International Labour Organization

Australian Aid

TRIANGLE in ASEAN Quarterly Briefing Note Myanmar

April – June 2025

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. TRIANGLE activities are implemented exclusively through civil society and non-state actors, in line with UN Country Team and ILO guidance. On 5 June 2025, the International Labour Conference at its 113th Session in Geneva voted to invoke Article 33 of the ILO Constitution. This further limit engagement with the military authorities to the implementation of specific Commission of Inquiry recommendations but does not significantly impact TRIANGLE's current or planned activities, as cooperation with state institutions has already ceased.

Key developments

Myanmar continues to face a multifaceted humanitarian crisis driven by escalating armed conflict, the lingering impacts of the 28 March 2025 earthquake, and the onset of seasonal monsoon floods. The 7.7-magnitude earthquake, which resulted in over 3,700 deaths and damaged more than 640 health facilities, has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), as of 27 June 2025, over 3.5 million people remain internally displaced due to ongoing clashes between the military authorities and non-state armed groups, with more than 110,000 newly displaced since late May in areas such as Bago, Magway, Sagaing, and Shan State. As of late June 2025, according to UNOCHA, flooding due to the monsoon impacts over 35,500 individuals in Kachin, Rakhine State and Shan State, while displacement camps report rising cases of waterborne diseases. Humanitarian access remains severely restricted due to interference by the military authorities, including diversion of aid to military authorities controlled areas such as Nay Pyi Taw. Although humanitarian actors reached approximately 1.5 million people, 27 percent of the target population in early 2025, as of mid-year, the 2025 **Humanitarian Response Plan is only 12 per cent funded**, while the Earthquake Response Addendum has reached just 36.5 per cent of its funding target.

Following the 7.7 magnitude earthquake that struck central Myanmar on 28 March 2025, the ILO conducted a preliminary employment impact assessment on the country's labour market with an estimated 3.5 million workers residing in the affected areas. The resulting loss of livelihoods represents a potential earnings loss of US$36.8 million per day or US$9.6 billion annually, if these workers are unable to secure alternative or quality employment. In the absence of basic social protection mechanisms, many displaced workers face heightened risks of falling into poverty, engaging in informal work, or being exposed to exploitative practices, including child and forced labour.

Although the military authorities declared a temporary ceasefire from 2-30 April 2025 to facilitate the earthquake response efforts, military operations continued. The military authorities carried out 207 airstrikes and 24 artillery attacks across multiple regions, resulting in over 105 civilian deaths during the declared ceasefire period. Meanwhile, clashes between the Arakan Army (AA) and the military authorities escalated, with the AA seizing key territories in central and southern Rakhine State. On 22 May, the AA imposed travel restrictions on young people attempting to leave Rakhine State, citing military service requirements to strengthen its own forces.

Myanmar's economy continues its downward spiral, with the June 2025 World Bank's Economic Monitor projecting a 2.5 per cent GDP contraction for the fiscal year 2025-2026. Inflation remained at more than 30 per cent annually, with staple food prices surging by 45- 60 per cent in urban markets since January 2025. On 30 June, the Myanmar Central Bank abruptly blacklisted 197 export firms, including major agricultural and garment exporters, for allegedly failing to repatriate US$320 million in foreign earnings. This measure has frozen critical trade operations, with industry groups warning of mass layoffs and further shortages of imported fuel and medicines.

On 25 April 2025, the **European Union intensified its economic pressure on Myanmar's military authorities** by unanimously voting to extend its sanctions package until 30 April 2026. The renewed measures uphold stringent arms embargoes and asset freezes targeting 106 entities and individuals linked to the military authorities, including senior military officials, state-owned enterprises, and companies that finance military operations. The sanctions were further expanded to include three additional mining conglomerates accused of generating revenue for the military authorities through rare earth mineral exports. In a parallel development, the **United States enacted a temporary entry ban on Myanmar nationals** (among other nationalities) effective 4 June 2025, citing unspecified "national security concerns" in a presidential proclamation.

On 5 June 2025, **the International Labour Conference at its 113th Session in Geneva voted overwhelmingly to invoke Article 33 of the ILO Constitution**, as the strongest enforcement mechanism against Myanmar. This historic decision is only the third application of Article 33 in ILO history. Another instance also applied to Myanmar in 2000. Responding to the military authorities' ongoing and egregious violations of the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), and the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87), the Resolution calls on all 187 ILO member States to undertake urgent reviews of their trade and economic ties with Myanmar to prevent the use of forced labour, enforce enhanced due diligence by companies sourcing from the country, and support robust UN monitoring of labour rights abuses. The decision will likely have a global impact, prompting major international brands to launch supply chain audits and may trigger the withdrawal of several multinational firms from partnerships linked to the military. With quarterly reporting now mandated to the UN Security Council, the Resolution elevates Myanmar's labour rights crisis to a matter of international concern and reinforces the ILO's commitment to upholding fundamental rights at work.

As of June 2025, **nearly 50,000 Myanmar migrant workers who had already secured overseas job offers are unable to depart due to the military authorities' overhaul of the Overseas Worker Identification Card**

(OWIC) procedures and the **introduction of strict quotas on migrant worker deployments**. The Ministry of Labour, under the military authorities, still recovering from the damage caused by the 28 March earthquake, had temporarily suspended OWIC issuance and later resumed it in March, requiring all applicants to reapply under more stringent procedures. However, processing delays are preventing timely departures. Each licensed overseas employment agency is now limited to sending 50 workers per month to Thailand, and 15 workers per month to Japan, with even tighter restrictions for destinations such as Singapore and South Korea. As a result, migrant workers – despite having received interview clearances and visas – are facing job cancellations, increasing financial insecurity and debt and distress.

Main programme activities

In response to the 28 March earthquake, the ILO mobilized **immediate emergency assistance**, including support to workers' and employers' organizations, and deployed fact-finding missions to hard-hit regions such as Mandalay and Sagaing. **Emergency employment programmes, supported by TRIANGLE community outreach workers and CSO partners in Mandalay and Shan State,** are delivering emergency assistance in the absence of formal support. In April, TRIANGLE's outreach workers in Taunggyi supported 299 households, consisting of 897 people (75 per cent women) in eight villages. In May, TRIANGLE's skills development partner, Parami Development Network, provided emergency cash assistance to 543 households, including more than 1,600 people (60 per cent women) in Pin Laung. The ILO also mobilized emergency employment support, staff donations, and donor engagement for longer-term recovery. This includes cash-for-work opportunities linked to small-scale infrastructure reconstruction, with fair wages and a focus on occupational safety and health. These efforts aim to create decent jobs while supporting community recovery and resilience.

On 30 April and 9 June, TRIANGLE held **virtual network meetings with civil society groups, workers' organizations and trade unions** to discuss Myanmar's worsening labour migration situation (April: W:11; M:6; June: W:18; M:6, including one person with a disability). Participants highlighted how the military authorities' restrictions are making it harder for people to migrate legally, with the Ministry of Labour refusing to issue Overseas Worker Identification Cards (OWICs), even for migrants under the MOU. Young people aged 18 to 35 are especially targeted by these measures. As a result, many workers are forced to rely on irregular channels, paying an additional US$1,000–1,200 to cross borders. Movement is also heavily restricted by military checkpoints, particularly in Shan State, which limit travel for people from regions affected by the intense armed conflict and military recruitment, namely: Sagaing, Magway, Rakhine State and Ayeyarwady. Meanwhile, passport offices frequently reject applications for "Passport for Job" (PJ type) documents, closing off legal pathways for job seekers. Facing these barriers, more workers are considering jobs in the domestic work sector in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States, while online scam centers continue to operate and expand in border towns, despite repeated Thai crackdowns. Rising reports of theft and robbery in Mandalay, Keng Tung and Tachileik also illustrate the worsening rule of law.

On 15 May, **TRIANGLE convened a virtual Stakeholder Consultation Meeting, in lieu of a Programme Advisory Committee (PAC) for Myanmar,** with 34 participants (W:19; M:15) representing trade unions, recruitment agencies, civil society organizations, UN agencies and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation as observer. The consultation provided a platform to reflect on TRIANGLE's achievements from 2015 to 2024 and to gather stakeholder input to shape the 2025 workplan and strategic priorities. Discussions focused on key challenges facing migrant workers, including irregular migration, online scams, forced conscription and vulnerabilities in border areas. Participants underscored the need to expand access to services, promote disability inclusion, enhance climate resilience and ensure fair and ethical recruitment. Feedback will contribute to forward-looking, adaptive programming. The ILO reaffirmed its commitment to inclusive, flexible and responsive support

for the protection of Myanmar migrant workers.

Participants join the question-and-answer session at the ILO-Three Good Spoons International Domestic Workers Day Event on 15 June 2025
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On 15 June, *to* commemorate International Domestic Workers Day, TRIANGLE and the Three Good Spoons Migrant Worker Resource Centre (MRC), **organized a celebratory event on 15 June in Yangon under the theme *"From Invisible to Indispensable: Valuing Domestic Work"***. The event brought together 120 participants (W:94; M:26), including domestic workers, migrant returnees, employers, representatives from civil society organizations and persons with disabilities. The event featured moving, personal testimonies, performances and a powerful collective Convention No. 189 chant, calling for full recognition of domestic workers' rights and dignity. In addition, an ILO op-ed titled *"Crisis and Beyond: Recognizing the Essential Role of Domestic Workers"* was published on the UN Myanmar website, reinforcing the call for dignity and decent work for all domestic workers.

Illustration of the story of Khin May Than, a migrant domestic worker in the United Arab Emirates.
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As part of the broader commemoration, from 16 to 22 June, **TRIANGLE launched a week-long social media campaign**, featuring seven inspirational stories of domestic workers- both in Myanmar and abroad- on the ILO Myanmar Facebook page. These stories, highlighting the resilience, aspirations and contributions of domestic workers, were also amplified through the United Nations Myanmar Facebook page, broadening public awareness and support for equal rights and decent work for domestic workers:

- Story 1: **Naw Pearl**, a migrant domestic worker in Singapore
- Story 2: **Khin May Than**, a migrant domestic worker in the United Arab Emirates
- Story 3: **Zar Zar**, a domestic worker in Myanmar
- Story 4: **Naw Tamalar Phaw**, a returnee from Singapore
- Story 5: **Thida Win**, a domestic worker in Myanmar
- Story 6: **Thu Zar Htwe**, a domestic worker in Myanmar
- Story 7: **Thu Lay Phaw**, a returnee from Singapore

During this quarter, **TRIANGLE-supported Migrant Worker Resource Centres (MRCs) provided wide-ranging services to migrant workers, their families and local stakeholders,** ensuring both inclusive and equitable access for women, persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups:

- On 10 June, a **Cross-Border Networking Meeting between Thailand and Myanmar** was held in Chiang Rai, co-organized by Mawk Kon Local Development Organization and New Life Center, Thailand. The meeting gathered 35 participants (W:23; M:12) from CSOs and community leaders from Eastern Shan State and Chiang Rai. Discussions covered cross-border coordination and a referral system for safe return and reintegration of migrant workers. Participants noted rising migration and stressed the need for joint advocacy, updated information and stronger service provider cooperation.
- Carelink's MRC in Hpa-An, Kayin State, supported 843 people (W:498; M:345) aged 18–39 through 12 **outreach activities**, **including safe migration training, counselling and information sessions**. The MRC also provided legal aid and referrals for 28 people (W:25; M:3) on labour rights, documentation and access to justice. To aid reintegration and enhance skills, 140 returnees and potential migrants (W:37; M:103) received **vocational training and support for better livelihoods**.
- From April–June, Mawk Kon's MRCs in Keng Tung and Tachileik reached 550 people (W:463; M:87) with **skills and knowledge, covering safe migration, financial literacy, Thai language and livelihood skills, as** well as with counselling and legal aid services. Nine ethnic migrant women's groups met to discuss life skills, leadership and local challenges. Mawk Kon also supported the safe repatriation of two trafficked girls from the China border.

- This quarter, TRIANGLE partner Northern Shan State Baptist Convention (NSSBC) held five **outreach sessions on safe migration**, reaching 469 people (W:242; M:227) in conflict-affected areas, responding to rising irregular migration to Thailand, China and Malaysia. NSSBC shared migration materials (including **Travel Smart/Work Smart, SaverAsia,** contacts, and tips) and created space for community questions. NSSBC also delivered humanitarian aid to 112 vulnerable families, reaching another 469 people (W:227; M:143; 99 children), combining emergency relief with safe migration awareness to help reduce exploitation risks.

The bakery skills training at AIE Hospitality Training Centre for people with disabilities organized by KDN © ILO

- From 1–23 May, TRIANGLE's disability inclusion partner, Karen Development Network (KDN), held a **bakery skills training** at the AIE Hospitality Training Center for six persons with disabilities and migrant workers' family members. The course built skills in breads and pastries, boosting confidence and employability in food and hospitality, and reducing reliance on unsafe migration by expanding decent work options. KDN also ran its **second online sign language training** for civil society and labour service providers. Fourteen TRIANGLE MRC partner staff joined to strengthen support for migrants with hearing impairments.
- From April–June 2025, CTUM's MRC in Payathonzu, Kayin State, **directly reached 40,027 migrant workers** (W:16,082; M:23,945) through border outreach, safe migration training, counselling and information sharing to reduce irregular migration risks. CTUM also **responded to nine group complaints** involving 189 workers (W:125; M:64) on unfair dismissal and broker exploitation, providing emergency support and mediation. As a result, 143 workers (W:86; M:57) were re-employed and better supported for reintegration.
- Three Good Spoons (TGS) supported 92 domestic workers (W:69; M:23) with counselling, outreach, skills training, and job placement, including **the "License to Stir" training to strengthen skills and rights awareness.** The Myanmar Domestic Workers Association held a meeting on 27 April to continue advocating for domestic workers' rights.
- TKPSI ran a **sewing training** in Tanintharyi Region for 10 women to improve employment prospects and reached 946 people (W:628; M:318) with outreach training, information, counselling, and emergency support.

▶ Upcoming activities and key dates (July – September 2025)

Date	Event	Location	Attendees	Purpose
July - September	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.
July - August	Deliver support services to migrant workers and their families	Shan State, Mandalay, Yangon, Kayin State Tanintharyi	Potential and returned women and men migrant workers and communities of origin	To provide support services and safe migration awareness information.
28 August	Consultation with civil society, labour organizations and relevant stakeholders to advocate for regional migration policies to contribute to the 19th AFML	Online	Representatives of project implementing partners, Network of CSOs and Labour Organizations and other relevant stakeholders	To consult and advocate for regional migration policies to contribute towards the AFML

▶ Media Coverage

Date	Title	Media source
2 April	A new human trafficking trend emerges from Myanmar scam centers	The Japan Times
8 April	Myanmar junta sends more workers to Russia amid growing domestic instability	Myanmar Now
25 April	'Thousands' of trafficked people held at scam casino site amid escalating violence	Radio Free Asia
25 April	Portable internet helps Asia scam centres bypass blackouts	The Straits Times
8 May	Phumtham says cutting electricity, Internet, and oil to online scammers proves effective	The Nation
9 May	Thailand's unwinnable war on scammers	East Asia Forum
20 May	Myanmar workers head to Japan as turmoil deepens at home	NIKKEI Asia
1 June	Malaysia arrests over 1,200 Myanmar nationals in major immigration crackdown	Eleven Media
8 June	40 undocumented Myanmar nationals arrested in Thailand's Kanchanaburi Province	Eleven Media
9 June	The Hidden Fallout From China's Cross-Border Crime Crackdown in Myanmar	The Irrawaddy
15 June	Nearly 50,000 migrant workers ready for employment abroad stuck in Myanmar due to regime's new rules	DVB

17 June	S. Korea: Migrant shipyard workers, incl. from Myanmar & Vietnam, burdened by huge debt due to high recruitment fee charges	Business and Human Rights Resource Center
20 June	From stateless in Myanmar to self-reliant in New Zealand	DVB
24 June	Many foreigners rescued from Myanmar scam centres still stranded	Bangkok Post
26 June	Malaysian crackdown on undocumented migrant workers spurs fear among Myanmar nationals	The Nation
27 June	EXPLAINED: What are scam parks?	Radio Free Asia
28 June	Online scam syndicates flourish in southern Shan State	DVB
29 June	Tightened inspections in Thailand's Mae Sot heighten pressure on Burmese migrants	Mizzima
30 June	Online Scam Cases Continue to Rise Despite Crackdowns on Foreign Fraud Networks	BNI

Myanmar at a glance

Population: 55.2 million

Labour Force: 23.2 million

Source: ILOSTAT, 2024

Migrant workers in Thailand

255,180 MoU migrant workers

(Women= 108,146 / Men= 147,034)

5,645 Section 64 (Border employment) migrant workers

(Women= 4,348 / Men= 1,297)

1,829,379 migrant workers renewing documents under the 24 September 2024 and 4 February 2025 Cabinet Resolutions, referring to migrant workers who had been regularized by various previous cabinet resolutions and are now required to renew their work permit and visa under the procedures prescribed by these two cabinet resolutions. A gender breakdown for this group is not available.

892,399 migrant workers newly registering under the 24 September 2024 Cabinet Resolution

(Women= 361,153 / Men= 531,246)

Source: Department of Employment, Ministry of Labour, Thailand (May 2025).

Migrant workers in Malaysia

Total: 141,873 migrant workers
(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 the end of 2024, TRIANGLE in ASEAN provided direct services to 102,119 migrant workers (49.6 per cent women) and reached another 392,339 migrant workers (44.2 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 2.41 million Myanmar documented migrant workers employed in Thailand and Malaysia alone (Ministry of Labour Thailand, February 2025 and Ministry of Human Resources, Malaysia, September 2023). According to the World Bank, an estimated US$1.47 billion was remitted by migrants during the 2023/2024 fiscal year, approximately 2 per cent of the Myanmar 2023 GDP and benefitting 7.5 per cent of Myanmar households (World Bank, 2024). This estimate does not include the millions that are informally remitted through brokers or hand-carried to family members.

Currently there are over 500 licensed overseas employment agencies in Myanmar. As of March 2025, recruitment agencies are limited to deploying 50 workers per month to Thailand and 15 workers per month to Japan. This, added to the expensive, complex and time-consuming procedures required for formal recruitment through licensed agencies, means that 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 early 2024, the military authorities reactivated the conscription law, which mandates military service for all men aged 18 to 35 and women aged 18 to 27. Though it had never been enforced in practice before, the law is now implemented amid the ongoing conflict and widespread resistance following the military coup. Alongside this, Myanmar's military authorities suspended the issuance of documents to migrate for work abroad in February 2024, effectively prohibiting regular labour migration. This decision was reportedly intended to prevent evasion of conscription. On 14 February 2025, Myanmar's authorities temporarily suspended the issuance of Overseas Worker Identification Cards (OWICs) for migrant workers, citing administrative reasons. The OWIC issuance resumed on 20 March 2025, accompanied by the implementation of more stringent vetting procedures. These include increased scrutiny for individuals eligible for military service, ensuring applicants are not listed for conscription before approval.

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 ▶ Carelink ▶ Future Light Centre ▶ KDN Organization ▶ Myanmar CSOs and Labour Organizations Network for Migrants
Target sites	▶ Yangon, Mandalay, Keng Tung, Taunggyi, Lashio, Dawei, Three Pagoda Pass, Bago, Hpa-An
Focal point	▶ Wai Hnin Po, National Programme Coordinator, 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) until 2024)** on protecting migrant workers and enhancing development opportunities. **TRIANGLE in ASEAN** 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 in ASEAN** aims to shape labour migration opportunities to support inclusive and sustainable growth in the ASEAN Economic Community. **TRIANGLE in ASEAN** engages institutionally with **ASEAN** and focuses on delivering in six countries **(Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam)**.

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