

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

Summary of Workshop 5 April 2022

Topic: What Makes Government and Civil Society Partnerships Effective?

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 meeting 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. Since the pandemic, the Platform has convened virtually both with all five countries, and bilaterally, on particular issues identified by participants. To date sessions have covered mainstreaming child protection, case management approaches and access to education for refugee children.

Summary of substantive session

On 5 April about 60 participants came together for a workshop on *what makes government and civil society partnerships effective*. Although participants could draw on any relevant past experience, partnerships related to ATD were a particular focus. Partnerships between government and civil society are critical for the effective development and implementation of ATD. No one stakeholder can do it alone, nor should they. Experience from around the world has shown that where different levels of government and civil society work together in genuine partnership, approaches are more effective, innovative and sustainable.

Participants had the opportunity to discuss elements of partnerships in small group discussions and in plenary. As always the event was closed door and conducted under the Chatham House Rule, so what follows is a high-level summary of proceedings.

Common elements identified as helpful in making partnerships effective included:

- **The importance of a whole-of-government approach.** 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.
- **Transparent and open communication, and clarity of roles and responsibilities.** This can take time to build, and should start as early as possible, including with simple practices like information sharing and dialogue. Being open and honest with each other can help to build mutual trust and respect.
- **Collaboration as part of the design as well as the implementation of programs.** The earlier the collaboration and consultation can begin, the more likely the program will be effective. Sometimes projects struggle if collaborators are not brought in early enough.

- **Not all collaborations need to be formalised.** Many informal partnerships have existed for a long time and been very effective. Institutionalisation is not always necessary, although is often beneficial in supporting coordination: such as by creating formal consultative bodies, or coordinators general to handle collaborations.

Participants shared some concrete examples of promising practices in their country contexts, which ranged from bipartisan political dialogues with lived experience leaders; creating dedicated coordinators within government to bring actors together; convening informal working groups that meet regularly to discuss particular policy issues; and collaborating to implement pilot programs.

Challenges raised included building trust and maintaining progress when staff turnover occurs; confusion that stems from different terminology and ways of working between government departments and civil society; and different levels of resourcing.

Next steps

IDC and the ADFM Secretariat thank all participants for their ongoing engagement, and look forward to continuing to work with all those involved in the Platform in the following ways over the rest of 2022:

- **Plan for an in-person Platform meeting later this year:** Nearly three years after we first met in person in Bangkok, organisers are hopeful that an in person meeting of Platform participants may be possible before the end of 2022. We will work with interested partners, including national governments, on where such an event could be hosted and when, and encourage participants to be in touch with any ideas or suggestions.
- **Further topics of interest to discuss as a group** include monitoring and evaluation, safe return home of children, particular needs of unaccompanied minors, temporary integration, and supporting realisation of the ASEAN Declaration of children in the context of migration.
- **Convening follow up bilateral discussions with interested countries:** Following the most recent Platform meeting, some participants expressed interest in a follow up conversation to delve deeper into the issue discussed. IDC and the ADFM Secretariat will work to convene this bilateral discussion, as has been done in the past.
- **Convening national discussions to advance key priorities:** Organisers are delighted with the work of the Indonesian Working Group on Access to Education, which has been meeting monthly since our last Platform session in September 2021. We are happy to continue supporting this work, and working with other interested countries to build something similar if desired.
- **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.
- **Ongoing involvement of those with lived experience of displacement and detention:** Co-Convenors were pleased to welcome experts with lived experience to this workshop, whose insights into policy and practice were valuable additions to the discussion. The organisers will continue to ensure these perspectives are included in the Platform going forward.