



Leadership Group for Responsible Recruitment South East Asia Chapter



Member Update on Countries of Focus: Impact of COVID-19 on Migrant Workers in South East Asia

9 April 2020

***Note:** The Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB) is providing regular updates to members of the Leadership Group for Responsible Recruitment on the impacts of COVID-19 as they relate to migrant workers in key countries across South East Asia, a region of special focus for the Leadership Group. These briefings are being made available on the IHRB website, in the event that they may be of interest and assistance more broadly. While every effort is made to ensure the information herein is up to date and accurate, the situation with COVID-19 is changing on a daily basis. You are encouraged to seek further information and clarification by visiting the websites of respective governments, industry and other organisations, or contacting them directly. Please also refer to past updates for further information. Links to other sites and statements are not an endorsement nor approval by IHRB or the Leadership Group for Responsible Recruitment.*

The following provides an overview of key Leadership Group migrant worker destination countries in Southeast Asia, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, and major source country, Myanmar.

The South East Asia region now has over 14,000 cases of COVID-19, with Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand now reporting steady increases of over 100 cases per day.¹

THAILAND

The Thai government has initiated a state of emergency effective from 25th March to 30th April. A partial lockdown of Bangkok and the order by the Thai Interior Ministry to close 18 border points took effect from 23rd March. Thai sea, land and air borders are closed to all foreigners except goods transportation crews, diplomats, and work permit holders. Thais and residents returning to the Kingdom are required to present a certificate from the Thai embassy and health certificates upon their departure.

Further restrictions taking effect from 3rd April requires people in Thailand not to leave their homes between 10:00 pm and 4:00 am, unless they have authorized documents. Public transportation, including taxis, Grab services, BTS and MRT trains, and the airport rail link, will also not operate between 9:30 pm to 4:00 am.

According to Issara Institute: *Some employers are functioning normally or within current movement restrictions, but many are scaling back production based on lower demand or other restrictions. Many employers are terminating workers, often with no legal severance, or pressuring workers to sign resignation letters. Other workers have been furloughed without legally mandated pay, or are seeing reduced overtime and reduced working days.*²

¹ <https://www.csis.org/programs/southeast-asia-program/southeast-asia-covid-19-tracker>

² https://shoutout.wix.com/so/0bN5F_Ams?cid=d52583ed-3fbb-498a-8147-a0503ee4f355#/main



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IOM Thailand

IOM Thailand is monitoring border movements and providing assistance to migrants and the Royal Thai Government. For updates and information regarding IOM Thailand's response to COVID-19, please visit:

<https://thailand.iom.int/iom-thailand-covid-19-response>

COVID-19 flash update: IOM Thailand is also producing a weekly update called Flash Update, to focus on the impact of COVID-19 on migrant workers. The newsletter combines key updates from the Government of Thailand and governments of the neighbouring countries in relation to migrant workers currently employed in Thailand. The updates provide information for migrant workers and their employers about the governmental decisions relevant to workers from Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar.

If you wish to be on the mailing list of the updates, please email, Pattarada Rittang (prittang@iom.int) and Yunxian Jiang (yjiang@iom.int).

Latest Flash Updates can be found on the [Thailand IOM website](#).

Links to current and past updates : [10 April](#) | [3 April](#) | [27 March](#) | [23 March](#)

Other updates and information from IOM Thailand:

- Tips for Migrant Workers Whose Job is Affected by COVID-19 Pandemic: [English](#) and [Thai](#)
- Tips for Employers of Domestic Workers during COVID- 19 Pandemic: [English](#) and [Thai](#)
- COVID-19 information **videos** for migrant workers by IOM Thailand: [Myanmar language](#), [Khmer](#), Lao ([English/Thai subtitles](#), [Lao subtitle](#))

MYANMAR

As of 3rd April, the Myanmar-Thai border gates (Myawaddy-Mae Sot and Three Pagodas-Kanchanaburi) remain open and are receiving returning Myanmar migrants from Thailand. Currently, returning migrants will have to stay at quarantine centres at border towns for two weeks.³

Due to concerns over capacity, the government is encouraging Myanmar migrants to plan their return after 15th April 2020. Newly setup quarantine centres are expected to be operational by this date. Returning migrants have to complete a 14-day quarantine before returning to their respective communities and homes. The quarantine will be arranged by respective Myanmar authorities, including provision for basic needs such as food, water, and healthcare.

³ <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-migrant-workers-face-14-day-quarantine-thai-border.htm>



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See also,

[Mekong Migration Network \(MMN\) Statement on the Impact of Covid-19 on Migrants in the Greater Mekong Subregion](#)

MALAYSIA

The Malaysian government issued a [Movement Control Order \(MCO\)](#) for 18th to 31st March, which was extended to 14th April. All production has been halted with clear instructions on paying workers at least the minimum wage of 1,200RM a month (US\$275).

The Malaysian government is encouraging all migrant workers in the country, including undocumented migrants, to voluntarily seek medical testing. An urgent appeal was made for those who attended the mass prayer gathering at the Sri Petaling Mosque between 27th February 2020 and 3rd March 2020. All migrants, regardless of their status, are able to obtain free screening and treatment of COVID-19 at designated Malaysian public hospitals.

Because of the MCO, many migrants are experiencing difficulty accessing basic needs or sending money home. While some factories are providing food to workers, migrant workers on daily wages or undocumented workers are facing difficulties.

Migrant workers under total lockdown

The stay-home order has also resulted in the opposite of the much-vaunted 'social distancing' method to 'flatten the curve' of infections, as many migrant workers often live with over a dozen others in a small room. As of 8th April, migrant workers living at the Selangor Mansion and Malayan Mansion buildings in Jalan Masjid India in Kuala Lumpur have been placed under total lockdown with the enhanced movement control order (MCO), following 15 coronavirus cases detected in the premises. ⁴

Both buildings have some 6,000 residents, with migrants mostly from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. A total of 1,850 residents, including migrants who been put under the enhanced movement control order (MCO) will be provided with at least two meals a day. However, the government is also seeking assistance from CSOs.⁵

CSOs such as [MFA](#) member, [Our Journey](#) have been providing assistance and food rations for affected and vulnerable migrant communities. Many CSOs are also seeking urgent funds to continue providing aid to affected migrant workers. If you would like to contribute towards their efforts, please get in contact with Sumitha Shaanthinni Kishna (ssk010@gmail.com), the Director of [Our Journey](#) and the co-coordinator of the Migration Working Group (MWG) Group in Malaysia, a coalition of civil society groups.

⁴ <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2020/04/582749/selangor-mansion-residents-are-good-health>

⁵ <https://www.thestar.com.my/metro/metro-news/2020/04/09/two-meals-a-day-for-s039gor-malayan-mansion-residents-including-foreigners>

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SINGAPORE

Between 7th April to 4th May, Singapore will have most workplaces except those offering 'essential services' (food establishments, hospitals and transport) closed. All schools are temporarily closed and lessons moved online. Residents have been advised to stay at home and avoid socialising with others beyond their own household.⁶ To further ease labour costs during this period, the Singapore government has announced that employers will receive a migrant worker levy rebate of SGD \$750 (US\$520) for each work permit or S Pass holder, based on previous levies paid in 2020. This is to help employers maintain their workers, and prepare their workforce to restart when the lockdown is lifted.

Migrant worker dormitories under total lockdown

Some 200,000 migrant workers live in 43 purpose-built dormitories in Singapore.⁷ The packed dormitories also make social distancing impossible, adding to a higher risk for virus transmission.

As of 5th April, a record 120 new coronavirus cases in Singapore where 116 were locally transmitted, many were linked to two migrant worker dormitories. The two dormitories, *S11 Dormitory @ Punggol* and *Westlite*, housing about 20,000 workers have been cordoned off as isolation areas and the migrant residents are being quarantined in their rooms for 14 days.

As of 6th April, a third nearby *Toh Guan Dormitory* which houses 4,500 workers⁸ has since been cordoned off as an isolation area.⁹ As of 9th April, a fourth migrant worker dormitory, the *Sungei Tengah Lodge*, has been declared an isolation area following 29 coronavirus cases.¹⁰ The number of residents at the fourth site is unknown.

The S11 site is now the largest patient cluster in Singapore with 118 cases, while the *Westlite and Toh Guan* dormitories, have 38 and 23 cases respectively.¹¹

According to the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), the authorities have been working to ensure workers in the dormitories have enough food and that the premises are kept clean. In order to minimise the risk of transmission via gatherings at the common kitchens, caterers have been engaged to deliver three meals a day for workers.¹² Measures are also put in place to lessen interaction of workers, including preventing the intermingling of workers between

⁶ <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/most-workplaces-to-close-schools-will-move-to-full-home-based-learning-from-next>

⁷ <https://www.eco-business.com/news/covid-19-measures-leave-southeast-asias-migrant-workers-exposed-lay-bare-their-living-conditions/>

⁸ <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/manpower/coronavirus-inter-agency-taskforce-to-provide-support-to-foreign-workers>

⁹ <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/toh-guan-dormitory-isolation-area-covid-19-coronavirus-12616408>

¹⁰ <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/coronavirus-sungei-tengah-lodge-is-4th-foreign-worker-dorm-gazetted-as-isolation>

¹¹ <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/coronavirus-sungei-tengah-lodge-is-4th-foreign-worker-dorm-gazetted-as-isolation>

¹² <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/coronavirus-covid-19-s11-westlite-dormitories-workers-12614988>



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different blocks and floors at dormitories, and staggering meal and recreation times. Migrant workers in essential services are being housed separately.¹³ An inter-agency task force has also been set up to provide support to migrant workers and dormitory operators. The taskforce is to ensure the well-being and living condition standards of migrant workers by supporting dormitory operators during the nationwide lockdown between 7th April to 4th May.¹⁴

In past years, CSOs have raised concerns about overcrowding in dormitories.¹⁵ A 2014 medical paper also noted previous outbreaks of typhus and pneumonia possibly due to the dormitories' 'high density' and 'occasionally less than satisfactory sanitary living conditions'.¹⁶

MFA member, TWC2's [Covid-19: Media Statement, 8 April 2020](#): The statement addresses migrant workers' quarantine and testing, concerns and vulnerabilities of work permit holders under quarantine, Special Pass holders being particularly vulnerable requiring special attention, and financial relief for migrant workers.

OTHER RESOURCES

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION (ILO):

[COVID-19 and the world of work](#)

You can find all ILO resources related to COVID-19, including on OSH and social protection.

[The six-step COVID-19 business continuity plan](#)

The ILO has now produced a **COVID19 six-step business continuity planning tool** for enterprises. The tool aims to establish the risk profile of enterprises and the level of vulnerability to COVID-19 in terms of its impact on the business' People, Processes, Profits and Partnerships. It also helps enterprises develop an effective risk and contingency system for the business.

[Country policy responses](#)

For those operating in specific country contexts, the government and policy responses in the world of work - arranged by country.

[Prevention and Mitigation of COVID-19 at Work](#)

This checklist is a management tool to implement practical actions to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 pandemic at the workplace. The successful implementation of the tool is dependent on the cooperation between employers, supervisors and workers to make positive changes in the workplace to improve response to and preparedness for COVID-19. Employers should involve workplace safety and health committees or safety delegates in the process.

¹³ <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/coronavirus-record-120-new-covid-19-cases-in-spore-two-foreign-worker-dormitories-gazetted>

¹⁴ <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/manpower/coronavirus-inter-agency-taskforce-to-provide-support-to-foreign-workers>

¹⁵ <https://twc2.org.sg/2013/09/01/andrew-loh-reports-on-workers-dormitories-in-industrial-buildings/>

¹⁶ <https://bmchealthservres.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1472-6963-14-300>



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Please also see:

- [ILO Standards and COVID-19, FAQ for Key provisions of international labour standards relevant to the evolving COVID-19 outbreak](#). This note provides a compilation of answers to most frequently asked questions related to international labour standards and COVID-19.

- [ILO Monitor 2nd edition: COVID-19 and the world of work, Updated estimates and analysis](#). The 2nd Monitor report of the ILO released 7 April 2020 estimates job losses (a drastic increase from the last estimate equivalent to 195 million full-time workers hours lost). Large reductions are foreseen in the Arab States (8.1 per cent, equivalent to 5 million full-time workers), Europe (7.8 per cent, or 12 million full-time workers) and Asia and the Pacific (7.2 per cent, 125 million full-time workers).

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM):

In support of the important work of businesses, IOM has developed the following practical tools for employers of migrant workers. The tools, overview and recommendations will be regularly updated.

[Governments response overview](#)

Regularly updated repository of government responses to COVID-19 relevant to the situation of migrant workers based on official resources

[Employer survey](#)

Survey questions to supplement ongoing monitoring efforts by brands and suppliers on the situation of migrant workers that can help guide business responses

[COVID-19 places migrant workers in highly vulnerable situations](#)

Overview article on how COVID-19 increases migrant worker vulnerabilities

[IOM COVID-19 Disease Response - Situation Report](#)

Snapshot of IOM continued efforts to support refugees and migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic - version 5

[Global IOM response to COVID-19](#)

IOM's COVID-19 Global Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan (SRP) to support countries preventing the spread of the pandemic



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OTHER RESOURCES

[Southeast Asia Covid-19 Tracker](#)

This is a project of the CSIS Southeast Asia Program to provide a resource for the public on the impacts of COVID-19 in Southeast Asia, national and regional responses, economic impacts, and more. This page will be updated daily and regularly expanded by the Southeast Asia Program team.

The Business and Human Rights Resource Centre

[Latest news on the implications of the outbreak for business and human rights](#)

International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

[ITUC Global Covid-19 Survey](#): Regional differences exposed in government responses to the Covid-19 pandemic – millions of workers in Africa, Asia-Pacific and the Americas at risk of economic devastation