Abstract: Inter-regional labour migration is a defining characteristic of contemporary Southeast Asia. Migrant workers from the Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar provide the cheap labour that underpins economic growth in countries like Malaysia and Singapore. They also make a significant contribution through remittances to their home country economies. Although migrants are generally employed in occupations that local workers eschew, trade unions in Southeast Asia and elsewhere have nevertheless traditionally been hostile to migrant workers. In the last decade, however, there has been a significant shift in this position, largely driven by the work of the Global Union Federations (GUFs), which have provided the conceptual tools and, at times, the material resources required to reach out to this most non-traditional of non-traditional constituencies. This paper examines the GUFs’ dealings with the migrant labour issue in Southeast Asia and the impact of their programs on local trade union practice. It argues that although not all GUF initiatives have succeeded, GUF programs have brought very real change in local unions’ attitudes towards migrant workers, and thus hope of a more equitable and sustainable model for labour migration in the region.

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