

# ► TRIANGLE in ASEAN Quarterly Briefing Note Myanmar



## April – June 2024

### 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 authorities have been halted, and no military authority's 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

Throughout April, clashes and armed conflicts led to an **influx of Myanmar nationals through the border at Myawaddy and Mae Sot**. Estimates indicated that [more than 3,000 Myanmar people](#) settled in a temporary shelter in Thailand, and were [repatriated](#) later when the fighting calmed down. Official border crossings in the area were [temporarily shut](#), affecting flows of migrant workers who were required to cross the border in order to fulfil their immigration obligations. Procedures for Myanmar migrant workers entering Thailand via the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) through air travel only were set up to address the issue, though this adds costs to migrant workers' journeys.

During this quarter, the "conscription drive" by the Myanmar military authorities, and several accompanying measures, had a severe impact on migrant workers. In early May, the authorities said that they would [no longer allow men to migrate for employment](#) as [large numbers of women and men were leaving the country](#) following the February 2024 start of a mandatory conscription of men aged 18-35 and women aged 18-27 to serve in the armed forces for two years. In May, a revised instruction narrowed down the age bracket and banned men from overseas work if they are aged between 23-31 years. This re-allowed those men under the age of 23 and over the age of 31 years to migrate for work. In early June, the military authorities announced that they would [no longer process passport conversions](#), which

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would allow Myanmar nationals to convert their passport for the purpose of tourism to a passport for work. Thailand, which is facing a shortage of workers, allows Myanmar migrant workers extension of work permits. In April however, Thailand announced that [those whose MOU tenures had reached four years had to leave the country for at least 30 days and apply for the extension to their stay from Myanmar](#), which may make them subject to conscription. Affected MOU migrant workers had until 30 April to depart, or they would be fined and charged for overstaying.

Thai news reported a **major increase of Myanmar citizens, especially youth, who migrated irregularly to Thailand**. Migrants who had been arrested primarily reported that [forced conscription in Myanmar was their key incentive](#) for migration. Some reported paying up to [45,000 baht](#) (US\$ 1,320) to be smuggled into Thailand.

On 10 July, UNICEF Myanmar released the [Humanitarian Situation Report No. 6, covering the 6-month period up to 30 June 2024](#). The report highlighted a significant increase in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Myanmar, rising from 2.8 million to nearly 3.2 million. This surge is primarily due to ongoing conflicts across various regions of the country and seasonal flooding in Kachin, which are both worsening the already severe humanitarian needs.

At the 112th session of the International Labour Conference (ILC) in Geneva (3-14 June 2024), the **ILO Governing Body addressed the follow-up to the [Commission of Inquiry's report on Myanmar's non-observance of ILO Conventions No. 87 and No. 29](#)**, as well as resolutions from previous sessions. The [351th Session of the Governing Body](#) deplored the continued lack of progress towards democracy and the restoration of the democratically elected government, notably over three years past the military coup. It called on military authorities to cease all violence, arbitrary arrests, and detentions, particularly of trade unionists and labour activists, and to release those detained. The Governing Body emphasized the need for Myanmar to ensure the rights of workers' and employers' organizations in a secure environment, and to implement the Commission's recommendations, including revoking forced recruitment to the military.

On 11 June, global union federations and other trade union activists, convened during the ILC in Geneva to [urge ILO to invoke Article 33 of its Constitution against Myanmar](#). This call comes in response to the military authorities in Myanmar neglecting to implement recommendations issued following an ILO Commission of Inquiry's discovery of grave breaches in Forced Labour and Freedom of Association standards.

The [United States 2024 Trafficking in Persons report](#) was released on 25 June. Myanmar remained on Tier 3. It concludes that Myanmar does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so.

## Main programme activities



A Group photo of Gender Equality and Disability Inclusion Training in Yangon, 22 April 2024.  
@ILO

training. Following the training, TRIANGLE conducted a session with the MRCs and other implementing partners,

On 22-24 April, TRIANGLE organized a **Gender Equality and Disability Inclusion Training** in Yangon. 32 participants (W:24; M:8) from 17 organizations, including representatives from Migrant Worker Resource Centres (MRCs), trade unions, CSO implementing partners, the CSOs and Labour Organizations Network for Migrants, and Organizations of People with Disabilities (OPDs) joined the

aiming to reinforce principles such as ensuring beneficiaries' safety, obtaining consent and maintaining confidentiality during data collection for reporting purposes. The meeting also revisited the monitoring forms and promoted inclusion of different sexual orientations and gender identities and persons with disabilities. Additionally, barriers to access services were identified, and changes proposed to foster inclusive behaviours within communities.

Tanintharyi Karen Peace Support Initiative (TKPSI) in Tanintharyi Region, conducted a **Safe Migration Training of Trainers on 9-10 May 2024**. In total 30 community leaders and volunteers (W:17; M:13) from Dawei, Yae Phyu, Theyet Chaung and Laung Long townships were trained. Further, TKPSI organized a bakery training for 12 young potential and returned migrant workers (W:8; M:4) from 17-19 June. The latter training provided the practical skills of making various pastry aimed to improve the economic opportunities for local communities. Moreover, TKPSI conducted 19 community trainings on safe migration in various villages and transit places in Dawei. TKPSI reached a total of 507 potential migrant workers and their families (W:336; M:171).

The MRC run by the CSO partner Mawk Kon in Keng Tung, organized a **Cross-Border Networking Meeting** on 28 May in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in collaboration with the FOCUS Foundation. They brought together 48 participants (W:26, M:21; SOGIE:1), representing 19 local CSOs from Eastern Shan State and Northern Thailand. Participants discussed the current migration situation on the Thai Myanmar border, exchanged insights on organizational challenges and successes in cross-border collaboration for safe migration, identified available mechanisms, and developed a joint cross-border work plan on protection of migrant workers.

On 12 June, TRIANGLE's MRC partner, the Confederation of Trade Unions Myanmar (CTUM) in Phaya Thonzue (Three Pagoda Pass), conducted a **Training for Local Ethnic Youth Leaders** with a view to enhance data collection of migrant workers to increase their protection at the Thai Myanmar border. In total, 13 participants attended the session (W:5; M:7, SOGIE:1). Additionally, CTUM continued delivering safe migration information to migrant workers leaving for Thailand through Phaya Thonzue, reaching 33,667 individuals (W:13,666; M:20,001) from April to June.

On 22-23 June, The Mawk Kon MRC in Keng Tung organized an **Exchange Trip for Migrant Women's Groups** to Chiang Mai. A total of 14 women leaders of migrant women's groups in Keng Tung, along with Keng Tung MRC staff, participated in the trip and visited the Centre for Girls Foundation, Women's Economic Empowerment Learning Centre in Chiang Kong, Thailand with the purpose to provide the migrant women's groups with exposure to and learning from the activities of women's organizations in Thailand, fostering networking opportunities and enhancing their livelihood product development for marketing purposes.



Celebration of Domestic Workers Day in Yangon, 16 June 2024.

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On 16 June, TRIANGLE organized a **Domestic Workers Day** event in collaboration with the Myanmar CSOs and the Labour Organizations Network for Migrants in Yangon. 196 participants (W:158; M:38) attended the event in person and an additional 33 (W:20; M:13) joined online. The event **featured a song honouring domestic workers** (see link

below) and experience sharing by two domestic workers. A panel discussion included representatives from

employers of domestic workers; the Fifth Pillar, a legal aid organization; Three Good Spoons Training Centre; and the Myanmar Domestic Workers Association. The panel addressed the challenges faced by domestic workers, services available to them, and their access to legal protection. In addition, TRIANGLE launched a social media campaign starting on June 17, featuring song performances and stories of both domestic workers and their employers, shared on the **ILO Myanmar Facebook page** (see links below). The campaign aimed to raise awareness about the contributions and challenges of domestic workers, fostering greater understanding and support within the community. The following stories were published on Facebook:

- 1) [Ma Chaw Su, a domestic worker and trainer of domestic worker](#)
- 2) [Khin Khin Kyaw, an employer of domestic worker](#)
- 3) [San Mya Aye, a domestic worker](#)
- 4) [Naw Eh Tamalar, a returned domestic worker](#)
- 5) [Domestic worker song performance](#)

During this quarter, TRIANGLE MRC partner, **Three Good Spoons**, organized a comprehensive series of **trainings for domestic workers both at the MRC and online**. These sessions included training topics covering safe migration, financial literacy, the SaverAsia app, effective communication, occupational health and safety, digital literacy, first aid, gender equality, and women's empowerment. Additionally, cooking skills training and a basic English course were provided. In total, 180 prospective migrant domestic workers (W:167; M:13) both transversal and sectoral skills. The programme aimed to equip participants to be able to enhance their safety, financial stability and overall well-being in their future roles.

Also, during this quarter, TRIANGLE organized two virtual monthly meetings of the **ILO Labour Migration Projects' Implementing Partners, and member organizations of Myanmar CSOs and Labour Organizations Network for Migrants** on 20 May and 28 June 2024. In total, 26 CSO and labour organization representatives (W:16; M:10) joined. The meetings focused on updating each other on migration-related information and security conditions across various regions of Myanmar and sharing information about upcoming activities.

► **Upcoming activities and key dates (July – September 2024)**

| Date             | Event                                                                                                                   | Location          | Attendees                                                                                                     | Purpose                                                                                                                                                        |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| July - September | Monthly meetings of the Myanmar CSOs and Labour Organizations Network for Migrants                                      | Online            | Representatives of TRIANGLE implementing partners, Myanmar CSOs and Labour Organizations Network for Migrants | To update and coordinate on the migration situation and policies of destination countries                                                                      |
| July-September   | Capacity Building on Migration Knowledge for Community Leaders' Network and Organizations for Persons with Disabilities | Online/ in-person | Community leaders in different states and regions                                                             | To train community leaders on migration knowledge in order to mitigate exploitation and abuses and increase support for migrant workers at the community level |



|           |                                                                                                                                                     |        |                                                               |                                                                                        |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3 October | Consultation with Civil Society, Labour Organizations and Relevant Stakeholders to Advocate for Regional Migration Policies (to contribute to AFML) | Online | Civil society, labour organizations and relevant stakeholders | To consult and advocate for regional migration policies to contribute towards the AFML |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

## ► Media Coverage

| Date     | Title                                                                                                                            | Media Source                    |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 April  | <a href="#">Stricter Work Permit Rules Makes It Harder for Myanmar Citizens to Gain Legal Status in Thailand</a>                 | Burma News International        |
| 1 April  | <a href="#">Myanmar junta compiling lists for military service in Karen State</a>                                                | Mizzima News                    |
| 11 April | <a href="#">Millions in Myanmar face economic 'free fall' due to war, UN finds</a>                                               | Washington Post                 |
| 15 April | <a href="#">Myanmar's New Taxation and Conscription Policies Are likely to Increase Irregular Migration</a>                      | The Diplomat                    |
| 19 April | <a href="#">ASEAN calls for halt to violence on Thai Myanmar border</a>                                                          | Nikkei Asia                     |
| 21 April | <a href="#">In Myanmar, young people are fleeing the country or hastily arranging shotgun weddings to avoid conscription</a>     | ABC News                        |
| 23 April | <a href="#">NUG appeals to Thai Government for assistance</a>                                                                    | Mizzima News                    |
| 3 May    | <a href="#">Myanmar junta bans men from overseas work in bid to stymie draft Dodgers</a>                                         | The Diplomat                    |
| 14 May   | <a href="#">Workers' Rights in Myanmar should be respected</a>                                                                   | Mizzima News                    |
| 16 May   | <a href="#">Myanmar workers among fastest-growing group of foreign workers in Japan as society ages</a>                          | Channel News Asia               |
| 20 May   | <a href="#">Myanmar Shoppers Report Hyperinflation as Kyat Plunges Past 4,000/Dollar</a>                                         | The Irrawaddy News              |
| 22 May   | <a href="#">Further 152 new EPS manufacturing workers sent to ROK</a>                                                            | The Global New Light of Myanmar |
| 29 May   | <a href="#">Myanmar embassy in Malaysia warns workers to keep documents amid nationwide operations</a>                           | Eleven Media                    |
| 31 May   | <a href="#">Burmese workers in Thailand fear getting drafted under new visa restrictions</a>                                     | Radio Free Asia                 |
| 7 June   | <a href="#">Thai Embassy in Yangon processes up to 400 migrant worker visa applications daily</a>                                | Eleven Media                    |
| 7 June   | <a href="#">Myanmar's junta halts passport conversation as Thailand mulls worker amnesty</a>                                     | Radio Free Asia                 |
| 12 June  | <a href="#">Soaring living costs to curb Myanmar's Growth, World Bank Says</a>                                                   | Bloomberg                       |
| 16 June  | <a href="#">Over 26,000 undocumented foreign workers, including 20,111 Myanmar nationals, arrested in Thailand within a week</a> | Eleven Media                    |
| 19 June  | <a href="#">'Like slaves': Myanmar workers trafficked to Laos scam hub</a>                                                       | Frontier Myanmar                |

## Myanmar at a glance

Population: 55.2 million

Labour Force: 23.2 million

Source: ILOSTAT, 2024

## Migrant workers in Thailand

262,213 MoU migrant workers  
(Women = 101,192 / Men= 161,021)

Section 64 migrant workers = 2,509  
(Women= 1,744 / Men= 765)

1,364,828 migrant workers under the 7 February 2023  
Cabinet Resolution  
(Women= 605,254 / Men= 759,574)

676,515 migrant workers under the 3 October 2023  
Cabinet Resolution

(Women = 286,149 / Men = 390,366)

Source: Department of Employment, Ministry of  
Labour, Thailand (February 2024).

Migrant workers under the Thai cabinet resolutions have been regularized by invoking Section 63/2 of the Thai Royal Ordinance "Concerning the Management of Employment of Migrant Workers". Each cabinet resolution may outline eligibility of migrant workers to be regularized as well as details of the regularization procedures.

## Migrant workers in Malaysia

Total: 141,873 migrants  
(Women=30,509/ Men=111,364)

Source: Ministry of Human Resources, Malaysia,  
September 2023)

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

Since the start of the programme up until end 2023, TRIANGLE in ASEAN provided direct services to 47,102 migrant workers (48 per cent women) and reached another 122,086 migrant workers (48.9 per cent women) with information services 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 estimated that more than 10 per cent of the Myanmar labour force is working abroad, with approximately 2.4 million Myanmar documented migrant workers employed in Thailand and Malaysia alone (Ministry of Labour Thailand, February 2024 and Ministry of Human Resources, Malaysia, September 2023). 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](#)). This estimate 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. The military coup took place on 1 February 2021. Post-COVID, 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.

In October 2022, the military authorities enacted a Registration of Associations Law, requiring all associations as defined by the law (NGOs and INGOs) to register with the military authorities by 27 December 2022. Under the law, operations without registration are illegal. The law added onerous registration requirements, including multiple approvals and 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](#) aid agencies therefore need to decide whether to operate illegally or to register with the military authorities, which some fear legitimizes the coup.

- 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
  - Myanmar CSOs and Labour Organizations Network for Migrants
- Target sites**
- Yangon, Mandalay, Keng Tung, Taunggyi, Lashio, Dawei, Three Pagoda Pass
- 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 Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)** 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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