



Migrant family in Mueang Ranong community in Thailand © IOM 2021 (Photo: Javier Vidal)

Background

South-East Asia is comprised of source, transit and destination countries and is characterized by migration inflows and outflows. Due to its unparalleled economic growth in the last decade, Thailand is a lucrative destination for labour migrants, mainly from South-East Asia. According to the UN Migration Report, in 2018, the number of migrants in Thailand reached 4.9 million. Majority of the migrant population are from bordering countries, namely, Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Vietnam.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and containment measures put in place across Thailand, migrant communities have faced an array of challenges. For many, the recent lockdown has resulted in loss of employment, as well as limited access to services and facilities.

HIGHLIGHTS

- In July 2021, there were a total of 77,130 COVID-19 cases among migrants from Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, and Myanmar (CLM) in Thailand.
- At least 200,000 migrants, from CLM, living in Thailand have been vaccinated, with at least one dose received.
- Quarantine facilities have been set up in the border areas between Thailand and CLM countries to host migrants moving between the countries. Additional facilities continue to be set up in Thailand, Cambodia and Lao People's Democratic Republic to adapt to the increase of movement between these countries.
- On 13 August, Cambodia re-opened its land borders in eight provinces after being closed for two weeks, resulting in 4,989 migrants returning to Cambodia. However, curfew and market closure measures remain in these eight red zone provinces until 15 August.
- Points of Entry (PoEs) at the Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge I (Nongkhai-Vientiane), II (Mukdahan-Savannakhet), and III (Nakhon Panom-Khammouane) have opened for returning migrants. An estimated 100-200 migrants return to Lao each day.
- Key informants across the Thailand-Myanmar border estimated that 325 Myanmar nationals arrived in Thailand irregularly in the month of August. According to key informants, the motives of incoming Myanmar nationals are to seek employment opportunities, as well as flee violence and fear of persecution.
- In CLM and Thailand, food and non-food items (NFIs), including hygiene kits and personal protective equipment (PPE), as well as Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials and COVID-19 tests were distributed to migrants and returnees along the border.

CONTACTS

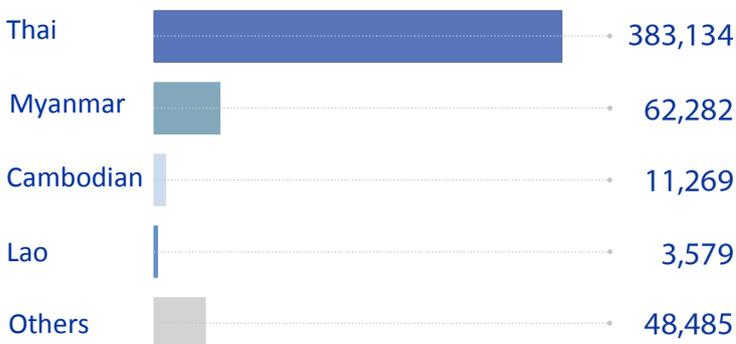
THAILAND

NUMBER OF DOCUMENTED MIGRANT WORKERS (As of July 2021)



Source: The Foreign Workers Administration Office of the Department of Employment

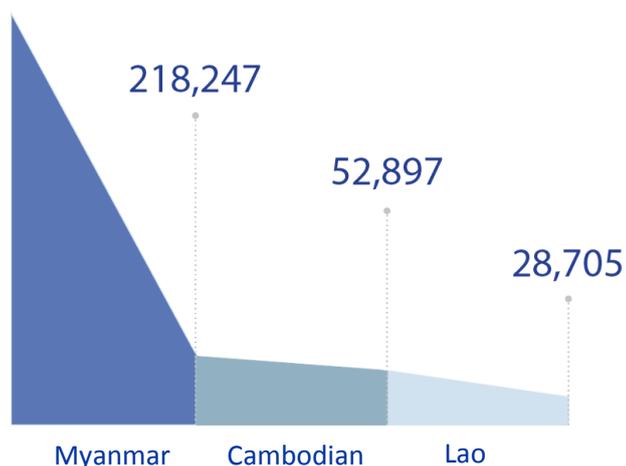
NUMBER OF COVID-19 CASES BY NATIONALITIES (As of 25 July 2021)



Source: Ministry of Public Health

According to the WHO, approximately 15 per cent of the total positive cases in Thailand are migrant workers. While this appears to be a minority of the overall cases, on a per capita basis, migrants are disproportionately affected. For every 1,000 migrants from CLM, 22.04 migrants were infected. However, it is important to note that the number represents cases of those who tested positive regardless of their status.

NUMBER OF COVID-19 VACCINATION BY NATIONALITIES (From 28 February to 26 August 2021)



Source: Ministry of Public Health Immunization Center



COVID-19 VACCINE ROLLOUT UPDATE

As of 31 August 2021, there were 32,600,001 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine administered in Thailand. The number of people that received at least one dose of vaccine was 23,795,098, or 34.2 per cent of the population, while 8,212,750 people or 11.8 per cent, were fully vaccinated.

According to Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) Immunization Center, healthcare workers (779,302), frontline workers (701,699), and Village Health Volunteers (350,276) have been identified as a priority group and are vaccinated. The secondary priority is the elderly (1,073,473) and people with severe comorbid conditions (706,445). A total of 4,247 pregnant women were also reported to have been inoculated.



POLICY UPDATE

Following the Cabinet Resolution from 4 August 2020 allowing four groups of migrant workers from Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar to extend their stay and work permits, and a consecutive decision issued on 13 July 2021 to allow these groups to further extend their work permits until 27 July 2022, as of June 2021, a total of 217,683 migrant workers managed to extend their stay. Of those, 61,501 were Cambodian, 12,992 Laos and 143,190 Myanmar.

As per the Cabinet Resolution dated 4 August 2020, the four groups allowed to extend their work and stay permits were as follows:

- Group 1: workers who have completed four years of employment;
- Group 2: workers who have changed or are changing employers;
- Group 3: pink card holders; and
- Group 4: cross-border seasonal workers.

Following the Cabinet Resolution dated 29 December 2020 allowing irregular migrants residing in Thailand, regardless of their employment status, to register online with the Department of Employment (DOE) to regularize their stay, as of June 2021, a total of 326,753 out of 654,864 migrant workers who initially registered, completed the process. The nationality breakdown is as follows:



IMMIGRATION DETENTION CENTERS (IDCs) AND ORGANIZATIONAL QUARANTINES (OQs)



The RTG has set up additional OQs in addition to 18 IDCs to accommodate migrants. According to the data provided by the Border Patrol Police, there are 14 OQs in Chantaburi (2) and Sakaeo (2) along the Thailand-Cambodia border; Nong Khai (1) at the Thailand-Lao People’s Democratic Republic border; Songkhla (1) at the Thailand-Malaysia border; Tak (3), Chiang Rai (1), Kanchanaburi (1), Ratchaburi (1), Prachuap Khiri Khan (1), and Ranong (1) along Thailand-Myanmar border as of 31 August.

As of 31 August, the OQs are hosting 177 migrants. Almost all migrants are Myanmar nationals. Males (65%) represent the majority of the migrants. The data also revealed that only two per cent of the migrants in OQs have tested positive for COVID-19.

BUSINESS CLOSURE

According to the Department of Business Development, 3,958 businesses registered as juristic persons closed down between April and July 2021.

Number of business closures by month



RESPONSE

Between 1–15 August, IOM delivered dignity items, including underwear, hygiene items, sanitary pads, among other items, to 130 migrant workers in two garment factories in Mae Sot district, Tak province. This is in addition to 800 migrant workers assisted in Mae Sot garment factories with dignity items between 23 – 27 July.

Between 27 July–20 August, IOM distributed 2,050 survival kits to migrant workers affected by the construction camp lock down in Bangkok and surrounding areas.

Additionally, IOM provided 421 relief packages, COVID-19 tests, COVID-19 treatments, food, and NFIs to migrants communities, field hospitals, and factory quarantines in Chiang Mai, Ranong and Songkhla provinces, and Mae Sot district. IOM also provided hygiene items and PPE to more than 4,000 migrant workers and volunteers in the mentioned locations.

Fourteen Myanmar migrants in the Detention Center in Bang Khen also received food and hygiene kits from IOM in the beginning of August.



International Labour Organization (ILO) collaborated with The State Enterprises Workers’ relations confederation (SERC) and Employers’ Confederation of Thailand, distributed 5,000 sets of survival kits including food, water and sanitary items to migrant workers stranded in the construction sites in the BMA and factories in Songkhla province.

Together with SERC, 30 migrant leaders were trained online on labour rights, social security rights, trafficking, COVID-19 information, vaccination and home isolation with the goal that such migrant leaders will disseminate the information to their peers and communities.

ILO also collaborated with Raksthai Foundation to distribute 775 PPE kits to 798 migrant workers of which 90.4 per cent were women.



Survival items being distributed to migrant worker communities in Bangkok © IOM 2021

Recently, ILO issued a grant to Foundation for Education and Development to support Myanmar migrant communities in Phang-nga province. The beneficiaries are primarily migrant workers in fishing and seafood processing sectors affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, pregnant women, and households with children. The approximately 500,000 THB grant includes providing nutritional supplements and essential non-food items that will support nearly 400 vulnerable Myanmar migrants. The grant will also include FED staff and volunteers, PPE, and other related operational and logistic costs. The activities will be carried out from September to November.

In August 2021, ILO collaborated with the Migrant Working Group (MWG), Human Rights and Development Foundation (HRDF), and the Construction Material Industry Thailand to distribute 724 relief packages to migrant workers at construction sites in Bangkok, Samut Prakarn, and Nonthaburi provinces. Additionally, in collaboration with the Employers' Confederation of Thailand, ILO provided 1,000 more survival bags to migrant workers in the construction sector in Greater Bangkok.



Survival items being distributed to migrant worker communities in Mae Sot
© IOM 2021

UNICEF provided risk communication and community engagement, including vaccine literacy. Health and Child Protection case management services are also available for both infected and at-risk cases in Khlong Toei communities in Bangkok province. The case management services also include testing, screening, initial HI/CI measurement support, First Aid, linkage with telemedicine, referral, and follow-up until cases are closed.

UNICEF also supported the communities on Mass Rapid Testing and Response, setting up Community Isolation Centers and providing volunteers to support building the centers. The communities are also given dignity kits, hygiene supplies, baby materials such as milk, toys, and books and delivered psychological first aid support to children, adolescents, and young mothers.

CAMBODIA



CAMBODIA-THAILAND BORDER

Total returning migrants between 13-29 August 2021

 15,749



Female

6,788 (43%)



Male

8,961 (57%)



Adults

14,599 (93%)



Children

1,150 (7%)

The border with Thailand was closed between 28 July and 12 August. No migrants were allowed to cross the border except those with health conditions, pregnant women and unaccompanied children. Migrants who were found to be waiting in the open field without shelter and food were transported to quarantine centres in Thailand. As of 29 August, a total of 15,749 migrants crossed the border from Thailand since the border was reopened on 13 August.

On average, 926 migrants return per day. Around 10 PoEs in four provinces have been used to allow migrant workers to return to Cambodia. O'Smach PoE in Oddor Meanchey and Ou Beichoin PoE in Banteay Meanchey are the most active.

Interception of Cambodian migrants in Thailand

IOM Thailand has been monitoring data from the Centre for COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA), established in 2020, to report the result of effective coordination within different government offices to prevent, mitigate cross-border disease transmission and respond to COVID-19.

Specifically, IOM has been monitoring the number of apprehensions of irregular migrants to analyze data and identify any possible trends in apprehensions that may be impacting migrants as a result of the evolving COVID-19 situation.

According to the CCSA, a total of 1,524 Cambodian migrants were intercepted in Thailand. The number has slightly increased compared to the 1,438 apprehensions made in June.

QUARANTINE CENTERS (QCs) AND TREATMENT CENTERS

As of 29 August, more than 11,940 people are currently in 70 QCs in Banteay Meanchey, Oddor Meanchey, Battambang and Siem Reap provinces. Over 9,380 people are in 40 different treatment centers according to the severity of COVID-19 cases.

Given that the current QC facilities in Cambodia are at full capacity, the Cambodian government is building more QC using the tapioca warehouses along the border and setting up additional treatment centers on the tapioca field.

When these facilities are ready, they will be used to isolate migrants for asymptomatic and mild cases for a period of 21 days due to the risk of Delta variant of concern. After the migrants have completed their quarantine period, they will be transported to their respective provinces by military trucks.

Banteay Meanchey and Oddor Meanchey provinces are finishing the construction of four treatment centers, two in each province, for asymptomatic and mild cases, with a capacity of 6,000 persons in each province. Each province along the border is constantly assessing its capacity of QCs. In Oddor Meanchey, returnees will be transported to facilities in Siem Reap or other provinces.

Number of COVID-19 cases

All migrants are tested at PoEs by the Rapid Response Team from the Provincial Health Department, using the COVID-19 rapid test. After screening and registration, migrants will be transported to QCs, or the Treatment Centers depends on the COVID-19 test result. The facilities are located in the border provinces of Banteay Meanchey, Battambang, and Oddor Meanchey. Migrants will be transported to the facilities either by military trucks or ambulances. In total, 1,919 or 12 per cent of the total returning migrants between 13-29 August have tested positive for COVID-19.



Migrants waiting to get COVID-19 test at PoE in Battambang province, Cambodia/© IOM 2021

RESPONSE



hygiene kits and sleeping materials are distributed to returning migrants

IOM continues to respond to the needs of the returning migrant workers and has provided over 8,000 hygiene kits and sleeping materials for returning migrants in August. IOM is also supporting the local authorities on distribution coordination, data collection and PPE provision, and provides updates on the situation of migrant workers abroad.

With support from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, IOM distributed PPE, medical supplies, food items, and IEC materials to the Provincial Health Departments in Banteay Meanchey, Oddar Meanchey, and Battambang. IOM also distributed medical and hygiene items to the testing center at Poi Pet Transit Center as part of the overall strategy to limit the risk of transmission of the Delta variant.

LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC



LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC -THAILAND BORDER

All 11 PoEs are opened for Lao nationals to return. The six main PoEs are Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge I, II, III, Vangtao, and Tonperng Special Economic Zone. PoEs in Vangtao, Tonperng Special Economic Zone, and Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge II between Mukdahan and Savannakhet provinces have reached their full capacity, which in turn reduces the number of returnees. The Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge II can only accommodate 150 returnees daily capacity.

While government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic is tightening the rules at the PoEs and trying to expand the QCs to accommodate the increasing number of returnees in the Southern provinces, they have coordinated with the Thai government to quarantine the returnees in Thailand for 14 days before deportation to Lao People's Democratic Republic and requested that Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge I be the main PoE for returnees.

Estimated number of returning Lao migrants per day


100-200

Interception of Lao migrants in Thailand

According to the CCSA: The number of Lao migrants being apprehended in Thailand have considerably increased from 604 individuals in June to 1,519 in July. The number of apprehensions have been slowly increasing in 2021 from an average of 180 in the first quarter of the year, to about 450 per month in the second quarter and over 1,500 in the first month alone of the third quarter.



QUARANTINE CENTERS (QCs)

Currently, there are 106 QCs hosting approximately 14,000 returnees. At present, returning migrants are required to quarantine for a total of 28 days: 14 days in a designated facility and 14 days at home quarantine. Approximately 30 per cent of the returning caseload have tested positive for COVID-19.

With QCs in Champasak and Savanakheth provinces and Vientiane Capital being overcrowded with returnees, there are reports of unmet needs for food, water and medical items. Returnees also reported being stressed due to lack of updates on quarantine period as they were being detained at the QCs for 28 days instead of 14. The Ministry of Health also mentioned that the QCs are in urgent need of sleeping materials such as mattresses, pillows, bedsheets, and blankets. Other challenges encountered include provision of WASH facilities, such as drinking water and portable toilets.

RESPONSE

6,600
copies of
IEC materials


467
copies of
COVID-19 SOP

are developed and contextualized by the Department of Immigration. IOM Lao People's Democratic Republic jointly distributed the items with the Department of International Relations, Ministry of Public Security, WHO, and the Ministry of Health, at each PoE to frontline officials, relevant government stakeholders, and donors. An additional distribution of 200 migrant surveys was disseminated by the Department of Immigration, Ministry of Public Security.


1,500

direct assistance packages
are provided at the provincial
level

IOM Lao People's Democratic Republic continued to provide direct support at the provincial level and closely coordinate with the QC management officials and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare for additional QC support. This support includes the distribution of 1,500 direct assistance packages comprising PPE and NFIs to returnees at QCs, provision of safe migration trainings to 1,500 returnees, and data collection support on returning migrants.

On 6 August, IOM Lao People's Democratic Republic delivered 600 sleeping materials to QC management officials in Champasak province border, including mattresses, beddings, pillows, blankets, and mosquito nets.



IOM staff distributing direct assistance to migrant workers at QC in Suvannakhet province, Lao PDR /© IOM 2021

MYANMAR

MYANMAR-THAILAND BORDER

Land borders between Myanmar and Thailand remain closed for entry for travelers of all purposes, except travelers with transportation of goods, to prevent the transmission of the Delta variant. Each province implements its restrictions aiming to limit the spread. For instance, the Governor of Kanchanaburi is implementing stringent measures by ordering the closure of the Thai-Myanmar border in five districts from 5 - 31 August. The districts are Three Pagoda, Sangkhla Buri, Ban Phu Nam Ron and Muang.

On August 13, the Governor also implemented a lockdown in Sangkhla Buri district after detecting positive cases among 22 Myanmar migrant workers from three factories. However, goods, medical and parcel transportations are allowed to pass through the district until further notice. Truck drivers and passengers are required to get a COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Test at checkpoints.

The Governor also expanded the surveillance areas in Thong Pha Phum, Sai Yok, and Dan Makham Tia districts and set up 11 additional checkpoints to prevent transmission of COVID-19 and migrant smuggling.

According to the notice from the Department of Civil Aviation issued on 30 May 2021, the ban on all international commercial flights to and from the Yangon International Airport has been further extended until 31 August 2021.

In July, KIs reported that approximately 2,800 Myanmar nationals arrived in Thailand irregularly within the month. The motive of incoming Myanmar nationals to Thailand was to seek employment. In Ranong, in addition to seeking job opportunities, incoming migrants were also fleeing violence and fear of persecution.

KIs also mentioned that broker fees have increased and is now between 25,000 and 50,000 THB, depending on the destination.

As of 1 August, Myanmar re-opened its land borders for incoming Myanmar nationals. Only 200 individuals are allowed to return to Myanmar via the Mae Sot– Myawaddy border crossing every other day, including both voluntary returnees and deportees. As of 15 August, 65 Myanmar and one Lao migrants were placed in eight OQs in Myanmar.

MOBILITY MONITORING

Estimated number of incoming Myanmar nationals in July and August



IOM Thailand is working in close coordination with IOM Myanmar to share information and strengthen the analysis of cross-border movements between the two countries. Since February, IOM Thailand has been conducting Mobility Monitoring at the Thailand-Myanmar Border Area, using a network of key informants (KIs) in seven border provinces.

RESPONSE

IOM Myanmar continues to provide humanitarian support for vulnerable returnees from Thailand and internal migrants in distressed conditions. IOM reached a total of 29 individuals (16 men and 13 women). IOM, in close collaboration with partners, supported the cost of onward transportation and meals as well as provided clothing, drinking water, hygiene items, and medical support to the migrants.



IOM staff providing humanitarian assistance to returnees at the Friendship Bridge of Myawaddy-Mae Sot border, Myanmar/© IOM 2021