

Asia-Pacific trade strengthened by people-to-people links

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Credit: Victoria University

Research by Victoria University of Wellington senior lecturer Dr Kate McMillan shows the importance of people-to-people links in building New Zealand as an Asia-Pacific trading nation.

Dr McMillan recently completed *Relations and Relationships: 40 years of [people](#) movement from ASEAN countries to New Zealand*, a report

commissioned by the Asia New Zealand Foundation to mark the fortieth anniversary of New Zealand's relations with ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations).

"ASEAN is a hugely diverse and dynamic region with much to offer and teach New Zealanders looking for experiences and opportunities abroad.

"To facilitate this relationship it is essential for New Zealanders to become familiar with the languages and cultures of the ten member countries of ASEAN. We also need to deepen our appreciation for the experiences and perspectives of ASEAN nationals. People flows between ASEAN and New Zealand have a central role to play in both."

The report looks at the movement of people between ASEAN countries and New Zealand from 1975-2016. It shows that the relationships built through ASEAN students, immigrants and refugees, and short-term visitors, such as tourists and business people, are essential to the continued development of New Zealand's relationship with the Asia-Pacific.

"Early flows of people to New Zealand from the region were dominated by students studying here on Colombo Plan scholarships, and refugees from Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. Contemporary people movements are more diverse. There are professionals looking to live permanently in New Zealand, temporary workers filling essential skills gaps, young people on working holiday visas, seasonal horticultural workers, fee-paying students, tourists, refugees and business visitors.

"The stand-out story, though, is that of Filipino migration, with Filipinos now filling major labour market gaps in the aged-care, construction and dairy industries in New Zealand."

She says changes in the numbers and types of people flows between New

Zealand and ASEAN have been supported by government initiatives, including an increase in scholarships for ASEAN students to study in New Zealand, the ASEAN Young Business Leaders Initiative, ASEAN Fellowships, and Special Work Category Visas that flow from the ASEAN Australia New Zealand Free Trade Agreement.

Economic growth and development within the ASEAN countries has also played a major role, with emerging middle classes in a number of ASEAN countries taking advantage of educational, tourism and business opportunities in New Zealand.

"The movement of New Zealanders to ASEAN countries has increased as well, with New Zealanders increasingly looking to work, live, study, do [business](#) and holiday in those [countries](#)."

ASEAN was created to promote economic and political cooperation in Southeast Asia. Its members are: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

More information: Strong history, bright future: Harnessing New Zealand's connections with Southeast Asia: www.asianz.org.nz/media-releases/2016-06-harnessing-new-zealand%E2%80%99s-connections-southeast-asia

Provided by Victoria University of Wellington

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