



IOM International Organization for Migration  
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## Solving Health Problems for Migrants in Thailand

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Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to participate in this Seminar on Health and Migration sponsored by IOM, WHO and CDC. On behalf of the Royal Thai Government's Ministry of Public Health, I would like to thank the International Organization for Migration for inviting me to this seminar.

For the past 10 years, movement of populations to Thailand especially irregular or undocumented migration is on rise - becoming one of the top socio-economic and political issues in Thailand. The concern is not only the number of irregular migrants but also the difficulties of managing undocumented migration, its effects on the social structure of the country, the rights of migrants and the country's relationship with its neighbors. The Royal Thai Government in collaboration with various organizations is implementing a long-term approach to manage and regulate migration to the kingdom.

Presently, it is estimated that nearly 1 million undocumented unskilled workers are working in Thailand. Majority came from Myanmar and many others from the neighboring countries. The high demand for unskilled workers in factories, the fishing industry, and domestic labor have drawn migrants to work in Thailand. It is believed that for every one-registered migrant worker, 10 undocumented migrants are working illegally. The public health significance of this undocumented migration has become a major concern to the Ministry of Public Health, especially in the control of communicable diseases, reproductive health services, environmental health and sanitation, demand and burden upon the public health services.

The current policy of the Royal Thai Government in managing undocumented migration was developed through multi-sectoral involvement of the different ministries, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations. The outcome was a Guideline for Migrants Workers Management that was approved by the cabinet for implementation. Its objectives are to identify all undocumented and registered migrants from Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia in Thailand and have them undergo registration. In addition, the cabinet also approved registration of employers who wish to employ migrant workers following a specific time frame.

The Royal Thai Government expects that this new registration process will become successful and will help the undocumented migrant worker population to become regularized and access the benefits entitled to them under the labor policy of the government. To ensure that all migrants understand the registration process, the regulations will be written in the languages of the three main groups of migrants and will be disseminated through the different media and campaigns. With the support of the employers, this endeavor by the Royal Thai Government supports the rights of migrants and helps protect them from exploitation.

In its effort to improve the health conditions of migrants in the country, the Ministry of Public Health has strengthened its policy on health prevention and communicable disease control for migrants. This will be achieved through decentralized implementation of the Health Service Plan, where the provincial and district health authorities can plan and implement appropriate health interventions on communicable disease control, health prevention and promotion to migrants. Health examinations are given to all migrants upon registration for work permits, together with their compulsory participation to the National Health Insurance Plan that ensures their access to basic health services in the public health facilities. In addition to this, the Ministry of Public Health systematically collects, organizes and share relevant immigration data to all government agencies responsible for migration and migrant workers. The ministry hopes the data will be properly categorized and utilized, especially for use of irregular migration management and for policy development.

The dynamics of migration and its significance on the health of the migrants and their host communities are complex and require global attention. Thailand's Ministry of Public Health is working closely with the International Organization for Migration and the World Health Organization to pilot and implement programs that will generate experiences and lessons learned that directly benefits the migrants. Lessons drawn from these experiences will provide a good reference to the Ministry in developing its National Policy for Migrant's Health.

The IOM-MOPH Migrant Health Project was implemented since September 2000. Its main objective is to strengthen the response capacity of the Ministry of Public Health in the sustained provision of cost effective primary health care, reproductive health and communicable disease control services to migrants and their Thai host communities.

On cross-border health activities with Myanmar, MOPH collaborates WHO in improving the health of populations in the border areas of Thailand and Myanmar - focusing mainly on health and humanitarian aspects of migrants in the 10 border provinces of Thailand. The objectives of the WHO Border Health Program are:

- strengthen coordination between the government, NGOs, UN agencies donor and others involved in improving the health of the population in the Thai-Myanmar border area;
- support ongoing Provincial Health Coordination Meetings;
- work with policy and strategy to identify appropriate capacity building skills needs to strengthen Provincial Health Coordination Meetings;
- improve data collection in the border area to better identify public health problems, with special emphasis on the undocumented migrants to develop a standardized data collection tool and age-upon process for data collection of migrants outside the camps;
- support the design development and distribution of a standardized maternal/child multi-lingual medical records book for use in the border areas.

IOM and WHO are very effective in bringing attention to and assisting the Ministry in solving problems related to migrant's health. This cooperation is further enhanced by participation of non-governmental organizations that directly provides assistance to migrants in coordination with the health authorities. Such cooperation broadens access to services for documented migrants, undocumented migrants and cross-border population.

Thank you very much.