requirements and process for CSOs to access funding and improve the dissemination of information regarding available grants and calls for proposals to ensure that CSOs are aware of opportunities. For example, explore the creation of a common platform or communication channel to circulate information about limited calls for proposals available to CSOs.
- Advocate for increased funding and support for evidence-based assessments and research related to climate change impacts.
- Promote the involvement of trade unions in initiatives, such as the Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETP) in Indonesia.
- Support SMEs in navigating through the administrations dealing with climate change management but working in silo.
- Maintain solid spending targets on climate and environment.
- Promote the participation of CSOs (citizen organisations and women organisations) in stakeholder dialogues with the government.

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<sup>1</sup> Previous consultations on the MIP were held in May 2021 and March 2023 to capture the views of PFD stakeholders. A meeting was also organised in July 2023 in the context of the Regional MIP Mid-Term Review (MTR), assessing its relevance and progress and looking into priorities for the period 2025-2027.

Within the **Digital** group:

- Address the privacy of data and data protection, as well as gaps in programming.
- Emphasise the need to use digital, AI, and technical advances to develop more sustainable and inclusive jobs, and also financial inclusion, in particular for women.
- Recognise the significance of cybersecurity and the exploration of potential programming and actions related to cybersecurity in future EU initiatives. Collaborate on cybersecurity, particularly when countries do not have cybersecurity laws in place.
- Improve meaningful communication between EU Delegations and CSOs.
- Increase familiarity with the Digital for Development Hub (D4D) to better engage with it to bring feedback and ideas related to digital cooperation.

Within the **Migration and Forced Displacement** group:

- Recognise the evolving needs of Afghans displaced in host countries, which are greater than the support provided.
- Address the need for long term funding, especially around livelihoods and education, and pay attention to mental health and psychological support.
- Recognise and combat the lack of access to information by displaced groups regarding where they can find support.
- Address the difficulty of cooperating with CSOs, with shrinking civic space, particularly in Iran and Pakistan.
- Manage the risk of over dependence on EU support.
- Address pushbacks and the unequal treatment of Rohingya refugees vis-à-vis other migrants.
- Improve monitoring of the situation in Myanmar and the Rohingya crisis, including the collection of accurate data and evidence to inform responses.
- Work on policy changes with authorities regarding the Rohingya response, including advocating for relocation and asylum for refugees in Europe.

There was agreement across the groups regarding: the importance of enhanced cooperation with CSOs and SMEs and the involvement of CSOs in decision making processes; the need to work collectively on climate change issues; the need to use digital, AI, and technical progress to develop more sustainable and inclusive jobs, and increase financial inclusion; the need to improve monitoring of displaced persons; and the importance of long-term funding for migrants and forcibly displaced, especially around livelihoods, education, and mental health.

**Stéphanie Truillé Baurens** thanked the participants for their valuable comments and encouraged participants interested in the Digital sector to connect with the [D4D advisory group](#). She pointed out that climate change, environment and energy is mainly addressed at a national level, despite some regional actions (such as the Central Asia Regional TEI on Water, Energy and Climate Change or the action “Energy Connectivity in South Asia”). **Jean-Louis Ville** concluded the meeting by noting the MTR is expected to be finalised for October 2024. He thanked everyone for their participation and closed the meeting.

## Presentations

**Peteris Ustubs** welcomed the participants to the meeting and highlighted the importance attached to such consultation, which assists the programming process through the views expressed by CSOs on priorities for the Asia-Pacific region. The focus of the actions carried out thus far adapt to the local context of the diverse region and subregions in Asia Pacific. The participants were thanked for sharing their recommendations and priorities of their respective organisations and constituencies, which will be taken into account in the programming implementation phase.

**Stéphanie Truillé Baurens** briefed participants on the [state of play and progress of the Regional MIP](#), as communicated in a document that was previously circulated to participants. The structure of the regional programme considers the diversity of the region, based on geographic pillars and considering the different relationships within subregions. The aim of the session's discussion was to focus on the three key areas that have been identified in the previous consultations: climate change, energy and environment; migration and force displacement; and digital. The other areas of interest, including peace, security, community led actions, and governance are best tackled through other tools available with Delegations, such as the respective country Multi-Indicative programmes or the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights. Significant progress has been made around climate change, environment and energy across all the different regions. Some of the achievements include: adopting a Water, Energy and Climate Change initiative in Central Asia in 2023; Support to India's green transformation; South Asia Regional Energy Connectivity; EU-ASEAN Green Initiative; and the Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership. With regards to the area of migration and forced displacement, significant progress has been made since 2023: the Rohingya Resilience programme in Bangladesh and the Durable Solutions for Displaced and Vulnerable Populations in Iraq were approved. Three pilot actions were approved: the Sustainable Reintegration of Returnees and Improved Migration Management in Pakistan, and two talent partnerships in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Concerning the digital area, a Central Asia digital TEI has been approved for an amount of EUR 20 million. In 2024, an action to prevent violent extremism online was approved and will soon start. In the horizontal and specific priorities of "decent work," "resilience," and the nexus of "migration-climate," progress has also been achieved, such as in ensuring decent work under migration, responsible business conduct, climate resilience through the KIWA initiatives,<sup>2</sup> and migration resilience programmes.

Subsequently, **Jean-Louis Ville** updated the floor on the MTR process 2021- 2027, which was launched in June 2024, but was delayed due to the midterm revision of the EU Multiannual Financial Framework that took place in parallel. It is expected to be concluded in October 2024. The MTR took into consideration the geopolitical and geoeconomic environments marked by the state of play of the current crises, highlighting the importance of aligning investments with the EU's Global Gateway. The review shall translate into an increase of the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+), including for blending investments under the regional MIP, which will represent another way of channelling funds to deliver on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) priorities. An envelope under the regional MIP is proposed for countries in complex settings, such as those without a MIP or with MIPs that need to be terminated, with the view to ensure flexibility and adaptability. Regarding the 2030 Agenda, it has been severely disrupted over the past years because of COVID, the Russian-Ukrainian war, and instability in the Middle East. However, efforts will continue to reach the commitments and the objectives set under the SDGs.

## Question and Answer Session

Following the presentations, participants raised several questions. Regarding the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR), it was pointed out that many CSOs do not have the capacities or resources to adapt to the regulation,

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<sup>2</sup>KIWA Initiative for the resilience of Pacific States: nature based solutions for climate resilience

which could provoke a shift to non-premium markets and actually increase deforestation. The EU had previously committed to the development of a strategic framework of support via technical and financial resources, in addition to information and awareness raising about the regulation. What is included in the RIP in that regard, particularly following the mid-term review? Also referring to the link between climate change and deforestation, it was asked if there were plans to address the problem of pollution in upcoming actions, as these issues go together.

**Stéphanie Truillé-Baurens** explained that the issue of deforestation was discussed during MTR, and that a series of meetings were held recently regarding the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CS3D), where it was noted that the directive and the deforestation regulation were starting to translate into actions. Colleagues in thematic units have initiated some global actions on the sustainability agenda, looking at both CS3D and deforestation with some pilot countries. There is a significant increase in requests for meetings to look into this issue, but no action has been approved yet in the RIP. **Tom Corrie**, Team Leader, INTPA C2 South and South-East Asia, explained that under the regional MIP, work is done to ensure alignment with the different strands of EU policy, including the deforestation regulation. A new programme of support to ASEAN is on biodiversity, which will be approved in 2024, and aims to work with smallholders and SMEs, which are a key building block of the industry in Southeast Asia.

**Jean-Louis Ville** also stressed that deforestation is a key area of priority for both Mongolia and Papua New Guinea, with a large bilateral programme dedicated to this area. **André Debongnie**, Acting Team Leader Pacific, INTPA C3 East Asia and Pacific, explained that thus far, there is a programme on packed waste, which addresses waste in general, which includes plastic waste. **The World Wildlife Fund for Nature** noted that they have country programmes in Sri Lanka and the Maldives to look at plastic pollution. Every country in that region has green transition or green growth as priority. Climate change and green transition are key topics, with work to link country-level actions with regional programmes. Regarding energy, an upcoming programme will focus on regional connectivity to support the creation of an electricity market in South Asia, and also increase the use of green energy in the region. They are working as well on a programme to support disaster risk reduction through earth observation and climate services, and would like to build the capacities of the public administration to use the Copernicus programme. There is not much work in South Asia on deforestation, but they are looking at possible support of the CS3D and its possible linkage with providing support to businesses and organisations in the context of the EUDR.

Responding to the query as to whether there was funding for CSOs and LAs, **André Debongnie** explained that in the regional programmes, the focus is not on direct funding of CSOs and LAs per se; they can participate in some aspects of activities that are funded regionally. There is a programme in the pipeline, which addresses CSO capacity building and support in the Pacific region, but that is not carried out through regional funding. **Tom Corrie** clarified that work is often carried out through CSOs because of the nature of the actions, such as in the migration thematic area, where in forced displacement situations in Afghanistan and in Bangladesh, work is implemented through UN agencies and CSOs. The same applies to the green areas of cooperation in other regions, where some grants are run by CSOs. It was suggested that it would be useful to have a roster to understand which CSOs are available, and which specific expertise are involved. **Tom Corrie** highlighted that work is done on a competitive basis, via a call for proposals published and projects subsequently evaluated. If the need arises for a specialised area of expertise, then colleagues in thematic directorates dealing with CSOs and LAs are consulted.

The EC was asked if it intends to invest more heavily into large-scale restoration, both forests and wetland restoration, and whether the programming is looking at that restoration side of things, of both through the climate lens, and the biodiversity and large-scale regional connectivity lens. **Stéphanie Truillé-Baurens** explained that the RIP is an incomplete picture of interventions as there are also thematic programmes, mainly on

environment and climate change under the Global Challenges program. **Tom Corrie** added that the ASEAN biodiversity programme was deliberately designed to be reasonably wide to include various work areas but there is going to be a focus on smallholders and SMEs, with the exact topics still to be determined. **Stéphanie Truillé-Baurens** also referred to the KIWA initiative to address climate resilience and biodiversity in the Pacific, and to the financial contribution to some global initiatives in support of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) led by thematic colleagues. Discussions have also taken place to support nature-based solutions for infrastructure development that would exceed Asia Pacific.

Regarding work with trade unions in the field of deforestation and CS3D, **Tom Corrie** explained that work indeed takes place with trade unions, such as in the case of the Delegation in Vietnam, where there is a group that brought together the business side, the trade union side, and employers to discuss issues and challenges around deforestation and legality of timber. In some migration-related programmes, there are programmes on labour rights.<sup>3</sup> **Stéphanie Truillé-Baurens** referred to a multi stakeholder alliance that the EU is supporting in Myanmar, which notably involves the Myanmar Trade Union Federation, to support the textile, clothing and footwear sectors.

In response to a question about matching the ambition of lowering the risk of investing across Asia and the Pacific and the capacity of the region to borrow money from the financial markets, **Jean-Louis Ville** clarified that the debt level of countries in the Pacific was high, adding that coming up with investments and loans by European financial institutions represents a risk that is carefully estimated. Banks make their evaluation of the risks before coming up with a proposal on projects. Work is also done under the IMF framework, where some countries are on a concession level of lending, and that is why blending is used to provide better lending conditions for a country which has a limited capacity in reimbursement.

**Tom Corrie** clarified that there is no specific programme supporting tenurial rights for the whole region of Southeast Asia. Instead, work is done to build into programmes, as there are significant challenges faced, whereby individual country situations are quite different across Southeast Asia. Therefore, work is done to build in a sort of 'lay of the land,' in terms of tenure rights into the projects to make sure they are as relevant as possible.

A question was raised regarding trade unions and social dialogue, to which **Tom Corrie** answered that work is done to cooperate with trade unions in employers, organisations and worker representatives into the projects when this makes sense. This is the case of the fisheries sector in Southeast Asia, where work with trade unions is ongoing, or another programme on business and human rights that was approved in 2023, where a strong component is working with the International Labour Organisation and social dialogue partners.

When asked whether any measures would be taken to assist small scale farmers or SMEs in adapting to new EU sustainability standards to maintain access to EU markets, **Stéphanie Truillé-Baurens** clarified that there is a multi-country action in preparation looking into sustainable agri-value chain in Asia Pacific with a focus on the national farmers platform and cooperatives. With regards to the Pacific, **André Debongnie** also referred to the "Prize" programme, which aims to improve the capacities of Pacific countries in terms of trade, and in being part of the interim Economic Partnership Agreement. This includes the capacity of LAs and SMEs.

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<sup>3</sup> One programme that is in the pipeline is called "ship to shore" and is about labour rights in the fishery sector in the blue economy in Southeast Asia, where work with the trade unions will be carried out to enable workers to make the most of their rights.

## Feedback Breakout Sessions: Main points and conclusions

The working group discussions were structured around three thematic areas. This section summarises key points and recommendations from each discussion.

### Climate Change, Energy, Environment

#### Increase Awareness about the green sector initiatives and grants

There were different levels of awareness around initiatives and opportunities to apply for funding. Such initiatives must reach local communities to ensure sustainability.

#### Enhance involvement of trade unions in initiatives

In the national processes for the JETP in Indonesia, trade unions have been involved, but the involvement was not as meaningful as they hoped it would be. While trade unions are not traditionally part of green initiatives conversations related to climate change and just transition, they are key actors in these types of discussions.

#### Green initiatives and CSO involvement

Participants shared examples on green initiatives, such as the engagement of CSOs in global challenges, when the Filipino government, in the context of devising its biodiversity action plan, invited public input, which will be integrated into the national plan. This demonstrates the commitment to target 3 of the Global Biodiversity Framework in terms of recognising the rights of the indigenous people and the local community.

#### Challenges faced in applying for green sector initiatives and grants

A number of challenges were raised by the group concerning their participation in the initiatives and grants. While CSOs were involved in the identification and formulation missions, there is **no systematic mechanism to share CSOs' details** with the different consultants, which depends on people's private networks. Furthermore, at the regional level, the available time to design a concept note is very short, especially with regard to consortium building. It is **complicated to deliver quality outputs within such a short time frame**. Regarding the indirect funding modality, the only way to be involved is in upstream identification and formulation mission and be able to provide data and evidence, because otherwise involvement with a multiplicity of EU Delegations is required, which is time consuming and requires resources. Smaller organisations lack the capacity and resources to engage in large initiatives; small CSOs cannot apply for grants.

While there are some limited calls for proposals that are open for everyone to apply for; owing to the complexities involved in the application process, it becomes very difficult for small CSOs to jointly apply, especially with the short timeline. They suggested looking for a platform to include the limited calls for proposals that are open for other CSOs to apply for, or a chat box. This would allow CSOs from a different region to jointly apply for the different calls for proposals that are available.

Participant experiences shared

#### Regional cooperation to address climate change and environment

A regional experience in the Greater Mekong Subregion was shared, where a learning forum was established in five countries in the region to exchange experiences. In each country, a suitable policy that a CSO can influence is selected, such as fresh water management in deforestation in Vietnam, where they focus on community forest management. They also have a CSO network to exchange experiences between countries, such as when Laos and Cambodia visited Vietnam to learn about the models they can apply in their countries.

#### CSOs and LAs working on sustainable consumption with SMEs

An experience from Vietnam was shared regarding cooperation between SMEs and community-based organisations, which aims at supporting the community in the sustainable raising stream. In the project, SMEs

play a very important role in supporting the community and collaborating with communities to facilitate the sale of farmers' products. They have a sector engagement in the project, bringing SMEs and community-based organisations to work together from the beginning, including in the planning process, in order to understand the crop seasons. As such, SMEs play a very important role in supporting the community. After five years, the community-based organisations have become a cooperative in the group of farmers raising shrimp, producing shrimp in Mekong Delta, Vietnam. Another project was one implemented through the EU Switch programme, addressing the food and beverage sector in Myanmar on water stewardship and energy stewardship. The project works with SMEs on doing water audits, and energy audits and gives them tools to minimise the water wastage. Another project in Myanmar targeted the textile sector, addressing water stewardship, but focusing more on stopping water pollution going from different SMEs into the river. Working with SMEs, production processes became more effective, facilitating better profit as well as making sure that there is environment stewardship that is integrated into theirs. Another project is the sustainable rubber project in Myanmar, where they are working with SMEs on making sure that sustainable natural rubber principles are involved and that the traceability system is initiated.

Meanwhile, the **Asian Farmers Association for Sustainable Rural Development** shared an initiative supported by the EU through IFAD, that provides technical capacity building for business plan development and at the same time providing seed capital for organisations that are not qualified yet to access funding from the commercial banks and linking them with the local private sector, such as cafe owners in Jakarta. With this support, they are able to graduate from a raw product producer, and do some processing and then market it with local companies. There are also other groups who are working through the producer public private partnership to engage in the "farm to school" project that links the government and the private sector to provide healthy food, milk and vegetables for school children. Others who produce organic rice and are linked up with exporters, such as in Cambodia, where the Farmers and Nature network is linked with a producer and exporter of organic rice. This kind of partnership was made possible because the farmers' organisations were given the support so that they will be able to link up with the market and meet the requirements.

### **Participation in national policy reforms**

**Red Cross national societies** are regularly working closely with authorities on reforming the legal framework under the disaster law. There are programmes at the national level, but also at global level to support this issue in order for countries to protect their communities when they face the impact of climate change. They are also increasingly working on policy reform on key sectors, for instance, to address the health impact of climate change. They emphasised the importance of the EU having solid spending targets on climate and environment issues, adding that it is important that the high ambitions are led by the EU.

On the other hand, the **Gender and Development Research Institute** highlighted the importance of dialogue and taking part, as stakeholders, in discussions, but added that they are never invited to national or ministerial dialogue. Citizen organisations, especially women organisations, must be involved. Another way of involvement is through participation in initiating/drafting laws.

### **Challenges faced in cooperating with SMEs: silo operations**

The government ministries often work in silos, each with its own specialisation. The lack of integration between ministries and departments hinders the promotion of climate change management. Participants discussed this challenge and noted that private and industrial businesses should be responsible for the greenhouse emissions, not only in the credit carbon credit marketing, but also a fair share with the community who are protecting the forest, the wetlands, and the environment.

On this issue, **Stéphanie Truillé-Baurens** stated that most of the comments regarding the situation at the country level will be shared with colleagues in respective Delegations to feed into the dialogues at country level.



Regarding the funding opportunities, she took note that it was not easy to access information, and that a big share of EU programmes are implemented through indirect management via organisations which comply with a set of institutional requirements and rules in place, be it member state organisations, international organisations, or UN agencies. But under the regional programme, CSOs may be the implementing partner of some components. For instance, the Switch programme provides opportunities to participate to regular calls for proposals. There has been a call in 2023 and there will be a future call, most likely in 2025. Regarding the work done with the farmers organisation through IFAD, discussions are ongoing to continue the programme. Opening opportunities for CSOs and for engagement from CSOs remains a key concern for the EU.

### **CSOs and LAs views on the priorities in terms of sustainable investments**

Some initiatives regarding energy efficient facilities, energy efficient tools, and tools for women were shared. Another example concerned blended financing, and the creation of a cooperative climate resiliency fund, where cooperatives try to pull their resources and try to leverage it for other funding, including a guarantee fund, government funding, and insurance from crop insurers. These initiatives are at the initial stages, hoping to continue investing in a more resilient food system through small scale farmers.

### **Evidence-based assessments**

**The Gender and Development Research Institute** suggested that the EU lend support to the area of evidence-based assessment within a country or across borders. They noted that there is a gap in studies, with limited resources available for evidence-based research. Another area to highlight is the importance of dialogue and taking part, as stakeholders, in discussions, as they are never invited to national or ministerial dialogue. Citizen organisations, especially women organisations, must be involved.

## **Digital**

### **Digital sector in Asia-Pacific: challenges and concerns**

The group exchanged views on some of the challenges they face in terms of the digital sector, including:

#### **Artificial Intelligence and digital inclusion**

In discussions on AI and technological developments and advancements, often the world of work is left out; therefore topics such as privacy of data within the world of work are often left out. Another issue of concern is how technology, AI, and technological advancements can and should be used to develop more sustainable, more decent jobs, and a more inclusive economy. Inclusiveness and equality are of great importance, because unfortunately, often there is a digital divide both globally and locally, leaving out vulnerable/excluded communities from the possibility of benefiting from technological advancements. Capacity building activities, support for inclusion, education, and training of these excluded communities is encouraged. Digital inclusion is important, but it is necessary to take into account the environments where this is not always possible, such as when there is little connectivity or limited access tools, or when there are other basic needs that need attention, such as food or shelter. More work still needs to be done on inclusion and advocacy in general and financial inclusion, especially for women. These issues are interlinked, and must be taken into account, especially with refugees and displaced populations.

#### **Increase involvement of CSOs and stakeholders**

A point was raised regarding the efficient collaboration between stakeholders and how to involve CSOs, noting that affiliates on the ground have been trying very hard to be involved as much as possible with other stakeholders, including CSOs and institutional figures in the planning and the implementation of programmes and projects. Participants called for a consistent and structured manner to engage in projects in the digital field in the future. They have applied the partnership principle into project implementation in Timor-Leste: localisation, locally led, mutual accountability, and capacity sharing. They ensure that partnership and

localisation principles are applied through the community, local authorities and local CSOs to contribute to this project.

### **Cybersecurity: threats and concerns**

Participants exchanged experience and concerns regarding cybersecurity threats and asked the EU to consider this issue together with CSOs, particularly when countries do not have cybersecurity laws in place. They also suggested having a digital system that can track cybercrimes. **Titien Amati** explained that the regional MIP covering Asia Pacific is an extremely broad document and is broken down by subregions, and as such, it is not possible to see many actions on cybersecurity at the pan regional level. Instead, within the regional MIP at the subsections per region, there are more details in that regard. **Maurizio Leonardi** added that the regional MIP is broader and addresses digital connectivity. This is linked with the initiative that has been undertaken in the Philippines on Copernicus. Although there is no specific cybersecurity aspect, the MIP could include some initiative on cybersecurity, coherent with the current approach. **INTPA** added that for South Asia, cybersecurity was one of the topics identified by all Delegations when discussing allocations for stability, security and peace. The EU is aware of this issue, and is considering it as a potential future action.

A question was also raised regarding cybersecurity in Southeast Asia and future programming in Southeast Asia specifically. **Maurizio Leonardi** stated that there is a possibility, noting that the future programming will take place in 2028. Discussion will be open on programming, which will likely include digital. **Titien Amati** added that the Foreign Policy Instrument of the Commission may in some cases cover cybersecurity aspects.

#### **Participant experiences shared**

**Asiadhrra** referred to their digital agriculture initiative to make digital solutions accessible to smallholders, and to empower them in the value chain. While working on policies according to priorities derived from community-based profiling, the bigger chunk of the work is indeed capacity development, identifying the gaps and matching them with the available solutions that exist. There are indeed a lot of gaps, not just in the three pilot countries (Philippines, Cambodia and Vietnam) they are working on now, but also in the region and globally. Meanwhile, the **Childfund Alliance** shared a project they are carrying out in Timor-Leste that addresses child protection and child rights in the digital world through the Swipe Safe project. It is a flagship programme of several Asean countries and is focused on the digital world, addressing effective digital global governance, security, and connectivity. It also addresses the rights of the children to safely access to digital environments.

#### **Regional cooperation in digital projects**

**The Danish Refugee Council** shared their experience with a platform for legal aid in Ukraine, where individuals can reach out to local lawyers who can support in providing answers and providing information on legal rights. The Danish Refugee Council does a lot of humanitarian work through ECHO Humanitarian Implementation Plans (HIPs), which usually span more than twelve months. In terms of developing the tools, digital platforms, and making sure the capacity is built, they are looking at longer term frameworks to allow for developing, implementing, and seeing the impact.

### **Migration and Forced Displacement**

**Tom Corrie** facilitated the session and reminded the group that under the current programming period and the new NDICI-Global Europe instrument, the EU has set a target of spending at least 10% of the overall funding on migration for this period until 2027. Within the Asia Pacific and Middle East region, the aim is to have a 10% target. There are significant forced displacement situations, and a high degree of potential cooperation with partner countries in that region. It is also important to ensure that the programmes are in line and support the EU's wider priorities.

### **Afghan regional displacement crisis: data collection and challenges identified**

An initiative by the **Mixed Migration Center** was shared with the group regarding collecting data on Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Turkey since 2021, looking at the protection risk that Afghan refugees face and their access to assistance along the route. The level of need for assistance in host countries is high, but the access is very limited and is dependent on legal status. For example, in Iran, such services are accessed through the Amayish card<sup>4</sup>, whilst those who do not hold such cards are excluded. Through the data collected, it was possible to identify the type of assistance gap. Afghans in Pakistan, Turkey, and Iran are reporting more economic support and resettlement. Such types of support need funding for long term initiatives, and would foster local integration into those communities, especially around livelihood and education. There is also a significant gap in providing mental health and psychological support among Afghan refugees, especially for women and children, who suffer from trauma. There are significant gaps in addressing their specific vulnerabilities, noting that these groups lack access to information about these services, and how they can find them. Afghans in these countries are not aware of available assistance through CSOs or NGOs, and therefore, information dissemination around available services in Turkey, Pakistan and Iran is necessary. **The Norwegian Refugee Council** acknowledged and welcomed the support provided in response to Afghan displacement, and noted that there is a deterioration in the funding landscape, with the risk of over dependence. They also raised concerns about new laws that could further undermine such response. The regional refugee response plan represented only 37% of the request, which means that USD 74 million out of 198 million is required. Furthermore, there is the potential discontinuation of MIPs for certain countries that are politically sensitive.

**Felix Fehling**, cooperation officer Iran (INTPA.C1), commented that indeed, bilateral cooperation is extremely limited, but that the support for Afghans continues. The EU wants to continue it in the region as well as for Iran, with a specific action to support this, which is in the pipeline. Support for Afghans in Iran and host communities will be maintained. **Tom Corrie** added that a lot of work done regarding the Afghan regional displacement crisis is executed through UN agencies, which are encouraged to work with NGOs and with CSOs, understanding that there is limited space for NGOs to be registered or authorised to work. The EU wants to ensure its continued support to the regional displacement crisis around Afghanistan and the wider region without any gaps, and is planning a new programme of support for 2025, despite the challenging political situation, in particular in Afghanistan and Iran.

### **Displacement crisis of Rohingya refugees: projects and challenges**

Examples were shared regarding projects to support Rohingya refugees. Concerns around a clear double standard between the treatment of Rohingya refugees vis-à-vis refugees arriving from Afghanistan and Syria, who generally have access to certain rights and services, were raised. There are discriminatory laws and regulations to deter people from coming, and any support response will be met with these restrictions enforced by law. There is a need to work more on policy change, working with authorities to advocate for legal frameworks and policies that protect this group. Participants also suggested working with governments in Europe and America to look into the processes for the Rohingya registration and for granting them asylum or access to other countries, and possibly even raising the quota for Rohingya refugees.

There is a gap in response to the Rohingya crisis at the regional level, particularly a gap around establishing a regional refugee framework that would address some discriminatory laws that exist that lead to the lack of access to rights that Rohingya refugees face in Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. There is a need to extend support to enhanced regional coordination for protection at sea, given that push backs are occurring at sea, with push backs at the border between Rakhine state in Myanmar and Bangladesh, and a lack of response and protective policies. There is a significant lack of funding for UNHCR in the region and the refugee status determination process is extremely lengthy, particularly in Malaysia, which leaves Rohingya refugees without

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<sup>4</sup> [The Amayish card](#) is a type of residency certificate that is issued to Afghan immigrants in Iran by the General Department of Foreign Nationals and Immigrant Affairs of the National Organization of Iranian Migration

protection for many years. There are gaps around accessing detention centres and arbitrary detention of refugees in certain countries, particularly Malaysia, and not much progress in advocacy around that area. They added that Rohingya organisations in Malaysia and Indonesia are a real opportunity that are not being used to the degree they could be.

Participants encouraged the EU to keep a minimum of engagement with the government owing to the risks. The focus on basic needs and livelihoods, maintaining EU support, avoiding a complete phasing out were encouraged. They called upon the EU for regional support, and engagement with ASEAN to ensure that Myanmar and Bangladesh do not pull out from the international cooperation scene. They added that they need EU support to keep the engagement, encourage presence, and monitor the flows. They also hope that the EU maintains a focus on livelihood aspects, especially formal and informal market-based income generating activities in order to enable durable solutions for Rohingya populations.

**Annelie Hildeman** (Migration programme officer, INTPA.C2) explained that regarding the Myanmar border, the EU is closely following what is happening and that the new package on Rohingya support will be launched soon, with UNHCR, with the World Food Programme, and hopefully eventually also with BRAC. INTPA and ECHO are jointly trying to lobby the interim government to try to do more to support livelihoods for the Rohingya in refugee camps. INTPA is following these issues closely and wants to join hands with the participants to address them, adding that they are aware of the difficulties in terms of access, especially in Myanmar.

#### **The impact of environmental degradation on human mobility: case study**

**World Wide Fund for Nature - Myanmar** explained that in Myanmar, they have carried out a number of interventions where they worked with local communities and indigenous people on forest restoration, specifically focusing on forests that are degraded due to conflict and displacement. They are also working with a number of organisations to mainstream the environment into humanitarian intervention, give them tools and guidance on how they can incorporate environmental considerations and address issues such as forest degradation when they are doing their humanitarian intervention.

**Annelie Hildeman**, explained that the Southeast Asia Climate induced migration programme has three specific objectives: 1. gathering and complementing available data, as well as looking at the gaps in terms of data on migration and forced displacement caused by climate issues; 2. supporting governments to integrate these issues into their own national policies; and 3. addressing regional integration - working closely with ASEAN to see what needs to be strengthened. Work on climate issues as such is ongoing, but maybe needs linking to the migration issue. The same applies to the South Asia programme, where the programme will be looking into the possibilities to work regionally as well amongst the participating countries.

#### **Conclusions**

Following the breakout sessions, the participants shared the main conclusions of their respective group discussions. There was repeated mention of the need for inclusion and capacity building of civil society and support for the leadership of the EU, which was encouraged to continue. **Stéphanie Truillé Baurens** and **Jean-Louis Ville** thanked the participants for the valuable feedback and closed the meeting.