

## TRIANGLE in ASEAN Quarterly Briefing Note

### Myanmar (July – September 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 organisations and civil society

#### Disclaimer

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 current guidance of the UN Country Team. Under this guidance, all activities that would strengthen the de facto authorities have been halted, and no de facto government representatives from Myanmar are accredited or invited to any meeting or official event scheduled or 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 its TRIANGLE in ASEAN programme 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, including assisting migrant workers facing COVID-19 related challenges. For more information, please see [this document](#).

### 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 thought that as much as 10 per cent of the labour force is working abroad, with approximately 1.5 million Myanmar migrant workers employed in Thailand and Malaysia alone (Ministry of Labour Thailand, April 2022, and Ministry of Human Resources, Malaysia, September 2019). According to the World Bank, an estimated US\$2.25 billion was remitted by migrants in 2020, approximately 2.9 per cent of GDP (World Bank, 2022), which does not include the millions that are informally remitted through brokers or hand-carried back home to family members.

An established policy framework to manage the immense labour migration flows is yet to be developed in Myanmar. As a result, migration remains largely laissez-faire and inequitable, divided between regular migrants, who typically head to more developed economies within Asia and the Middle East via formal recruitment, and undocumented migrants, who travel clandestinely to work in neighbouring middle-income countries.

Because of the expensive, complex and time-consuming procedures required for formal recruitment through licensed agencies, most migrants continue to seek the assistance of unlicensed brokers or go abroad independently. 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. On the other hand, for some, this is the only avenue available to them to access livelihoods and safety, especially in the current economic and political climate.

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### Myanmar at a glance

 Population:	55.2 million
 Labour Force:	23.4 million

Source: ILOSTAT, 2022

### Migrant workers in Thailand

303,678 MOU migrant workers

(Women= 132,308 Men= 171,370)

Section 64 migrant workers = 9,017 (Women= 6,042 /Men= 2,975)

257,043 migrant workers under the Cabinet Resolution on 29 December 2020 (amnesty programme)  
(Women= 110,454 Men= 146,589)

769,119 migrant workers under the 13 July 2021 Cabinet Resolution<sup>1</sup>  
(Women= 344,066 Men= 425,053)

217,551 migrant workers under the 28 September 2021 Cabinet Resolution (amnesty programme)  
(Women= 89,327 Men= 128,224)

Source: Office of Foreign Workers Administration, Department of Employment, Ministry of Labour, Thailand (August 2022)

### 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 through three Migrant Worker Resource Centres (MRCs). These MRCs, managed in partnership with civil society organizations and Trade Unions, are based in **Keng Tung**, **Tachileik**, and **Yangon**. In addition, TRIANGLE provides MRC-type services through other non-regime partners in Mandalay, Shan State, and Taunggyi.

Since the start of the programme up until the end of 2021, TRIANGLE in ASEAN reached **36,151 migrant workers** (44% women) through the Myanmar MRCs.

<sup>1</sup> This cabinet resolution includes four groups of workers of earlier three respective cabinet resolutions: 20 August 2019, 4 August 2020, and 10 November 2020. These cabinet resolutions were issued with the purpose to facilitate migrant workers who failed to complete their documentation-related procedures as a result of COVID-19.

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

Regular migration from Myanmar to Japan started in early 2022. Regular labour migration to Thailand via the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) resumed on 10 May 2022. Since then and up to 30 June, 2,500 workers have migrated to Thailand under the MoU system through two border crossings at Myawaddy in Kayin State and Kaw Thaug in the Tanintharyi region (source: [Myanmar Labour Attaché in Thailand](#)).

### Key developments

On 1 February 2021, the military declared a state of emergency on grounds of alleged electoral fraud. All legislative, judicial and executive powers were transferred to the Commander in Chief. On 2 September 2022, a court [sentenced Aung San Suu Kyi to three years' imprisonment with labour](#) after finding her guilty of election fraud. She is already serving 17 years for other offences.

On 5 July the Thai cabinet approved an important resolution on the "Management of migrant workers from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam for Thailand's restoration." Some key decisions outlined in [this resolution](#) are that:

- Migrant workers registered under the previous cabinet resolutions to legally stay and work in Thailand until 13 February 2023 can extend their stay until February 2025 if they complete the required procedures.
- Migrant workers who live in Thailand irregularly as a result of either coming into the country through irregular channels, overstaying their permits, or staying with terminated permits are allowed to regularize. Their employers or licensed recruitment agencies must complete online registration.

The regularization program, the high demand for migrant workers to fill labour market gaps in Thailand, along with the [political situation and economic depression in Myanmar](#) has meant many people are making decisions to migrate, some in an irregular status. [An outflow of undocumented migrants from Myanmar to Thailand is ongoing.](#)

Remittances, mainly from Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, totaled US\$ 264 million from January to July 2022, [according to the Myanmar Central Bank.](#)

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The Myanmar de facto authorities advised recruitment agencies that remittances should be sent through official channels and banks, despite there not being a system in place yet for such transfers.

The authorities [continue to crack down on non-licensed money transfers](#). The Central Bank has started to control the Kyat since June 2022 and has been issuing various decrees on monetary policy. The exchange rate between Myanmar Kyat and US\$ given for remittances differs significantly from prevailing market rates. For example, on 5 August 2022 [the rate was set at MMK 2,100 per US\\$ 1 while the market price was around MMK 3,200 per US\\$ 1](#). [Unofficial money couriers \(or “hundis”\) remain popular options](#) for sending remittances to Myanmar, as they are not bound to the exchange rates that are officially set.

### Main programme activities: July – September 2022

On 22 July, 26 August and 30 September, TRIANGLE held **monthly networking meetings** with CSOs and Labour Organizations. Aiming to improve collaboration, in the meetings, participants updated each other on the migration situation from their local areas and shared activities and services provided to migrant workers.

TRIANGLE in ASEAN's partner Three Good Spoons conducted two trainings on **labour rights for domestic workers on 16 and 26 July** and two training on **communication, self-management and hygiene on 6 and 9 August**, respectively. Around 20 participants attended each training.

On 4 August and 8 September, monthly meetings on **Building Migrant Women's Groups, including Domestic Workers** were held with Mawk Kon and Three Good Spoons. Partners shared the progress of activities in the past month and discussed a strategy for the inclusion of migrants with disabilities in their services, outreach and referrals.

The ILO migration projects in Myanmar jointly organized a three-day **Training of Trainers on Safe Migration for CSO and trade union implementing partners and consultants** from 29 to 31 August. This was the first in-person training held in Myanmar since the start of the pandemic. Seventeen participants (W:12; M:5) attended. The training discussed emerging migration policies and procedures, service provision in pre-departure, return and reintegration phases, complaint mechanisms and migrant workers' rights. The meeting partially focused on domestic workers and fishers migrating to Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Japan.

On 2 September, the Keng Tung MRC operated by Mawk Kon Local Development Organization posted a **migration awareness video** to reach migrant workers in Burmese [on their Facebook page](#).

On September 5-6, TRIANGLE developed a list of support services for people with disabilities, to act as a point of referral for implementing partners in Myanmar for further support to migrant workers with disabilities.

TRIANGLE signed a new **implementation agreement with the CSO Tanintharyi Karen Peace Support Initiative (TKPSI)**. The agreement will run for 12 months until August 2023. TKPSI will increase knowledge and awareness on migration and labour rights issues and ensure access to social services for potential and returnee migrants and their families in Dawei, Tanintharyi Region. On September 7, TRIANGLE conducted training on project reporting with the staff of TKPSI.

On September 9 and 10, Mawk Kon MRC provided a **safe migration training of trainers for community members from Keng Tung**. The training was attended by 30 participants (W:21; M:9).

On 16 September, TRIANGLE arranged a **Myanmar Consultation Meeting with CSOs and Labour Organizations in preparation for the 15th AFML** with 24 participants (W:18; M:6).

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On 28 September, TRIANGLE in ASEAN organized a **virtual training session on the SaverAsia Application** as part of the Financial Literacy Training with representatives of CSOs and Trade Unions. Saver.Global led the training, explained the different functions in SaverAsia and led the 25 participants (W:19; M:6) through various user scenarios.

During this quarter, **TRIANGLE in ASEAN continued to deliver emergency assistance and MRC services, including counselling, migration awareness, livelihoods and skills training, financial literacy and community outreach to migrant workers and their families** through partners in Keng Tung, Tachileik, Lashio and Taunggyi in Shan State, the Mandalay Region, the Yangon Region and border areas in Kayin State.

From July to September, TRIANGLE in ASEAN reached 1,588 (W:1,028; M:560) migrants and their families with emergency assistance and other MRC services. This includes 688 (W:512; M:176) in Keng Tung supported by the Mawk Kon Local Development Organization; 142 (W:69; M:73) in Tachileik also supported by Mawk Kon; 95 (W:53; M:42) in the Mandalay region reached by a national consultant; 606 (W:376; M:230) in Taunggyi and surrounding areas reached by another national consultant, and 57 (W:18; M:39) supported by the Confederation of Trade Unions Myanmar (CTUM).

## Upcoming activities and key dates (October – December 2022)

Date	Event	Location	Attendees	Purpose
October to December	Provide services including information, emergency response and reintegration support	Keng Tung Mawk Kon MRC, Tachileik Mawk Kon MRC Confederation of Trade Unions Myanmar (CTUM) MRC Northern Shan State Baptist Convention (NSSBC) National Consultants in Mandalay and Taunggyi Three Good Spoons Training Centre in Yangon Tanintharyi Karen Peace Support Initiatives in Dawei	Potential and returned women and men migrant workers	To provide support services and information to potential and returned migrant workers
October to December	SaverAsia rollout activities in communities	Keng Tung Mawk Kon MRC, Tachileik Mawk Kon MRC Confederation of Trade Unions Myanmar (CTUM) MRC Northern Shan State Baptist Convention (NSSBC) National Consultants in Mandalay and Taunggyi Three Good Spoons Training Centre in Yangon Tanintharyi Karen Peace Support Initiatives in Dawei	Potential and returned women and men migrant workers and communities of origin	To provide basic financial knowledge, as well as directions to use the SaverAsia App for family remittances

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October to December	Monthly CSO and Labour organizations' networking meetings	Online	Representatives of project implementing partners, Network of Labour Organizations and Civil Society Organizations	To update and coordinate on the migration situation and on policies of countries of destination
October to December	Monthly meetings for migrant women's groups and domestic workers' groups	Online	CSOs and Women's Groups	To plan activities and campaigns and to support migrant women's groups
October to December	Revise print and digital content of migration information in ethnic languages for dissemination by TRIANGLE MRCs and others	ILO and project implementing partners	Potential and returned women and men migrant workers	To raise awareness around labour migration
October	Training of Trainers on financial literacy and labour migration	Online	CSOs and Labour Organizations	To build the capacity of implementing partners to provide better support for migrant workers
December	International Migrants Day	Online	CSOs, Labour Organizations and migrant workers	To raise migration awareness, and celebrate International Migrants Day, and launch lessons learned from creating women's groups (to be confirmed)

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### Media coverage

Date	Title	Media Source
12 July	<a href="#">Thailand needs 500,000 more migrant workers for recovery, Chamber of Commerce says</a>	Reuters
30 July	<a href="#">Yangon on list as Bangkok Airways resumes regional services</a>	Mizzima
2 August	<a href="#">More needs to be done to support migrant workers</a>	Tea Circle
24 August	<a href="#">Myanmar trade unions and civil society organizations face existential threat following military takeover</a>	ILO News
25 August	<a href="#">Rohingya: Kill us, but don't deport us to Myanmar</a>	BBC World
29 August	<a href="#">Arrangements underway for return of eight Myanmar women in Dubai: MOFA</a>	Eleven Myanmar
6 September	<a href="#">Workers struggle to make ends meet in Myanmar</a>	Frontier Myanmar
7 September	<a href="#">Cross-border migrant workers heading to Thailand on the rise</a>	BNI Peace Monitor
8 September	<a href="#">Human Trafficking: Hundreds of Myanmar women are brought to Dubai and are facing being sold into Arab countries by agents</a>	The Chindwin
14 September	<a href="#">Myanmar junta tightens controls on migrant remittances</a>	The Irrawaddy
20 September	<a href="#">Exodus from Myanmar as cost-of-living crisis bites</a>	Frontier Myanmar
23 September	<a href="#">23 illegal Myanmar Migrants arrested in Ranong, Thailand</a>	Mizzima

**TRIANGLE in ASEAN** extends the cooperation between the **International Labour Organization (ILO)**, the **Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade** and **Global Affairs Canada** on protecting migrant workers and enhancing development opportunities. **TRIANGLE in ASEAN** aims to ensure that the benefits of labour migration are equally realised 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**).