

# ► TRIANGLE in ASEAN Quarterly Briefing Note Myanmar



## October – December 2023

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### Context

Following the military coup on 1 February 2021, all ILO projects funded by development partners and implemented by the ILO in Myanmar have been reviewed and reprogrammed in consultation with individual donors and in accordance with the guidance of the UN Country Team. Under this guidance, all activities that would strengthen the military regime have been halted, and no regime representatives are accredited or invited to any meeting or event hosted by the ILO. Certain programming can continue if it meets a set of specific criteria, including meeting urgent humanitarian needs for the people of Myanmar. ILO and TRIANGLE in ASEAN continue to promote safe migration for migrant workers regardless of gender, sex, disability and other intersecting identities through community-based awareness, rights advocacy and service delivery, as well as other support in partnership with civil society and trade unions.

### Key developments

The ILO released [the report of Commission of Inquiry for Myanmar](#) on 4 October 2023. The report stated that the Commission has determined that Myanmar has violated the [Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 \(No.87\)](#). The violations curtail the basic civil liberties and trade unions rights by the military authorities. Additionally, Myanmar has been found to be in non-compliance with its obligations under the [Forced Labour Convention, 1930 \(No.29\)](#). The Commission was established by the [ILO Governing Body](#) in March 2022 in response to the military coup in February 2021 and their subsequent suppression of pro-democracy protests.

Since late October 2023, armed clashes between Myanmar's Armed Forces and Ethnic Resistance Organizations have intensified, with particularly intense fighting in northern Shan State, expanding to the Northwest, the Southeast and Rakhine State. The conflict has led to over 75 civilian deaths, 94 injuries, and over 200,000 people forcibly displaced across various regions, as reported on 15 November by the [United Nations in Myanmar](#). The total number of internally displaced persons as of 15 December has surpassed [2.1 million](#). Communication breakdowns further impede access to services, posing heightened protection risks according to the report on 27 November shared by the [United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights](#). According to the monitoring

group Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, as of 31 December 2023, [more than 4,200 people have been killed in the post-coup crackdown on the opposition](#), and the military regime persists in using airstrikes that target civilians.

During this quarter, Thailand's Ministry of Labour issued two announcements granting special permissions to Cambodian, Myanmar, Lao and Vietnamese migrant workers. The first announcement in mid-November, which took effect retrospectively from 1 October, gives migrant workers from the four countries whose employers had undertaken the first step to put their names on a registration list the right to continue to live and work until 30 September 2024. The second announcement, effective as of 14 November 2023, concerns migrant workers who entered under the Memorandum of Agreement, and whose work permits were expiring on 31 December 2023, the right to continue to work in Thailand until 30 April 2024 with the possibility to extend their stay in Thailand until April 2025.

In an effort to increase the inflow of foreign currencies to Myanmar, [as of 1 September 2023, the military regime is demanding that migrant workers remit \(a minimum\) 25 per cent of their foreign currency earnings](#). Non-compliant migrant workers will be barred from working overseas for three years after their work permit expires. To ensure the money is remitted, the [Myanmar Ministry of Labour announced](#) on 8 December, that a "Remittance Management System Mobile Application" for migrant workers in Thailand would be launched. Further, on 23 September, the Myanmar State Administration Council amended the Union Tax Law 2023. Effective from 1 October 2023, [a two per cent income tax is to be collected](#) from Myanmar migrant workers abroad. The tax must be paid in foreign currency. Tax collection has already started in Malaysia, according to an [announcement from the Myanmar Embassy in Malaysia](#) on 20 December. It is expected that the decisions on forced remittances and taxation will have far-reaching impacts on Myanmar migrant workers and might act as a push factor for irregular migration.

Since the military coup, the Central Bank of Myanmar has maintained a fixed exchange rate for foreign currencies. However, a recent [announcement](#) on 5 December signals a relaxation of this fixed rate system. The central bank allows authorized banks to decide foreign exchange rates based on market dynamics. This aims to stimulate exports and encourage domestic production, said the State Administration Council spokesperson.

## Main programme activities

On 5-6 October and 9-10 October in Yangon, TRIANGLE conducted two rounds of workshops: **Training of Trainers (TOT) on the Pre-departure and Safe Migration for Representatives from Civil Society Organizations and Trade Unions**. The participating organizations previously focused only on protecting labour rights of workers in Myanmar. However, due to the unstable political situation, an increasing number of workers are seeking to migrate overseas. Consequently, there is a growing demand for information and services related to migration. The training aimed to enhance the capacity and knowledge of participants on available migration-related resources, policies, and information related to key destination countries. In total, 21 representatives (W:14; M:7) from the Coordination Committee of Trade Unions, the All Burma Federation of Trade Unions, Lets Help Each Other, Future Light Centre, Solidarity Trade Union Myanmar, and the Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business joined the training.

TRIANGLE organized the **7th and 8th virtual monthly Networking Meetings** with CSOs and Labour Organizations on 24 October and 17 November 2023. A total of 27 representatives (W:18; M:9) from across Myanmar joined the meetings. The meetings focused on the current migration situation, including the passport application processes and other policy changes from various areas across Myanmar. The discussion also covered information to support internally displaced persons and migrant workers in the areas of ongoing armed conflicts

in Northern Shan State and preparation for an International Migrants Day Event.

The first ever **Myanmar Domestic Workers Association** was formed in October with TRIANGLE support via partner **Three Good Spoons** (TGS). Domestic worker leaders held a workshop and foundational meeting on 25-



Representatives of Domestic Workers Association at the organizational development workshop on 27 October in Yangon.

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27 October. Twenty domestic workers and members of the new Association finalized their Terms of Reference, developed the Association's advocacy and activity work plan for the next two years and elected the Association's committee. During the meeting, ILO presented good practices of domestic worker associations from other countries in the region and beyond. Serikat Buruh Migrant Indonesia shared their experience of running the Indonesia domestic workers association in

Hong Kong and Indonesia. Moreover, the domestic workers also learned about the ILOs [Forced Labour Convention, 1930 \(No. 29\)](#), the [Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 \(No. 87\)](#), and the [Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 \(No. 183\)](#). TRIANGLE celebrated with an article about the establishment of the Myanmar Domestic Workers Association, which was [published on the UN Myanmar website](#) (also in [Myanmar language](#)) and on its social media pages ([Facebook](#); [Twitter](#)) on 7 December. ILO Myanmar also amplified by sharing the link through its Facebook page.



Campaign event on 16 Days Activism on violence against women on 21 November in Keng Tung organized by Mawk Kon Local Development Organization.

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TRIANGLE's partner, the Keng Tung Migrant Worker Resource Centre (MRC), organized an **event to mark the 16 Days of Activism Campaign to eliminate gender-based violence**, in collaboration with six ethnic women's groups on 21 November in Keng Tung. In total, 65 participants (W: 56; M:8 and Other: 1) attended the event. During the event, women's groups raised key messages on gender-based violence and violence against women, which were developed during the TRIANGLE 4th Regional Migrant Women's Group Meeting (see ASEAN regional QBN). They also showcased ethnic cultures and the products resulting from the livelihood skills training provided by the Mawk Kon Local Development Organization.

Three Good Spoons organized two discussion sessions on 2 and 9 December 2023, as part of the **16 Days of Activism Campaign to eliminate Gender-based violence**. These sessions discussed women's rights, awareness on elimination of violence against women, and the application of [ILOs Forced Labour Convention, 1930 \(No. 29\)](#), and reached 30 migrant workers in Yangon.

TRIANGLE supported a series of International Migrants Day events through its partners. This included the **online International Migrants Day Event** for migrant workers and their families on 3 December along with CSOs and Labour Organizations in Myanmar and ILO's Ship to Shore project. The theme of the event was "Let's reaffirm our commitment to safe and dignified migration for all". Six migrant workers shared their migration experiences and

ILO presented policy updates on regularization for migrant workers. The event was joined by 344 participants, including migrant workers from countries of destination, their families, community members and representatives of CSOs and labour organizations.



TRIANGLE collected **six stories from migrant workers, both returnees and current migrants**, through implementing partners. Each migrant worker's story was posted on the ILO Myanmar Facebook page from 18 to 23 December, amplifying the voices of migrant workers as part of the International Migrants Day celebration. The stories can be found below:

- Story 1: [Nan Thida](#)
- Story 2: [Aik Leng](#)
- Story 3: [Sai Lone](#)
- Story 4: [Zalat](#)
- Story 5: [Shine Wanna](#)
- Story 6: [Moe Moe](#)

TRIANGLE's partner, the **Mawk Kon Local Development Organization**, organized an event on 4 December to commemorate **International Migrants Day** in Keng Tung with 78 participants (W:53; M:25), including potential and returned migrant workers, families of migrant workers, community leaders, women and youth. During the event, an art competition was held to showcase the beneficial impacts and positive contributions that migrant workers have on their families, communities and the overall development of the country.

On 9 December, TRIANGLE supported a virtual **cross-border networking meeting between Myanmar and Thailand CSOs, organized by HomeNet Thailand and Three Good Spoons Myanmar** in an effort to foster more cooperation between domestic workers groups. Seventeen women representatives from HomeNet, the Network of Domestic Workers Thailand, the Myanmar Domestic Workers Association and Three Good Spoons joined the meeting. Domestic workers' organizations exchanged ideas about possible areas of collaboration, such as pre-departure support for potential migrant domestic workers, reintegration services for returnees and collaborative advocacy on cross-border issues relevant to domestic workers. They also shared insights about the background, structure, legal status and advocacy issues of their organizations.

**Due to the escalation of armed conflicts in Northern Shan State**, many people, including local and migrant workers across Myanmar and foreign workers in towns along the border with China, fled to Lashio throughout November and December. The majority of them used jungle paths to avoid the fighting and the military security check points. They walked for days without food in order to reach to Lashio. Monasteries and churches provided food and shelter to the internally displaced persons. In Lashio, TRIANGLE's CSO implementing partner, **Northern Shan State Baptist Convention supported about 1,500 IDPs and migrant workers** (40% women) with food, shelter and other emergency assistance from October to December.

## ► Upcoming activities and key dates (January – March 2024)

| Date            | Event                                                                                                                                    | Location                                                       | Attendees                                                                                                                  | Purpose                                                                                                  |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| January - March | Monthly civil society and labour organizations networking meetings                                                                       | Online                                                         | Representatives of project implementing partners, Network of CSOs and Labour Organizations                                 | To update and coordinate on the migration situation and policies of destination countries.               |
| January - March | Deliver support services to migrant workers and their families                                                                           | Shan State,<br>Mandalay Region<br>Yangon Region<br>Kayin State | Potential and returned women and men migrant workers and communities of origin                                             | To provide support services and safe migration awareness information.                                    |
| 5 February      | Work planning meeting                                                                                                                    | Online                                                         | Representatives of project implementing partners, Network of CSOs and Labour Organizations and other relevant stakeholders | To present TRIANGLE achievements of 2023 and discuss the workplan for 2024.                              |
| March           | Capacity building of Myanmar women migrant workers at the annual Women's Exchange Get Together in Chiang Mai organized by MAP Foundation | Chiang Mai                                                     | Women migrant workers                                                                                                      | To facilitate a session on decent work and safe migration for Myanmar women migrant workers in Thailand. |

## ► Media Coverage

| Date        | Title                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Media Source                 |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 26 October  | <a href="#">Myanmar's military reaches into migrant pockets</a>                                                                                                                                               | East Asia Forum              |
| 26 October  | <a href="#">Migrant workers including Myanmar workers are allowed to work till 2025: Thai Govt.</a>                                                                                                           | Eleven Myanmar               |
| 28 October  | <a href="#">Myanmar junta stealing from desperate migrant pockets</a>                                                                                                                                         | Asia Times                   |
| 6 November  | <a href="#">Women saved from Thai factory were confirmed to room, barred from leaving</a>                                                                                                                     | Radio Free Asia              |
| 15 November | <a href="#">Migrants get more time to renew visas</a>                                                                                                                                                         | Bangkok Post                 |
| 6 December  | <a href="#">Empowering Domestic Workers: The Inaugural Journey of the First Myanmar Domestic Worker Association</a>                                                                                           | UN Myanmar                   |
| 10 December | <a href="#">MOL Minister of Labour addresses essential MOU issues with Myanmar workers in Thailand</a>                                                                                                        | MOI                          |
| 15 December | <a href="#">Myanmar Embassies in some countries start collecting income tax from Myanmar Expatriates</a>                                                                                                      | CNI                          |
| 15 December | <a href="#">Junta Targets Overseas Myanmar Workers for Income Tax Collection</a>                                                                                                                              | Burma News International     |
| 15 December | <a href="#">Organizations on migrant workers urged to cancel the mandatory transfer of 25 percent of basic wages</a>                                                                                          | Myanmar Labour News          |
| 20 December | <a href="#">Migrant workers protest in Thailand as Myanmar regime enforces new income tax</a>                                                                                                                 | Myanmar Now                  |
| 20 December | <a href="#">Myanmar workers in Malaysia required to pay income tax</a>                                                                                                                                        | Global News Light of Myanmar |
| 29 December | <a href="#">A labour union official called the new rules, which require migrants to pay income tax before receiving certificates of identification needed to work in Thailand, "unjust" and "exploitation</a> | Myanmar Now                  |
| 30 December | <a href="#">New Rules, New Fears for Myanmar's Migrants</a>                                                                                                                                                   | Reporting Asean              |

## Myanmar at a glance

Population: 55.2 million

Labour Force: 23.2 million

Source: ILOSTAT, 2023

## Migrant workers in Thailand

291,404 MoU migrant workers  
(Women = 115,036 Men= 176,368)

Section 64 migrant workers = 1,428  
(Women= 930 Men= 498)

1,433,317 migrant workers under the Cabinet Resolution on 7 February 2023 (amnesty programme)  
(Women= 631,228 Men= 802,089)

Source: Office of Foreign Workers Administration, Department of Employment, Ministry of Labour, Thailand (October 2023).

The 7 February 2023 Cabinet Resolution extends the deadline for migrant workers who have obtained a work permit, which expires on 13 February 2023 and have not completed visa renewal. The new deadline was 15 May 2023. The latest 8 August 2023 Cabinet Resolution is reflected in these figures.

## Migrants in Malaysia

Total: 350,605 migrants  
(Women=99,232 / Men=251,373)

Source: UNDESA, 2020

TRIANGLE in ASEAN delivers assistance directly to migrant workers and their communities in Myanmar through a Migrant Worker Resource Centre (MRC). The MRC, managed in partnership with a civil society organization, is based in Keng Tung. In addition, TRIANGLE provides MRC-like services through CSOs and individuals in Mandalay, Shan State, Tanintharyi, Taunggyi and Yangon.

Since the start of the programme through to end 2022, TRIANGLE in ASEAN reached 44,219 migrant workers (46 per cent women) through Myanmar MRCs.

## Background information

Labour migration has long been an important livelihood strategy for the people of Myanmar. By migrating, families and their communities have been able to survive periods of severe economic and political hardship. It is recorded that as much as 10 per cent of the labour force is working abroad, with approximately 2.2 million Myanmar migrant workers employed in Thailand and Malaysia alone (Ministry of Labour Thailand, March 2023 and Ministry of Human Resources, Malaysia, September 2019). According to the World Bank, an estimated US\$1.5 billion was remitted by migrants in 2023, approximately 2 per cent of the Myanmar 2023 GDP ([World Bank, 2023](#)), which does not include the millions that are informally remitted through brokers or hand-carried back home to family members.

Due to the expensive, complex and time-consuming procedures required for formal recruitment through licensed agencies, many migrants continue to seek the assistance of unlicensed brokers or go abroad through irregular channels. The social networks that facilitate these movements were established long before any management systems had been developed to regulate labour migration. The involvement of unscrupulous actors and the lack of accurate and impartial information can place migrants at risk of abuse and exploitation. For some migrants, this is the only avenue available to access livelihoods and safety.

In 2019, [according to the previous Government](#), Myanmar was sending workers through 273 licensed overseas employment agencies to 18 destination countries.

In October 2022, the de-facto authorities enacted a "Registration of Associations law". The law requires that all associations as defined by the law - NGOs and INGOs - be registered with the authorities by 27 December 2022. Under the law, operations without registration are illegal. The law added more onerous registration requirements, including multiple approvals requiring at least 40 per cent of organizations' board members to be Myanmar nationals. Registration of organizations may be declined if there is reason to suspect "any harm to national sovereignty, law and order, security and ethnic unity." The law does not apply to the ILO, labour organizations or employer organizations established under other laws in force. [Media reports suggest](#) that this law means that aid agencies need to decide whether to operate illegally or register with the de-facto authorities, which some fear legitimizes their coup. Regular migration from Myanmar to Japan resumed in early 2022, and regular labour migration to Thailand via the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) resumed on 10 May 2022.

- Key partners**
- Mawk Kon Local Development Organization
  - Northern Shan State Baptist Convention
  - Confederation of Trade Unions Myanmar
  - Tanintharyi Karen Peace Support Initiative
  - Three Good Spoons Training Centre
  - Network of labour organizations and civil society
- Target sites**
- Yangon, Mandalay, Keng Tung, Taunggyi, Lashio, Dawei
- Focal point**
- Wai Hnin Po, National Programme Coordinator, [pow@ilo.org](mailto:pow@ilo.org)

**TRIANGLE in ASEAN** extends the cooperation between the **International Labour Organization (ILO)**, the **Australian Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT)** and **Trade and Global Affairs Canada (GAC)** on protecting migrant workers and enhancing development opportunities. TRIANGLE aims to ensure that the benefits of labour migration are equally realized by men and women migrant workers, employers and governments. In shifting emphasis towards leveraging the development potential of migration, TRIANGLE aims to shape labour migration opportunities to support inclusive and sustainable growth in the ASEAN Economic Community. TRIANGLE engages institutionally with ASEAN and focuses on delivering in six countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam).



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