Delegates from the European Union, International Labour Organisation and UN Women are meeting in Myanmar today to introduce the “Safe and Fair” programme designed to promote safe and fair migration practices, including labour rights and an end to violence against migrant women.

They hope the programme can build on efforts by Myanmar’s ministries of Labour, Immigration and Population and the of Social Welfare, Relief and Settlement.

Government authorities, embassies, labour groups, overseas employment agencies, community-based organisations, NGOs and UN agencies will outline a shared roadmap that will inspire the effort in Myanmar over the next five years.

The meeting will ensure that the project aligns with national priorities and those of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and international legal frameworks on migration, anti-trafficking, ending violence against women and promoting women’s rights.

The Consultative Dialogue is part of a series of 10 national consultations being held in each Asean member-country.

Women migrant workers are contributing to the development and economies of both the country they work in and their homelands, sending significant amounts of money home and bringing back skills and contacts.

The Myanmar 2014 Population Census using backward-projection methods estimated that 4.25 million people (nearly 20 per cent of the Myanmar labour force) were living abroad.

Women make up nearly half the migrants in Thailand, China and Japan and just over half in Singapore.

Women work as domestic helpers, factory staff, sex workers and in agriculture and construction. According to the World Bank’s Migration and Remittances Factbook 2016, Myanmar migrants remitted US$3.5 billion to Myanmar in 2015, nearly 5 per cent of the country’s gross domestic product.

Myanmar women continue to migrate for livelihood reasons, and migration can be a positive experience, in which they gain skills, find meaningful employment, and gain more opportunities for themselves and their families.
Through migration, women can inform and change social, cultural, political and gender norms and can influence positive change across households and communities.

Yet some women migrants find that they cannot access legal and social support when they face problems. They can also suffer from discrimination – both as migrants and as women – which can result in isolation, unfair working conditions or abuse and exploitation.

Women migrant workers can face sexual, physical, psychological and economic violence – at home before migration, during migration and upon return. Whether migrating through regular or irregular channels, women can face the risk of violence from intermediaries and employers, as well as from partners and others.

Women who are in an irregular situation and women working as domestic workers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, violence, forced labour and trafficking due to their status and isolation.

Fear of being deported, reluctance to report abuses to legal authorities, language and cultural barriers are among the obstacles, women who have experienced violence face, when accessing services such as health care, justice, police or social services.

The positive experiences and contributions of women migrant workers can only be fully ensured if their safety, labour and human rights are fully protected and migration becomes a safe and fair process for them.