



# COVID-19: Impact on Migrant Workers in the ASEAN region and Responses

RCI-POD (ADB) Webinar on Migrant Workers and Remittances in a Time of Pandemic

4 August 2020

## 1. Labour migration in ASEAN

- **10 million international migrants in the ASEAN, of whom women comprise almost half.**
- **Migrant workers in ASEAN countries of destination:**
  - ✓ 38% of the workforce in Singapore
  - ✓ 24% of the workforce in Brunei
  - ✓ 15% of the workforce in Malaysia
  - ✓ 2.7 million migrant workers in Thailand
- **Migrants work in construction, agriculture, manufacturing, restaurants and hotels and in households.**



## 2. Impact of the pandemic on migrant workers



**Experiences in Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and in the Middle East have demonstrated that MWs are among the vulnerable groups for a variety of reasons:**

- Living conditions for many do not favour social distancing
- MWs could be continuing to work without sufficient PPE and in close proximity
- Often not included in unemployment insurance or relief measures
- May be the first to be retrenched
- Undocumented workers have been subject to detention in unsafe conditions
- Reduced earnings and remittances
- Returns

## 2. Impact of the pandemic on migrant workers

### Returns

<p><b>Cambodia</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As of 7 May: 90,607 migrants had returned, of whom 78,328 were from Thailand</li> <li>As of 17 June: 212 migrants return from Malaysia</li> </ul>
<p><b>Indonesia</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As of 12 May: returnees came largely from Malaysia (13,074), Hong Kong SAR (11,359), Taiwan (3,668), Singapore (2,611), Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (800), and Brunei (770).</li> <li>As of 19 May: 132,978 Indonesian citizens abroad have returned (according to the national COVID-19 task force). Of those, 591 tested positive for the virus.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Lao PDR</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>20 March-17 June: 119,401 migrants returned, most from Thailand</li> </ul>

## 2. Impact of the pandemic on migrant workers

### Returns

<p><b>Myanmar</b></p>	<p>As of 15 June</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 99,058 migrants returned through border checkpoints from 22 March to 10 June (from Thailand)</li> <li>• 36,280 were recorded as entering from China; 4105 returnees on assisted flights from over 10 countries; 400 deportations from Malaysia (May 8).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Philippines</b></p>	<p>As of 24 June</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• over 50,105 migrant workers have been repatriated as of June 15 (37,026 seafarers and 13,149 land-based)</li> <li>• another 29,963 seafarers and 17,830 land-based migrant workers are expected to return in the coming months</li> </ul>

## 2. Experiences of ASEAN MWs during COVID-19: Key research findings

### Interviews with 309 MWs in COD and COOs (women 70%), March-April 2020

- **COOs:** Cambodia (21%), Indonesia (5%), Myanmar (40%), the Philippines (30%), and Viet Nam (3%)
- **CODs:** Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong (China), Saudi Arabia, UAE.
- **Sectors:** domestic and care work (27%), service sector (19%), manufacturing (16%), seafood/fishing (14%)
- **Results not representative**



## 2. Experiences of ASEAN MWs during COVID-19: Key research findings

### Findings

#### (A) Country of destination:

- Well-informed about prevention and symptoms (98%); but less certain on what to do concretely (women 74%, men 67%)
- **COD: 89% were still employed**
  - 32% report work-related problems or abuses (could not refuse work during lockdown; pushed to take unpaid leave; documents kept by employer; threatened to terminate contract; harassment, violence)
  - 33% have insufficient personal protective equipment (masks, hand sanitizer)
- **97% of the unemployed had not accessed any social security support**

#### (B): Returnees in Country of origin

- **Reason for returning:** Choose to end contract prematurely (47%), Employment contract ended (24%) Employer ended contract prematurely (16%)
- **Quarantined upon arrival home (93%)** - 23% reported issues such as lack of food, heat stress, poor hygiene facilities, crowded, shared sleeping areas
- **Future plans:**
  - **Short term:**
    - Stay home and rest (52%)
    - Find a job at home, open their own business, or work on the family farm (20%)
    - Re-migrate (5%)
  - **Long Term (Myanmar only)**
    - Re-migrate (58%); most anticipate being able to go back to their former jobs.
    - Do not plan to re-migrate (28%)

### 3. Labour migration and COVID-19: Snapshot of responses in Asia

#### (A) Countries of origin:

- Repatriation assistance – registration of MWs wishing to return and repatriation flights
- Quarantine facilities (Myanmar set up 7000 + centres for tens of thousands)
- Protocol for deployment in the new normal (Indonesia)
- Government of India-led regional consultation on evacuation and repatriation of migrant workers (IN,BD, NP, SL); July 2020. ILO co-organized.





## ▶ 3. Labour migration and COVID-19: Snapshot of responses

### (B) Countries of destination:

- Thailand – Extension of work authorisation; visa relief measures; MWs in formal sectors eligible for unemployment insurance
- Singapore – Strengthened health monitoring and better safe distancing measures in dormitories; major programme being put in place to build additional dormitories with higher standards over coming months and years.
- UN system has advocated for humane and health focused treatment of undocumented MWs in Malaysia.

## 3. Labour migration and COVID-19: Snapshot of responses

### (C) Countries of origin and destination:

- In May, a Special Meeting of ASEAN Labour Ministers on Response to the Impact of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) on Labour and Employment issued a Joint Statement, which recognizes vulnerability of migrant workers
- Actions to address special vulnerabilities of migrant workers are likely to be defined in the Plan 2021-2025 of the ACMW, which is a subsidiary body of the ALM
- 13th AFML “Supporting migrant workers during the pandemic for a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN Community.” Nov 2020
- Humanitarian assistance (ILO and other organizations)  
e.g In Myanmar since March 23, 91,603 service providers and returnees (39,392 women and 52,221 men) have received assistance (PPE and Care packs) from CTUM and CSOs supported by ILO in the framework of the DIILM and TRIANGLE projects.

## 4. Key considerations and recommendations going forward



- There is a need to address structural flaws: in particular to give due attention to improving housing and wages of MWs; to achieve equal treatment with nationals in social protection; and to recognize domestic work as work
- Wage protection and support services;
- Return and reintegration;
- Protocols and guidelines for recruitment and deployment during the new normal
- Access to information, health and testing, PPE
- Mitigation of exposure risks by employers
- Humane and health focused treatment of undocumented MWs.

**THANK YOU!**

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