OVERVIEW

As the number of COVID-19 cases worldwide continue to grow exponentially with many countries reporting a second wave of new cases, the situation in Thailand from June to August was stable with no reported cases of community transmission. The State of Emergency Order was extended until September 30 and although there is no confirmed date for the reopening of borders, the Department of Employment has extended the permission to stay or return to migrant workers that have completed four years of employment, workers who have changed or are changing employers, pink card holders¹ and cross-border seasonal workers.

Through its continued engagement with migrants, IOM assessed that the biggest COVID-19 impact felt by these communities relate to the loss of employment and livelihoods, resulting in their inability to meet basic needs and access essential services including healthcare. The situation of migrants in detention centres is particularly alarming: in May, 65 migrant detainees held at the Songkhla Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) in Sadao District were infected by COVID-19.

In addition, IOM found that there are key gaps in the response and recovery support to these communities that remain to be addressed. This includes the support to frontline officials at points of entry to effectively manage the flow of migrants once borders reopen, reinforce the work with government authorities and employers to promote ethical recruitment, safe and clean working and living environments and the inclusion of migrant workers in social protection schemes, as well as ensuring migrants’ protection in the face of additional risks, including the increase in trafficking in persons that may be exacerbated by the outbreak and labour rights’ abuses linked to migrants’ irregularity and unethical recruitment.

¹ A "Pink ID Card" is an ID Card that was initially issued to stateless people within the Kingdom of Thailand. The Registration Act of 2008 allows them to be issued to anybody that qualifies, giving them temporary permission for living and working.

KEY FIGURES AND FACTS

The number of non-Thai residents within the country has increased from an estimated 3.7 million in 2014 to 4.9 million in 2018, according to the 2019 UN Thailand Migration Report.

Migrant workers account for 10% of Thailand’s labour force and primarily originate from Cambodia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Viet Nam.

An estimate of 200,000 migrants from Cambodia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Myanmar returned to their countries of origin preceding the closure of borders in March 2020.

Given the significant labour shortages on the agricultural, construction and fishing industries, the Royal Thai Government is planning for the safe return of approximately 100,000 migrant workers.
WHAT HAS IOM ACHIEVED SINCE JUNE?

PILLAR 1 – HEALTH FIRST: Protecting People and Health Systems

- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was distributed to 1,500 Myanmar Muslim families in 10 communities in Mae Sot.
- In July, approximately 70,000 face masks and additional hygiene supplies were provided to frontline border officials and immigrations counterparts at 10 points of entry (POEs) and 6 Immigration Detention Centres (IDCs).
- In August, IOM organized medical check-ups and provided informational session on COVID-19 safety for 40 detainees at Ranong IDC in order to raise the awareness on prevention measures, personal hygiene and nutritional awareness, aiming to improving health and hygiene capacities in Detention Centres, which is key to prevent new clusters from happening.
- IOM conducted a training for 12 immigration officers at Ranong IDC which focused on SOPs and preventive measures including self-protection, risk management, and health and safety measures. The IDC was also provided with additional medicines and medical supplies.
- Since June, 640 refugees bound to resettle to the United States were supported through health assessments and the provision of cloth masks, health education, a hygiene kit and an informational leaflet about COVID-19. IOM assisted 200 refugees to resettle to the United States.
- Throughout June, July and August, in partnership with local government, NGOs and CBOs, a total of 454 migrants were reached with information on COVID-19 prevention and protection through community engagement activities in Ranong and Tak provinces. Migrants were also provided with information on their labour rights as well as information on the prevention of trafficking in persons.
- A video animation was produced in Khmer, English with Lao and Thai subtitles, and Myanmar languages. The video provides migrant workers with information on COVID-19 symptoms, ways to stay safe during travel, as well as advice on how to seek up to date and reliable information in relation to work permits and border restrictions.
- An information hub was launched in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic to provide key and up-to-date information on labour migration policies, laws and regulations as well as available services for migrant workers including skills training, legal counseling and grievance support mechanisms in Khmer, Laotian and Myanmar languages.
- IOM Thailand supported 40 vulnerable migrants stranded in Bali Process Member States to return to their home country, through commercial flights and collaboration with their Embassies and Diplomatic Representations. 18 of them departed from Thailand. Several cases of Victims of Trafficking have been referred to IOM to support with voluntary return and reintegration in country of origin.
- The second round of the Thailand-wide rapid assessment entitled “COVID-19 Related Vulnerabilities and Perceptions of Non-Thai Populations in Thailand” was published in June. In total, there were 87 key respondents and the findings revealed that the cost of PPE and insufficient income resulting from the loss of livelihoods were among the major challenges faced by the migrant population since the start of the pandemic.

PILLAR 2 - PROTECTING PEOPLE: Social Protection and Basic Services

- Since June, 4,688 Myanmar Muslims living in Mae Sot received Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials on good hand-washing protocol, hygiene measures to maintain before and leaving home and social distancing practices.
• Between March and September, IOM produced 18 COVID-19 Flash Updates 2 with summaries of the Government Guidance Affecting Migrant Workers and their Employers in Thailand and Neighbouring Countries that reached 341 private sector companies, six donors and 23 UN agencies. The Flash Updates provide information for employers of migrant workers on government decisions relevant to migrant workers in Thailand, Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Myanmar.

• In July-August, a Flow Monitoring Survey was conducted with a representative sample of Myanmar migrant workers in Ranong Mueang and Kra Buri Districts to capture the needs, challenges and vulnerabilities faced by migrant workers as a result of COVID-19. The report findings are expected to be published in September.

PILLAR 3 - ECONOMIC RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

• In June, IOM installed new water pumps and renovated water pipes from the dug well in Mae Sot to provide improved access to water. The provision of safe water, sanitation and hygiene was essential for the prevention of COVID-19 further transmission in the camps.

• IOM Thailand has been providing support to address immediate basic needs resulting from the loss of livelihoods related to the COVID-19 pandemic:
  - In June, basic survival kits containing food and non-food items were distributed to 108 Myanmar Muslims in Mae Sot to support vulnerable women.
  - During July and August, 250 vulnerable migrant families in Pathum Thani and Chonburi provinces were provided with food items and hygiene supplies to last for a month.

• IOM partnered with JILAF, a non-governmental organization, to provide livelihood support to migrants in Ranong through interest-free loans, a crab-net making vocational program, boat engine reparation support and the provision of kits containing dish soap and detergent.

Since April, IOM has engaged in policy advocacy with NGOs, private sector, CSOs and government counterparts aiming to inform employers on ethical recruitment, reemployment and social protection for migrant workers in the context of COVID-19. IOM and its partners’ goal is to support the adoption of existing policies and regulations on migrant recruitment and employment.

• In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, IOM has developed and presented a set of policy recommendations on migrant recruitment and employment to the Department of Employment, in partnership with Employers’ Confederation of Thailand, Group of Entrepreneurs with Foreign Workers and Chulalongkorn University.

• IOM adapted its capacity building activities for private sector to include sessions on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the risks of labour exploitation and migrant workers’ vulnerabilities. A total of 104 representatives of companies based in Thailand and internationally are now better prepared to identify and address risks facing migrant workers employed in their supply chains.

• In response to wide-spread job-losses among migrant population employed in the most hard-hit sectors of the Thai economy, IOM reached:
  - 181 migrant workers through the provision of in-service training on safety and labour migrants, IT, construction, sewing and cooking from June to August 2020. The IT and sewing classes provided by the Foundation for Rural Youth were developed and implemented in collaboration with the Office of the Non-Formal and Informal Education under the Ministry of Education.
  - 59 migrant workers through the pilot of the easy-access digital training on skills development with Quizzr, in July 2020.

Looking for a way to offer training to migrant workers and Thai workers that is flexible, engaging and efficient? IOM’s PROMISE programme can help.
IOM offers pre-employment and on-the-job app-based learning through Quizzr across a variety of topics including:
- Construction
- Wage & Benefits
- Problem-solving
- Workplace Safety

How the app works

IOM DISTRIBUTING FOOD AND HYGIENE SUPPLIES IN CHONBURI © IOM 2020

2 All the COVID-19 Flash Updates on Government Guidance Affecting Migrant Workers and their Employers in Thailand and Neighbouring Countries are available here.
In addition, IOM Thailand formalized its relationship with the Thailand Professional Qualification Institute (TPQI) through an agreement signed in July 2020. Under the agreement, TPQI, will develop training curricula according to TPQI occupational standards, enroll migrant workers in relevant trainings, as well as provide assessment, recognition and certification of skills for 200 migrant workers in domestic work, hospitality, construction and manufacturing sectors.

To address informational gaps during the pandemic, IOM contributed to the development, dissemination and translation of national and global guidance for migrant workers and their employers. This included:

- Translation into Thai of the global IOM “COVID-19: Guidance for labour recruiters to enhance migrant worker protection during the current health crisis” and “COVID-19: Guidance for employers to enhance migrant worker protection during the current health crisis” and production of info-sheets for migrant workers and employers of domestic workers.
- Provision of updates to the Thailand Chapter of the regional “Asia-Pacific Government Response Overview” distributed monthly to 450 private sector partners with the goal of supporting migrant workers in respective supply chains. Assessment of the challenges and capacities faced by recruitment agencies in Thailand as part of a regional “Rapid Assessment of Labour Recruiters’ responses and challenges to protect migrant workers during COVID-19”

**What is next in IOM’s response?**

**GAPS TO BE ADDRESSED**

- **In relation to COVID-19 information:** Migrants need more information about prevention and necessary actions in case symptoms occur. IOM’s second round of the assessment “COVID-19 Related Vulnerabilities and Perceptions of non-Thai Populations in Thailand” revealed that 41 per cent of key informants reported that non-Thai nationals had little to no awareness of COVID-19 specific handwashing practices. 26 per cent of key informants reported that non-Thai populations had little to no awareness of COVID-19 symptoms. Key informants reported that information gaps are mostly due to poor literacy and language barriers faced by non-Thai populations. Other sources also informed IOM that the fear of detention or arrest due to migrants’ legal status, create additional barriers for migrants to get information about prevention and treatment.

- **Gaps in testing and treatment among migrant communities:** migrants, whose income was significantly affected by the pandemic, cannot afford COVID19 testing and treatment. Currently the Royal Thai Government does not have the capacity for testing and treatment of migrant communities, especially in land border areas.

- **Livelhood funding support:** based on discussions with community members and other stakeholders in Mae Sot, IOM estimates that households where migrants lost employment or are facing reduced income, require 1,000 THB per month to meet basic needs related to food and hygiene. This amount will not cover additional expenses related to rent, utilities, medical care, etc.

- **Access to Social Protection:** Migrants falling outside of existing social protection schemes or that cannot effectively access the Social Security Fund even if enrolled, are exposed to a multiplicity of health and social risks due to the lack of coverage.

- **Preparing post-COVID 19 mobility:** As the government prepares for reopening the borders, it is necessary to prepare a response that will engage with multiple actors.

  - **For migrants:** The unpredictability of travel restrictions and COVID-19 progression hinders migrant’s ability to get a job. Recovery measures need to support migrants’ employment, including the coverage of costly administrative fees related to re-entry through safe channels. These measures also need to consider migrants who remain in employment and need support with their stay and work permit extensions.

  - **For employers:** Migrant workers, working in both formal and informal sectors, are exposed to the heightened risk of unethical recruitment and exploitation. Economic contraction increases the risk of exploitative practices as wages are reduced and performance is prioritized, putting migrant workers in danger of being coerced to perform overtime, sometimes even unpaid. Thus, a guidance on during and post-COVID-19 recruitment and employment is essential to protect migrants and support employers during this transition, including through the consideration of accommodation standards, access to health and testing, and the impact of the increased costs of recruitment on migrant workers.

  - **For governments:** Action is needed from government counterparts to ensure no one is left behind, including migrants, who are key agents of development for the country’s recovery. A whole-of-society approach is necessary to include irregular migrants in the response, as well as to address jointly with the private sector and civil society, the increased costs of recruitment and other challenges to MOU recruitment processes.

  - **For General Public:** the negative perception towards foreigners puts at stake the safe return of migrant workers, which is a key factor for the recovery of the Thai economy.
IOM Planned Activities in response to these gaps

Coordination and partnerships
- Thailand volunteered to become one of the Champion Countries for the implementation of the Global Compact on Migration (GCM). IOM will lead the UN Migration Network Working Group to support the Government in preparing the implementation of the GCM priorities that have identified and ensure that considerations are made to address the pandemic related requirements.
- Facilitating coordination meetings with government counterparts to discuss durable solutions for irregular migrants and alternatives to detentions.

Disease Surveillance
- IOM will support COVID-19 case finding targeting 20,000 migrants in four regions with community-based organizations and in coordination with the Government (i.e. Chiang Mai, Mae Sot, Ranong, Songkhla). IOM and its NGO partners will address the gaps of information about COVID-19 within migrant communities, as well as the gap in data about pockets of migrant populations that the government has not reached yet.

Points of Entry
- IOM will support the improvement of the cross-border coordination for arrival of migrants and ensure that immigration and health officials are prepared to manage the return of migrant workers upon the re-opening of borders.
- Developing and implementing a methodology to do a standardized assessment of the response capacity and readiness at Points of Entry.

Points of Entry; Risk Communication and Community Engagement
- Adapting a video clip with health information for migrant workers under MOU to be displayed at Points of Entry. This video clip is being developed with the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Public Health.

Case management and continuity of essential services
- Continue supporting IDC and vulnerable migrants and ensuring that they have access to basic support, including health care and hygiene and food items.

Addressing socio-economic impacts of the crisis
- Organizing awareness raising sessions and campaigns with the Thai general public and frontline officials promoting tolerance and inclusion of migrants to address xenophobia and anti-migrant sentiments.
- Scaling up online in-service training for migrant workers in partnership with Quizzr and interested employers.
- In November, IOM Thailand plans to provide a personal hygiene management and caregiving skills development training to 150 Myanmar Migrant workers in the context of COVID-19, in collaboration with Mahidol University.
- Provision of training for ethical recruitment and COVID-19 related policies for recruitment agencies in Thailand under MOU, with the agreement of the Department of Employment of MOL. Starting last week of September.
- IOM will promote a regional dialogue with the governments of Cambodia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Thailand on recruitment of migrant workers through MOU and legal channels and the dissemination of information to migrants to the risks they face.
- Sectoral assessment for the protection of migrant and Thai workers in Thailand. The assessment will include the agricultural and fishing sectors and will also address excluded occupations such as domestic work and informal employment. This assessment will inform policy advocacy and support the government in the expansion of social protection schemes, as well access to governmental and non-governmental services.

With the support of: