



IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MIGRANTS IN THAILAND SITUATION REPORT DECEMBER 2021



Supporting the Lao Ministry of Health deliver COVID-19 Vaccine to vulnerable populations in Muang Kuan district, Houaphan Province, Lao PDR (IOM Lao PDR, 2021)

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 Thailand Migration Report in 2019, the number of migrants in Thailand reached 4.9 million. The majority of the migrant population are from bordering countries, namely, Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Viet Nam.

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, it has resulted in loss of employment, as well as limited access to services and facilities.

Highlights

- The emergence and local transmission of the Omicron Variant of Concern (VOC) prompted the CCSA to announce on 22 December that the Thailand Pass facility would close for all new Test & Go and Sandbox applications until further notice.
- The CCSA announced on 14 December its recommendations for COVID-19 booster doses.
- By 28 December, 3,723,167 foreign nationals residing in Thailand had received a dose of a COVID-19 vaccine (42%). This figure includes 1,736,118 nationals from Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar (CLM), representing 45 per cent of the total estimated 3.9M CLM population in Thailand.
- The national COVID-19 Hotline is again available in Myanmar, Lao and Khmer languages. It aims to increase access to information about vaccine registration, certificates Adverse-Effects Following Immunisation, and other COVID-19 related information and entitlements.
- The Ministry of Labour (MOL), Department of Employment (DOE) announced that 405,567 CLM migrants have gone through or have completed the regularization process in accordance with the Cabinet Resolution dated 29 December 2020 to receive a Pink Card by 31 March 2022.
- The UN Network on Migration's sub-Working Group on COVID-19 emphasises the need to urgently resolve the challenge of issuing COVID-19 vaccination cards to undocumented migrants and refugees in Thailand.

THAILAND

COVID-19 SITUATION UPDATES

On 31 December 2021, Thailand reported a cumulative total of 2,223,435 (+107,563) positive cases since the start of the pandemic, with 21,698 (+927) deaths.

The total number of 'active' COVID-19 cases reported on 29 December (33,502) indicated a continuing steady decrease, dropping by 25%, 18% and 12% during the second, third and fourth week of December respectively. The number of active cases on 29 December was the lowest since 15 May 2021, significantly reducing the burden on hospitals. Data from 28 December show positive trends in the decline in severe and ventilated cases:

Severe and Ventilated Cases		*Date: 28 Dec 2021	
	Severe Cases	717	12.7% of the highest number reported on 16 August (5,626)
	Ventilated Cases	176	15% of the highest number reported on 15 August (1,172)

COVID-19 is still widespread across Thailand, with community transmission in almost every province. Most of the provinces reporting high cases per million population are in the south and north-west (tourist destinations included). Those reporting the lowest cases are mainly in the north-east as shown in Figure 1.

The daily number of imported cases rose steadily since the reopening of the country to international tourists in November, and 116 were reported on 29 December, likely reflecting an increased incidence of COVID VOC Omicron infections in travelers from affected countries.

OMICRON VARIANT OF CONCERN

63 cases detected by 19 December 2021

Majority detected in travelers arriving from affected countries, however community transmission of Omicron is now being reported in several locations in Thailand.

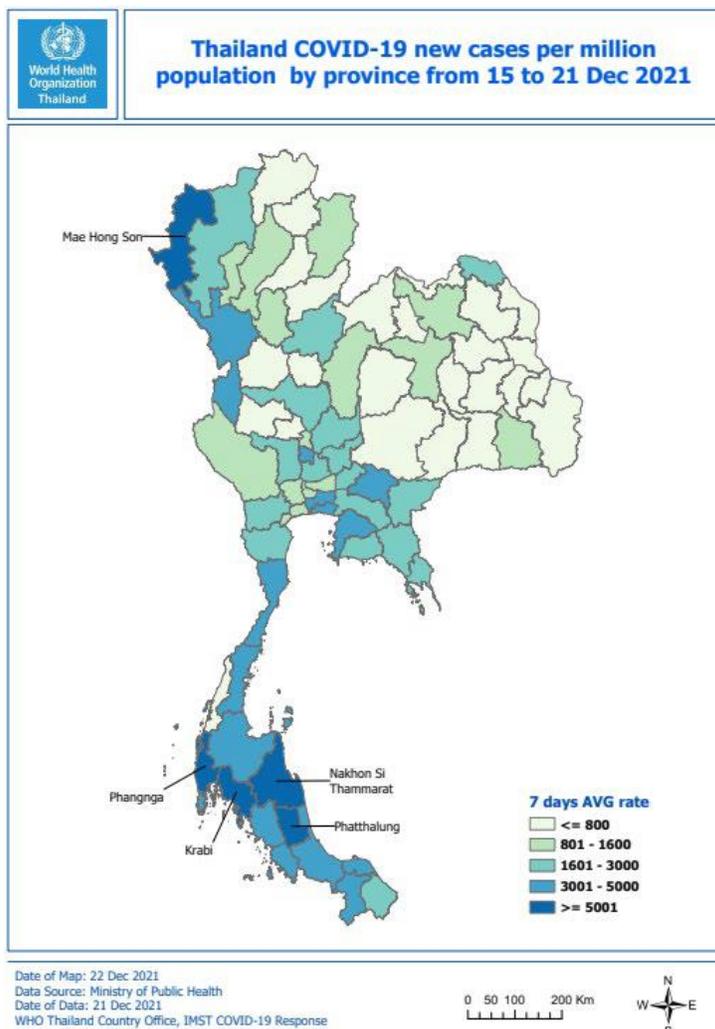
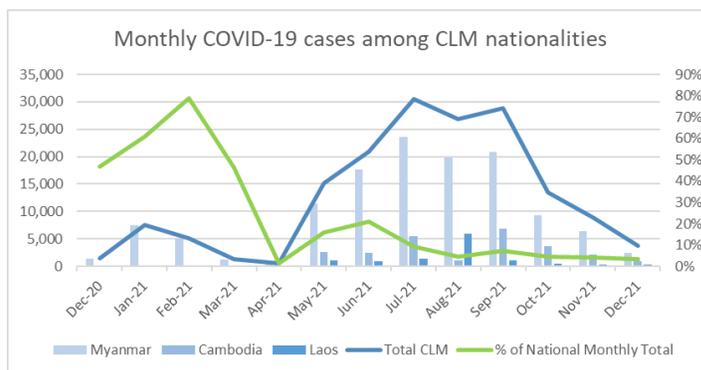


Figure 1: Distribution of new COVID-19 cases per million population by province (WHO)

COVID-19 CASES AMONG MIGRANTS

In December, 3,673 (-5,188) migrants from Myanmar (67%), Cambodia (27%) and Laos (7%) tested positive for COVID-19. Positive cases amongst CLM migrants comprised 3 per cent of monthly cases reported nationwide (107,563).



COVID-19 CASES AMONG MIGRANT CHILDREN

According to the Royal College Pediatricians of Thailand, and the Pediatric Society of Thailand, as of 24 November, the total number of accumulated COVID-19 cases amongst children up to 18 years of age was 314,468, with 4,483 among migrant children. 93 per cent of these migrant children were from Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos.

Data from 1 April and 11 August 2021 shows that there were 4,035 infected migrant children from CLM, indicating that the vast majority of cases occurred during the third and fourth waves of the pandemic in Thailand. Overall, the number of migrant children testing COVID-19 positive declining, similar to the wider, national trend.



COVID-19 VACCINE ROLLOUT

On 20 December Thailand had cumulatively vaccinated more than 100 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccination rates continue to rise and can be expected to significantly reduce levels of severe illness and deaths caused by currently circulating COVID-19 strains, including VOC Omicron. However, vaccination rates are still low in some provinces and in some important risk groups

By the end of December, 104,278,364 doses of COVID-19 vaccine had been administered in Thailand:

	Doses
First dose	51,267,054
Second dose	46,080,159
Third dose	6,931,151

On 14 December the CCSA released recommendations for COVID-19 booster doses. The type of booster vaccine recommended will depend on the type, or types, received for the two primary doses.

COVID-19 VACCINATION AMONG MIGRANTS

On 28 December, a total of 3,723,167 (+609,607) doses of COVID-19 vaccine had been administered to foreign nationals residing in Thailand. Within this figure, 1,736,118 (+196,487) doses were to CLM nationals, representing the top three nationalities:

	Myanmar	Cambodian	Lao
			
Total	1,201,270	356,850	177,998
December	(+136,632)	(+39,397)	(+20,458)
	45 % of the 3.9M CLM population in Thailand		

IOM can report that migrants in Songkhla IDC received their second dose of COVID-19 vaccine on 23 December. To support early detection and transmission of COVID-19 within IDCs, IOM provided 85 COVID-19 antigen test kits to Kanchanaburi IDC, and 130 to Tak IDC in December.

Overall COVID-19 vaccination rates in Thailand have reached a level that can be expected to significantly reduce rates of severe illness and deaths. Coverage remains low in some provinces and in some important risk groups, particularly pregnant women.

Despite progress in the national vaccination campaign, second dose vaccination coverage continues to vary significantly by province. For example the top 10 provinces range between 69 and 106 per cent, and the bottom 10 provinces between 37 and 43 per cent. Data for second dose vaccination coverage along Thailand's border provinces also varies:

- Cambodia (7 provinces) – 43-62%
- Lao PDR (12 provinces) – 37-53%
- Myanmar (10 provinces) – 42-71%
- Malaysia (4 provinces) – 41-67%

Vaccination certificates for undocumented migrants and refugees

The UN Network on Migration's sub-Group on COVID-19 would like to highlight the unresolved challenge in issuing vaccination certificates to undocumented migrants and refugees in temporary shelters. Such a document is required for job applications, resettlement and engaging in their communities. The group encourages MOPH and relevant actors to resolve the issue.

POLICY UPDATE

Policy updates: National control measures

In light of the emergence of the VOC Omicron, the Royal Thai Government announced on 6 January 2022 that COVID-19 measures will be strengthened to level 4, which includes:

- refrain from going to risk areas such as eating in restaurants with limited ventilation;
- refrain from going to places with large crowds, and
- refrain from unnecessarily travel across provinces by public transportation and the measures started from 9 January 2022 and the measures will be reviewed every 14 days.

Prior to this, on 22 December 2021 the RTG had also announced changes to its Thailand Pass Scheme (launched in November 2021). The scheme was closed to all new Test & Go and Sandbox (except Phuket) applications until further notice and new measures were applied.

Policy updates: Migrant workers

According to the Ministry of Labour (MOL), Department of Employment (DOE) 405,567 CLM migrants (105,545 Cambodian, 47,334 Lao and 252,688 Myanmar) are going through or have completed the regularization process in accordance with the Cabinet Resolution dated 29 December 2020 to receive a Pink Card by 31 March 2022.

Overall, there are four groups of migrants who have benefitted from the different regularization windows:

- 920,784 CLM migrants registered before the pandemic (August 2019) who are allowed to renew their permits in-country because of COVID-19 outbreak.
- 210,604 CLM migrants who registered in-country due to the pandemic in August 2020.
- 405,955 CLM migrants registered in December 2020 as the pandemic continued.
- Official statistics of those who registered through the Cabinet Resolution in September 2021 have yet to be published.

Holders of Pink Cards (stay and work permits of migrant workers who regularize their immigration status in Thailand) expiring on 31 March 2022 must submit an application to renew their permits in advance to be eligible to continue working in Thailand until 13 February 2023. Those whose passports, travel documents or certificates of identity have expired or are expiring must have their documents renewed and obtain a new visa stamp from the Immigration Bureau by 1 August 2022, which is the deadline for registered migrants with no valid travel documents to be able to remain in Thailand.

Since 1 December 2021, the DOE began accepting applications from Thai employers and licensed recruiters to bring in new migrant workers to work in the country through the Memoranda of Understandings (MOU) with neighbouring countries. As of 20 December 2021, the DOE received 255 requests from Thai employers to recruit 32,295 new MOU migrant workers under the official, regular labour migration process set out in the existing MOU between Thailand and the three countries of origin.

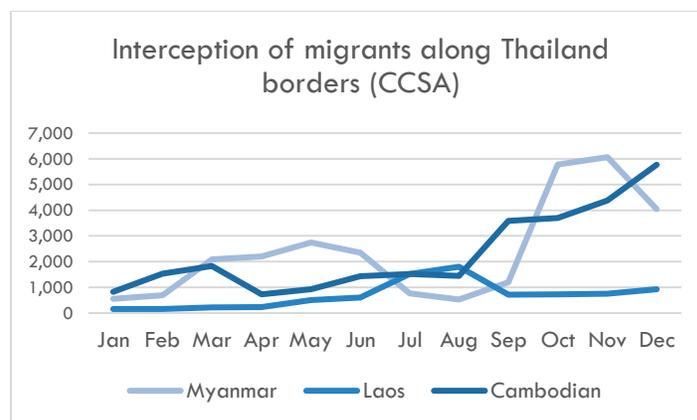
NUMBER OF DOCUMENTED MIGRANT WORKERS (as of November 2021)



Source: Foreign workers Administration Office of the Department of Employment.

Updates on border control measures

In December, 10,743 CLM nationals were intercepted along the border, a slight decrease from those that occurred in November (11,199). CCSA data as of 31 December 2021 show that 4,044 were Myanmar nationals, 929 Lao and 5,770 Cambodian.



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

As of 4 January, Border Patrol Police reported that there are in total 191 Myanmar migrants in 5 OQs (M=113, F=78), all of whom tested negative for COVID-19:

- Sai Yok District, Kanchanaburi – 52 (M=26, F=26)
- Maechan, Chiang Rai – 49 (M=25, F=24)
- Sadao, Songkhla – 7 (M=7)
- Tha Song Yang, Tak – 50 (M=25, F=25)
- Mueang, Ranong – 33 (M=30, F=3)

**THAILAND - CAMBODIA BORDER****Sa Kaeo**

Thai officials plan to hold talks with their counterparts in Cambodia to discuss reopening land borders between the two countries. Four border crossing points are in the plan:

- Ban Khlong Luek – Poi Pet in Aranyaprathet District,
- Ban Khao Din – Ban Kor Mor in Khlon Haad District,
- Ban Nong Prue– Malai in Aranyaprathet District, and
- Ban Ta Phraya– Ban Bueng Kuan in Ta Phraya District.

While the Sa Kaeo Governor held a meeting with relevant stakeholders on 15 December 2021, the border reopening remains in the planning process and there will be further discussion between Thailand's Department of Disease and Control and Cambodian officials.

**THAILAND - MYANMAR BORDER****Tak**

The Royal Thai Government (RTG) confirmed that 9,509 individuals from Myanmar had fled the upsurge in violence in Kayin and Kayah States since 16 December into Tak and Mae Hong Song provinces in Thailand. 2,547 individuals from Myanmar remain on the Thai side of the border as of early January according to UNHCR.

**THAILAND - LAO BORDER****Nong Khai**

Following the proposal to pilot the reopening of land border at Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge I between Nong Khai and Vientiane, the CCSA announced on 22 December 2021 that the reopening plan would be delayed until further notice. The Friendship Bridge had been assigned as the only land entrance to Thailand under the Test & Go scheme.

Mukdahan

Following the RTG approval to allow migrant workers to enter Thailand via the MOU, Mukdahan is one of the provinces that plan to reopen to migrant workers via the Thai-Laos Friendship Bridge II starting on 1 January 2022. The Mukdahan Governor said on 10 December 2021 that the estimated number of Lao migrants who will cross this Port of Entry (POE) would be approximately 10,000. Migrants will have to present a COVID-19 test result, either RT-PCR or ATK, taken no more than 72 hours prior to arrival. Once at the POE, an ATK test will be conducted again. If the result is negative, migrants can go to the quarantine facility. If the result is positive, migrants will not be allowed to enter Thailand.

There is also a similar plan to be proposed for Chanthaburi province. The Thailand-Cambodia Border Coordination Office (TCCO) held a meeting on 2 December 2021.

COVID-19 SITUATION OVERVIEW IN COUNTRIES NEIGHBOURING THAILAND (21 December 2021)

Country	Cases reported to date			Deaths reported to date			Vaccination % total population (17 December)	
	Cumulative cases	per 1M population	Trend (7 day average)	Cumulative deaths	per 1M population	Trend (7 day average)	1st dose	2nd dose
Cambodia	120,430	7,058	Down	3,006	176	Stable	84%	80%
Laos	100,524	13,524	Stable	284	38	Stable	51%	42%
Malaysia	2,724,684	82,611	Down	31,192	937	Stable	79%	78%
Myanmar	528,639	9,621	Down	19,230	349	Stable	31%	22%
Thailand	2,196,529	30,493	Down	21,440	298	Stable	70%	61%

CAMBODIA

According to data received from the National Committee for Counter Trafficking, 270,487 Cambodian returned from abroad since March 2020. Battambang province received the highest number of returning migrants (31%), followed by Banteay Meanchey (27%) and Siem Reap (14%).

While there has been a decrease in the numbers of migrants being quarantined, particularly since more of them can access vaccination in Thailand, IOM continues to identify needs at Quarantine Centres, particularly materials for children.

COVID-19 CASES IN CAMBODIA

At the end of December 2021, the cumulative total of confirmed COVID-19 cases had reached 120,464 (+192), and 3,009 related deaths (+46).

As of 27 December 2021, 31 Omicron cases had been detected in Cambodia upon arrival at the borders, of which 4 were symptomatic. The MOH and World Health Organization conducted a joint rapid risk assessment on Omicron and current control measures.



COVID-19 VACCINE ROLLOUT

The Cambodian Ministry of Health reported that 89.3% of the population were fully vaccinated by the end of December 2021. Second dose vaccination coverage among adults aged 60 or more stands at 99.4% and 100% among healthcare workers. Cumulative totals are as follows:

	Cumulative total
First dose	14,262,170
Second dose	13,659,518
Third dose	3,392,519

Samdech Prime Minister Hun Sen has recommended that 500,000 health workers and frontline government officers be given a second booster dose of Pfizer vaccine (i.e. fourth vaccine dose).



POLICY UPDATE

At the beginning of December, the authorities in Battambang province agreed with their Thai counterparts to allow Cambodians to cross to Thailand for seasonal work. This is based on the condition that they:

- are fully vaccinated
- have a work guarantee from a Thai employer and work permit card (for which migrants pay around 10,000 Baht)
- have a valid passport.

The workers would have to undergo a seven-day quarantine in Thailand (for which they pay 4,700 Thai Baht). Under this arrangement, migrants are allowed to cross to Thailand through Dourng POE twice a week.

Cambodian migrants returning from Thailand are tested for COVID-19 using an Antigen Rapid Diagnostic Test (Ag-RDT). Those who are fully vaccinated can continue their journey home. Migrants who are not vaccinated or who have received only one dose are referred to a quarantine upon crossing the border. Those tested positive for COVID-19 undergo treatment in Treatment Centres (TC).

Based on observations by IOM and UNFPA, many children and pregnant women were seen crossing the border and quarantined in Quarantine Centres (QC). The actual number of migrants staying in QCs has decreased as more migrants are receiving their COVID-19 vaccines while in Thailand.

There have been no further updates on the reopening of the border from Thai, Vietnamese and Lao authorities

LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

On 2 December 2021, National Day, the government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic officially launched the Lao PDR-Republic of China Bullet Train between Vientiane Capital and Kunming. The opening saw an increase in the flow of goods from China to the Lao People's Democratic Republic, particularly towards the Thanaleng Dry Port Special Economic Zone in Vientiane Capital. The Government ensured strict public health measures were in place, on the train, at each key terminal, for both freight and travelers.

The Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic continues with its preparations to open its borders to tourists from 10 nations in January 2022. It has identified three green tourist zones (Vientiane Capital City, Vang Vieng, and Luang Prabang), which will open in succession (Phase I, II and III respectively). Much effort has gone into ensuring public health measures are in place at the two international POEs that will receive visitors (Wattay International Airport and the Lao-Thailand Friendship Bridge I), tourist sites, and tourist operators.

Under the management and implementation of the National Taskforce on COVID-19 Response, Phase I has been approved as a pilot. Phase II will be approved based on experience during the previous phase.



POLICY UPDATE

Local and traditional POEs remained closed in December. International POEs are open and welcome returning Lao migrants, as well as the import and export of goods, diplomatic and health assistance under the management of National COVID-19 Response Taskforce. The average number of Lao returning

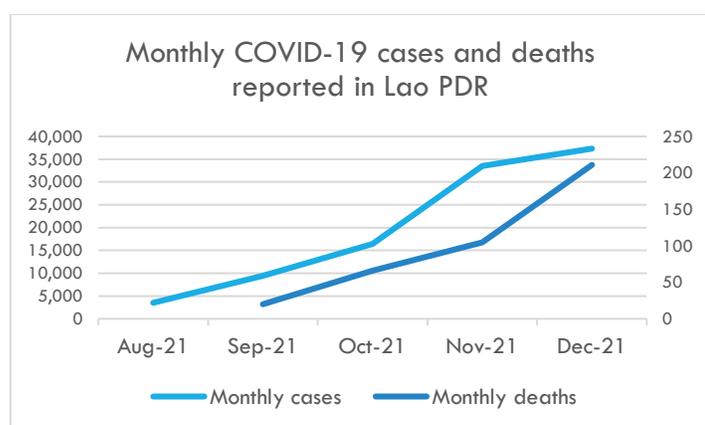
migrants is 10-15 people a day. Since the border with Thailand remained closed in December, there is no information on movements.

Migration Health Policy

To prepare inputs on Migration Health aspects to the development of IOM's Country Strategy, IOM's Migration Health Division conducted a technical consultation meeting with the Department of Primary Care and Health Promotion in December 2021 about the areas of cooperation between IOM Laos and the Lao Ministry of Health (MOH) during the next five years, particularly in terms of health management at POEs, both inbound and outbound, and migration policy.

COVID-19 CASES IN LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

The Lao MOH reported 37,329 new COVID-19 cases in December, bringing the cumulative total to 114,787. The total number of deaths has reached 409, of which 211 were reported in December (twice that reported in November).



COVID-19 VACCINE ROLLOUT

	Monthly total	Cumulative total
First dose	699,442	4,590,479
Second dose	479,015	3,643,020

MYANMAR

COVID-19 CASES IN MYANMAR

During December, 8,432 confirmed COVID-19 cases were reported in Myanmar and 164 related deaths.

	Monthly total	Cumulative total
Confirmed cases	8,432	530,834
Deaths	164	19,268

The test positivity rate during the first and last weeks of December was between 1.9 % to 1.8 %, with the total number of samples tested at a laboratory declining since November. Shan State, bordering China and Thailand in the east, experienced the highest case load in the country during November and December. The number of COVID-19 related deaths reduced from 405 in November.

POLICY UPDATE

On 16 December, MOH appended the additional information on the "Testing and Quarantine Requirements for International Travelers to Myanmar", which is a special arrangement for honourable guests and foreigners coming to Myanmar for essential business and projects. Travelers can submit their request for permission to enter five working days ahead of arrival to the Central Committee on COVID-19 Treatment, Prevention, and Control, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Health.

Currently the Myanmar Ministry of Health (MOH) allows entry into the country for those who have been fully vaccinated at least 14 days prior to arrival. The MOH recognizes seven different types of COVID-19 vaccine which are also recognised by the World Health Organization. All travelers arriving in Myanmar should present their completed vaccination record on arrival ahead of a seven-day quarantine. On 3 December, MOH added the COVID-19 vaccine COVAXINE (Baharat Biotech) to its existing list of seven approved vaccines, which are also on the World Health Organisation's Emergency Use List.

The Ministry of Transportation and Communication extended the effective date of the "Temporary Measures to Prevent COVID-19 Importation to Myanmar through Air Travel" from 30 November to 31 December, restricting the arrival of international, commercial passenger flights to the country.



COVID-19 VACCINE ROLLOUT

As of 28 December 2021, total 20,617,815 Myanmar people have received a COVID-19 vaccine including first dose and second dose since January 2021. According to vaccination data, 27.4 per cent of the total population in Myanmar have been fully vaccinated. The cumulative total administered in Myanmar stands at 35,680,066.

The Ministry of Health continue to expand the target groups in their vaccination programme based on vaccine availability. Vaccines are also available at private clinics, however it is worth noting that MOH data presented here may not reflect the accurate vaccination coverage of Myanmar because it does not include data from these private clinics. Data is not available to reflect coverage amongst vulnerable groups. Myanmar is not currently administering third doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.

ACTIVITY UPDATES FROM UN NETWORK ON MIGRATION MEMBERS



RESPONSE

IOM

IOM Cambodia

IOM and UNFPA have been supporting returning migrants with food provision and hygiene supplies upon their arrival. This is done in collaboration with the provincial authorities and provincial health departments to ensure that all migrants have access to COVID-19 prevention measures to minimize the risk of wider community outbreak. IOM was able to distribute over 5,000 dried food packages and hygiene kits to returning migrants in Oddor Meanchey, Bantey Meanchey and Battambang at POEs and in quarantine centres.



Figure 2: Distribution of food and hygiene kits to returning Cambodian migrants

IOM Myanmar

In December 2021, IOM in Myanmar supported meal costs to COVID-19 patients from IDP camps in Kachin State who were admitted to hospital.

In Rakhine State, a total of 36,190 persons received key COVID-19 health messages through risk communication and community engagement activities. IOM conducted 46 youth-led COVID-19 awareness sessions in 50 villages, and using its announcement car, was able to reach mobile populations, those residing in IDP camps, and ethnic minorities in Rakhine state.

IOM continues to assist the COVID-19 vaccination programme by supporting transportation costs among township health departments, thereby facilitating greater access to the vaccination centres by the community.

IOM Thailand

IOM's Migrant Health Division provided 100 relief packages to migrant families in Chiang Mai through the assistance of Human Rights and Development Foundation (HRDF). The relief package consisted of food and non-food items, hygiene kits, and essential personal protection equipment. Targeted areas were in Sarapee and Ban Chang districts.



Figure 3: Distribution of relief packages to migrant families in Chiang Mai who have been impacted by the recent wave of COVID-19 infections

COVID-19 Hotline 1422

IOM and its implementing partner Raks Thai Foundation are pleased to announce the continuation of the COVID-19 Hotline, available in three migrant languages: Myanmar, Khmer and Lao.

The hotline aims to increase access to information among the migrant community in Thailand about COVID-19 vaccine registration, certificates, Adverse-Effects Following Immunisation, and other COVID-19 related information and entitlements.

This activity is part of a project funded by the Australian Government, the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration and WHO.

IOM Laos

IOM Lao PDR held a consultation meeting this month with line ministries as it develops its Country Strategy 2022-2026. IOM and the Department of Immigration consulted on key cooperation areas during the next five years. Results of the consultation will contribute to the Ministry of Planning and Investment's High-Level Meeting between IOM Lao PDR and the government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Topics to be discussed include: 1) Human Resource Development; 2) Data-based Management and Control; 3) International Relations; 4) and Policy and Legislation Development under Immigration.

UNICEF

UNICEF continues its work with World Vision Thailand conducting Risk Communication and Community Engagement activities (RCCE), Health Case Management (screening, tracking, first aid

consultation, referral, and follow up until cases are closed). UNICEF continues to support Community Mass Rapid Testing in migrant communities, and also worked with partners to distribute essential non-food items and hygiene supplies to migrant communities affected by lockdown, in home or community isolation.

UNICEF and its partner Help Without Frontiers (Mae Sot) and One Sky (Sangklaburi) continue to support community isolation and home isolation measures. Volunteers supported community rapid test protocols and conducted risk communication and psychological first aid outreach. Through these implementing partners, UNICEF distributed soaps, alcohol gel and disinfectant to more than 5,200 children and families in migrant communities in Mae Sot and Sangklaburi.

Elsewhere, UNICEF and partners distributed hygiene supplies to curb the increase in COVID-19 cases in high-risk provinces including Chiang Mai, Bangkok, Narathiwat, Pattani, Samut Sakhon and Ayutthaya to more than 11,000 children and families in migrant communities through Raks Thai foundation to protect the most disadvantaged groups of children in these high-risk provinces facing ongoing COVID-19 outbreaks.

UN WOMEN

Under UN Women's Safe and Fair Programme, 400 dignity kits with the EAW services numbers and safety guideline in COVID-19 context (in Burmese) were distributed to women migrant workers and displaced persons from Myanmar in Mae Sot.

9 women migrant workers and migrant girls in Mae Sot received GBV-related services. The GBV protocol in time of COVID-19 and GBV case intake form were agreed upon between Mae Sot Hospital, Rights Beyond Border (RBB) and networks of NGOs working with women migrant workers in Mae Sot to ensure better coordinated response to violence against women migrant workers in time of the pandemic.