

**Regional Peer-Learning Platform and Program of Learning and Action  
on Alternative Care Arrangements for Children in the Context of  
International Migration in the Asia Pacific  
1-2 November 2022 | Putrajaya, Malaysia**

**Summary Report**

The *Regional Peer-Learning Platform and Program of Learning and Action on Alternative Care Arrangements for Children in the Context of Migration in the Asia Pacific* ([the Platform](#)) brings together individuals from policy and implementing agencies in the governments of Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand and Thailand, as well as civil society and international organisations. The Platform facilitates the sharing of positive practice and concrete examples of what is working in the development and implementation of Alternatives to Immigration Detention (ATD) of children.

The Platform has been co-convened by the International Detention Coalition (IDC) and Secretariat of the Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration (ADFM) since November 2019. The first roundtable took place in person over two days in Bangkok, co-hosted by the Department of Children and Youth in the Thai Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. Over the course of 2020 and 2021, the Platform convened virtual roundtables, both with all five countries, and bilaterally, on particular topics of interest identified by participants. Virtual sessions covered the following topics: mainstreaming child protection, case management approaches, access to education for refugee children, and effective government and civil society partnerships.

On 1-2 November 2022 the Platform convened its second in-person roundtable, bringing together 35 participants for the first time since November 2019. As always the event was closed door and conducted under the Chatham House Rule, so what follows is a high-level summary of proceedings.

**Summary of substantive sessions**

The roundtable commenced with presentations by Thailand, Australia, Malaysia and Indonesia on the latest developments in ATD for children and their families in their respective national contexts. Each country took stock of the current situation, recent successes as well as challenges. They also reflected on current gaps in ATD policy and implementation, and ways in which they hoped to collaboratively address these in the short and medium term.

Following each presentation, participants were able to ask follow up questions and reflect on the similarities, differences and shared challenges across country contexts. There was also a brief presentation on the [ASEAN Declaration on the Rights of Children in the Context of Migration](#) and its accompanying [Regional Plan of Action](#). These instruments outline the commitments made by ASEAN Member States towards upholding the rights of children and their families in the context of migration and include provisions on the implementation of ATD.

Next the roundtable proceeded with discussions on the importance of monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) of ATD, with speakers from Thailand presenting strong examples of MEL in their national contexts.

These examples showcased not only the effectiveness of ATD in supporting strong well-being outcomes for children and their families, but also the benefits to governments in implementing ATD. Independent evaluations of ATD in [Malaysia](#) and [Thailand](#) have demonstrated significant cost savings as well as full engagement by families with any immigration requirements.

The final session of the first day of the roundtable focused on lived experience leadership, where [child advocates](#) affected by migration in Thailand were able to share with participants, via pre-recorded video, their aspirations and policy recommendations. Participants also heard about the work of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugee Policy in Malaysia in engaging the expertise of people with lived experience in Malaysia.

On the second day of the roundtable, New Zealand participants joined the roundtable virtually to share their experience in the recent establishment of the [Refugee Advisory Panel](#), as well as their work in ensuring the safe and sustainable repatriation and reintegration of children from New Zealand to their home countries.

Participants also got more practical and interactive on the second day of the roundtable, with a quiz about ATD practice to start the session, and then working through specific case studies. This session helped to reinforce the point that ATD must uphold the right to liberty and the right to family unity. It was also a good reminder of the proven benefits of ATD, namely significant cost savings and high compliance rates in addition to positive physical and psycho-social outcomes for people and families.

Discussions were rich and engaging, and some key highlights are as follows:

- **Progress has been significant** - participants reflected that since the Peer-Learning Platform was launched in November 2019, there has been **significant progress towards ending child immigration detention** and implementing ATD in the region. Of course, much work remains to be done and progress has not uniformly benefited all children and their families affected by migration. However, it was important to also take stock and recognise the significant efforts of stakeholders in the region, including those present at the roundtable.
- **The importance of collaboration** - the value of both a whole-of-government approach and of government-civil society collaboration has been a recurring theme in previous Peer-Learning Platform meetings, and was reiterated again during the roundtable. **Government and civil society partnerships benefit from the complementary skills and approaches that each partner brings.** This is also true of different parts of government. Working together with different levels of government, including local government, to draw from their expertise of what is working, can help initiatives to succeed.
- **Lived experience in informing and shaping ATD policy and implementation** - **people with lived experience bring crucial perspectives** which in turn can support more effective and sustainable policy making and implementation. However, experts with lived experience need to be involved in a way that is meaningful (rather than tokenistic) and which supports their safety and security.
- **Context-relevant evidence of the effectiveness of ATD** - existing MEL initiatives in the region have been critical to demonstrate that ATD are effective and can be scaled up. They also support the sharing of good practice and lessons learned between countries and across regions, so that we don't have to keep reinventing the wheel each time.

## Final reflections

To close the roundtable, facilitators asked participants to share their reflections on the event and what they have learned. Captured below are some of these insights and reflections:

“ **Individuals within systems** have power to achieve change ”

“ It has been inspiring to hear the **openness and willingness of govts** to discuss ATD and related topics collaboratively ”

“ We can really see the **difference in the lives of children** when govt and NGOs come together ”

“ Every country needs to **accept that detention of children is a problem**, and **this is the first step** to identifying an approach to solve the problem ”

“ My big learning from yesterday and today has been about refugee leadership in policy development, in both New Zealand and Malaysia. Hearing about **how refugees have been involved in policy development that affects their lives has inspired me** to see how we can do this in my country ”

“ It is important to have courage and fortitude of heart to acknowledge the vulnerabilities of our system, and to acknowledge and protect others especially children. To **recognise our responsibility** and to find **courage to walk the talk** ”

“ I was most inspired by New Zealand's approach of mainstreaming the Convention on the Rights of the Child into all of their ministries - so that **it is every single government ministry's responsibility to uphold the CRC**. I hope to see this in my country too ”

“ I have been amazed by the **strong commitment and collaboration** of the stakeholders in the region ”

“ This kind of platform can be the **spark to catalyse regional and global cooperation** ”

“ **The journey can start only when you begin** ”

## Next Steps

The final session of the day focused on desired next steps for the group and ways in which the Platform and other participants could support these efforts moving forward. These included the following:

- **In-person meetings on an annual basis:** participants agreed on the value and importance of convening in-person on an annual basis to support ongoing peer learning and exchange and maintain momentum and motivation. In-person convening could also incorporate site-visits and study tours where possible.
- **Continued online initiatives in between in person events:** Additionally, virtual meetings around specific topics could also be explored to support ongoing exchanges between in-person events, either regionally or bilaterally.
- **Topics of interest** for future meetings of the Peer-Learning Platform include:
  - community-based placement and de-institutionalisation
  - addressing xenophobia and discrimination against refugees and migrants
  - development of national screening and referral mechanisms
  - institutionalising the expertise of lived experience leaders in policy-making and implementation
- **Learning from other regions** and in particular, positive or promising practices from other countries experiencing transit migration or hosting large numbers of people in mixed migratory context was a new topic raised in the group and one the co-conveners are happy to explore.
- **Knowledge and resource sharing:** IDC and the ADFM Secretariat will continue to facilitate information and resource sharing between participants. We are particularly interested to share resources and support for countries implementing the Regional Plan of Action on the ASEAN Declaration on the Rights of Children in the Context of Migration. Participants are encouraged to share resources that may be of use, including policy guides, frameworks, case studies and toolkits.