Reported COVID-19 cases in Asia and the Pacific region continue to increase, with varying contexts and patterns across the region. As of 23 June 2020, over 1.2 million cases and more than 38,700 deaths have been reported across the region. Confirmed cases have been reported in 28 countries, territories and/or areas. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan and Philippines continue to report concerning upward trends in new daily cases, despite limited testing capacity. Iran, Japan, Maldives, Singapore and Sri Lanka have witnessed relative stability or a decrease in new cases; however, in several instances, cases are concentrated among migrants or returnees, especially in dormitory accommodations for migrant workers and immigration detention centers. Several countries are now beginning to ease social public health measures, such as internal mobility restrictions and business closures, which is leading to increased internal movements and resumption of economic activity. The impact of these changes on transmission will need to be closely monitored.

Countries with significant outward labour migration, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Philippines, and those comprising the Greater Mekong Sub-Region, have witnessed heavy disruptions in established migration patterns. The anticipated economic recession in key migrant receiving countries due to lockdown measures is likely to push migrant workers to return to countries of origin. As travel restrictions are gradually being lifted, migrant-sending countries are beginning to experience significant return of newly unemployed migrant workers.

Multiple countries in the region are facing reduced remittance flows. In Bangladesh, more than 10 million migrants sent USD 18 billion in remittances in 2019. However, under COVID-19, 73% of Bangladeshi remittance senders are in Gulf Cooperation Council countries with limited economic activity and under some form of lockdown. In Myanmar, economic losses in GDP for 2020 are estimated between USD 4.6 and 6.5 billion compared to projected normal growth. The poverty rate among remittance-receiving households in Myanmar has risen by 7.5%, and remittance income is significantly impacted for all remittance-receiving households; international remittance income is anticipated to fall by 50%, while internal remittance income is anticipated to fall by 30%. Remittances in Sri Lanka, which comprise 7.8% of the country’s GDP, fell by 32% in April 2020. Similarly, Viet Nam estimates that remittances will decrease by 17% in 2020 compared to 2019.

IOM missions in the region are working with governments and partners to ensure that migrants, whether in regular or irregular situations, as well as returnees and forcibly displaced persons, are included in all aspects of COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. Crucially, IOM is also coordinating closely with governments on immediate and long-term strategies for addressing the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on migrant populations.
IOM Indonesia printed 700 posters with critical information related to COVID-19 for Indonesian Migrant Workers. These posters were distributed to various migrant worker sending areas, including East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) and West Kalimantan (Kalbar) Provinces. In NTT, 350 posters were distributed to the Anti-Trafficking Task Force Focal Points at regional level, faith-based organizations, and public communities. In West Kalimantan, 2 standing banners were given to Cross Border State Post (PLBN) Entikong and 10 posters were placed along the PLBN Area. These materials were compiled with inputs from the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, the Directorate General of Immigration, and the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (BP2MI).

Together with the RCCE Working Group in Malaysia, IOM produced a toolkit with recommendations for the media to support COVID-19 response efforts and contribute towards reducing the risks and stigma faced by migrant workers and other vulnerable populations. IOM is also producing a solidarity video, #WeAreInThisTogether, featuring the heads of UN agencies in Malaysia with a message to tackle issues related to stigma and xenophobia. A joint webinar with the Asia Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development on Media Sensitization on stigma, xenophobia and discrimination related to COVID-19 is also being organized to ensure media practitioners promote ethical journalism, combat misinformation, help reduce stigma and amplify the voices of migrants.

IOM Marshall Islands, together with the Ministry of Health and Human Services, organized COVID-19 awareness sessions and basic training on infection prevention materials for the private sector. Over the past two weeks, the teams visited 6 companies and reached over 375 individuals.
IOM Indonesia provided three ventilators to the government as part of a joint procurement with UNDP and WHO. The mission is also assisting IOM’s Global Procurement and Supply Unit to procure nitrile gloves for various IOM missions (Bangladesh, Gambia, Greece, Nepal, Philippines, Tanzania and Yemen).

In Myanmar, IOM has provided dignity kits to support women and girls in hospital and quarantine facilities in Buthidaung and Maungdaw Townships, Rakhine State. Additional hospital supplies have been provided to Department of Health and Welfare in Myawaddy, Kayin State.

POINTS OF ENTRY (POE)

On 10 June, IOM Bangladesh presented findings from the needs and capacity assessment of eight POEs to the Communicable Disease Control (CDC) Unit of the Directorate of General Health Services. Since March 2020, IOM has completed rapid needs and capacity assessments of POEs at Dhaka, Chattogram, Sylhet, Benapole, Akhaura, and Darshana. During the reporting week, the CDC approved the capacity-building curricula developed for POE personnel; related trainings are planned from 14 June to 16 July for approximately 350 staff to identify, screen and refer ill travelers.

IOM Marshall Islands participated in pre-arrival coordination and departure support for the only scheduled monthly flight from the country to the United States comprising of approximately 35 travelers and their families.

IOM Micronesia is providing technical support to airport authorities in Pohnpei to develop standard operation procedures (SOP) for incoming passengers, based on the IOM-developed SOP for frontline officials. Context-specific training to operationalize the SOP is also under discussion.

On 3 June 2020, the UN Secretary General released a policy brief on COVID-19 and people on the move, addressing the impact of the disease on migrants, refugees, internally displaced populations, and other vulnerable groups and highlighting opportunities for increasing support to these populations during the pandemic and moving forward.
IOM RESPONSE

POINTS OF ENTRY (CONT.)

IOM Nepal is supporting the Government in managing quarantine and holding centers at POEs, with a specific focus on vulnerable populations. The team is also providing returning migrants with essential non-food items and travel allowance to cover the cost of travel from holding/quarantine centers to their respective villages.

IOM Philippines provided 8 buses to the Overseas Worker Welfare Administration (OWWA) to support onward transportation for approximately 200 Returning Overseas Filipinos (ROF), as well as 15 vans to the Philippines Coast Guard (PCG) to transport COVID-19 testing teams to visit quarantine facilities. Furthermore, IOM augmented the data collection and management capacity at POE by providing 10 laptops to OWWA and 22 laptops to PCG for their operations.

On 17th June 2020, IOM Sri Lanka donated a range of equipment and supplies to strengthen health-compliant border control procedures at Bandaranaike International Airports. The equipment was handed over to the Aviation Services (Sri Lanka) Limited and the Department of Immigration and will support border officials with activities, such as remote passenger clearance, health screening of passengers, and collection of traveller information.

IOM Thailand has initiated a rapid assessment in collaboration with the Thai Immigration Bureau to assess the key needs and challenges at POE in preparation for the resumption of border crossing for migrant workers.

INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL (IPC)

IOM Marshall Islands is coordinating with the private sector and the Environmental Protection Authority on COVID-19 disinfectant protocols.

IOM Micronesia in Chuuk completed WASH engineering assessments of three Community Health Centers to support the decentralization of clinical care in Weno with the aim of increasing water storage capacity of health facilities to ensure WASH requirements are met in case of increased patient load.

IOM Myanmar provided community quarantine centers with surgical masks and infrared thermometers in Rakhine State; 7,500 surgical masks, 200 bottles of hand sanitizer and 1,750 cloth masks for volunteers were distributed in Buthidaung, Maungdaw and Paektaw Townships, Rakhine State.

CASE MANAGEMENT AND CONTINUITY OF ESSENTIAL SERVICES

IOM-supported health facilities in Cox’s Bazar Bangladesh received essential items and medicines, including 30,000 coveralls, 25,100 face shields and eight oxygen concentrators. To mitigate hospital-acquired transmissions of COVID-19, 16 camp staff assigned to Camp 2W isolation and treatment center (ITC) were trained on IPC, patient flow, and ITC layout. Following the training, staff conducted a dry run to prepare for the opening of the center.

IOM Myanmar is providing material support for patients at a 24-bed isolation facility in Buthidaung Township. IOM also supported preparation and renovation of isolation rooms at Buthidaung Hospital (24 beds) and Maungdaw Hospital (20 beds) for COVID-19 positive patients.

CAMP COORDINATION AND CAMP MANAGEMENT

IOM site management staff in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, facilitated a “go and see visit” to the completed ITC in Camp 23. The visit allowed community leaders, women and girls, and selected individuals from at-risk groups, to experience a tour of the ITC before it became operational on 20 June.

IOM Philippines finished construction of eight WASH facilities and two health facilities at four evacuation centers in Cotabato Province. Since the onset of COVID-19, 215 facilities (including 118 WASH facilities) have been constructed in 17 evacuation centers across Cotabato Province. IOM field teams have provided continuous camp coordination and camp management technical assistance to camp managers at all sites in Cotabato Province.

IOM’s Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific wrote a joint op-ed, “End stigma and discrimination against migrant workers and their children during COVID-19 pandemic,” with the regional offices of ILO, UNODC, UNICEF and UN Women. The op-ed details migrant vulnerabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, stigmatization of and discrimination against migrants, the severe socio-economic impacts of the pandemic on migrant populations, and the need for states to uphold the rights of migrants and include them in all government responses.
IOM RESPONSE

PROTECTION

In Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, 63 individuals were provided with psychosocial support through home visits and over-the-phone counselling. One-one support was provided to 19 individuals to help them cope with COVID-19 related stress and anxiety. Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) activities are provided for refugees, host communities and staff working on the humanitarian response. Services include community-based interventions, face-to-face individualized counselling and remote support via tele-counselling. IOM led a five-day training workshop for 17 community volunteers (12 men; 5 women), who will be providing MHPSS support to beneficiaries in isolation and quarantine in Ukhiya and Teknaf. IOM also developed an animated video in Rohingya to raise awareness on the psychosocial and mental health aspects of the COVID-19 outbreak in Bangladesh. The video uses contextualized images relevant to Rohingya culture, and key messages were adapted based on IASC guidance.

IOM Lao PDR has been requested to support returning migrants, monitor cross border movements and assess migrants’ needs; related data was collected during a recent monitoring visit to border areas.

As a lead of the sub-group on migrants and POEs under the National Protection Cluster, IOM Nepal organized a meeting focusing on migrant protection concerns, service gaps at POEs and holding centers, migrants stranded near the border and the situation at the provincial level. The subgroup also discussed a detailed action plan formulated by the government to facilitate the return of Nepali migrants from various countries of destination.

IOM Philippines and the Philippine Red Cross organized a training on Psychological First Aid for OWWA and PCG frontline personnel on 16 and 17 June. 230 persons were trained on practical skills to provide immediate support to ROFs in distress. This training also aimed to expand the frontline personnel’s network of MHPSS responders and enable them to efficiently refer ROFs who may need specialized interventions.

ADDRESSING SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT

IOM Fiji is conducting a rapid assessment on the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on labour mobility as part of the United Nations Joint Socioeconomic Impact Assessment in the Pacific region. Specifically, the assessment aims to support Pacific Governments to harness the gains of labour mobility schemes in their efforts to address socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 and to ensure that the needs of migrants and their families are incorporated into relevant government programmes and policies. Five focus countries (Fiji, Marshall Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu) and three major destinations for Pacific migrants (Australia, New Zealand, United States) are included.

In coordination with the National Emergency Operations Center, IOM Marshall Islands is supporting the implementation of the Household Rapid Vulnerability Assessment in Ebeye Island. Additionally, the Majuro Preliminary Rapid Vulnerability Assessment Report has been approved by the National Disaster Committee.

On 16 June, IOM Nepal organized a webinar on “The Impact of COVID-19 on Remittance and Livelihoods” to commemorate International Day of Family Remittances, featuring speakers from the Non-Resident Nepali Association, the Central Bank of Nepal, and researchers and academics.

IOM Philippines supported 101 IDPs with additional income through IOM’s Cash-for-Work initiative. A total of 353 IDPs have been supported through this programme since March 2020. IOM Thailand and its partners provided livelihood support to migrants in Ranong Province by creating two community-based pooled funds for interest-free loans, initiating vocational training for producing crabbing nets, procuring boat parts for migrant fishermen and distributing 85 hygiene kits to migrant households.

FURTHER RESOURCES

IOM has contributed to a number of IASC-endorsed COVID-19 related guidance notes, including:

- Interim Technical Note: Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) during COVID-19 Response - Version 1.0