

► TRIANGLE in ASEAN Quarterly Briefing Note Thailand



October – December 2023

Key developments

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 2023, with the possibility to extend their stay in Thailand until April 2025.



Thai migrant workers in the agriculture sector constituted the largest known numbers of non-Israeli deaths and hostages as a result of the 7 October Hamas attack on Israel. [Thirty-nine deaths and at least 32 abductions of Thai nationals](#) were reported on 30 November. Whilst [the Thai government warned Thai workers in Israel of the escalating conflict](#) and encouraged them to come back to Thailand, some workers decided to stay in Israel due to comparatively [much higher wages available in Israel, as well as the debts](#) they had accumulated to migrate, partially due to the [high recruitment and placement fees](#). For the same reason, [there were reports](#) that some Thai returnees wanted to go back to work in Israel. At the end of November, [around 8,500 Thai workers](#) were repatriated, and

23 hostages were released after diplomatic negotiation. Before 7 October, there were an estimated 30,000 Thai workers in Israel.

In a bid to persuade more Thai workers to return, the Thai government [announced redress measures for Thai returnees](#), including a compensation package and low-interest loans. On 22 November, the Ministry of Labour reported that almost 9,000 people, including families of the deceased, [had been compensated by the Fund](#) established to help overseas Thai workers, totaling 128,175,000 Thai Baht (equal to US\$ 3,600,000). On 12 December, the Thai cabinet approved additional availability of 750 million Thai Baht to compensate returnees impacted by the Israel-Hamas conflict. Further, Thailand has plans for a [labour partnership with Australia](#) with an aim to provide alternative jobs in the agriculture sector for Thai workers.

Beginning in late October, a few hundred Thai workers were trapped in Northern Myanmar amidst the coordinated offensive made by armed ethnic resistance groups against the Myanmar military. [The workers were successfully rescued and returned to Thailand by mid-November](#). The Thai nationals returning from Laukaing (Myanmar) had to be [screened for involvement in scamming operations prevalent in the area](#). Because of renewed attacks, it is estimated

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that [up to 300,000 Myanmar nationals had been displaced](#) since late October. In the meantime, analysts said Thailand would turn [towards a humanitarian role](#) in handling the conflict. On the ground, however, [a rights group reported](#) that Thai authorities had arrested almost 200 Myanmar nationals for illegal entry during 19-24 November.

In the first-ever election of the Social Security Board on 24 December, the “Progressive Social Security” coalition comprising advocates for democracy and the rights of labour, migrants and people with disability, won six out of seven seats allocated for employees’ representatives. One of the seven elected to represent employers on the Board is the General Secretary of the Employers Confederation of Thailand (ECOT). The other six representatives from government will be appointed from the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Interior, and the Budget Bureau. The Board has a pivotal role, including [providing advice on social security laws and policies as well as overseeing how the fund is managed](#).

One of the priorities of the Pheu Thai-led government coalition is to raise the daily minimum wage. On 8 December, the tripartite wage-setting committee [increased the minimum wage from 1 January 2024 by about 2.4 per cent on average, or by 2 to 16 Thai Baht \(0.06 to 0.28 US\\$\) per day](#), depending on the province. Phuket saw the largest raise of 16 Thai Baht (0.28 US\$), while the Southernmost provinces (Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat) received as little as a 2 Thai Baht (0.06 US\$) increase. The Thai Prime Minister Srettha [expressed his dissatisfaction](#) with the increase. Facing public criticism for the low raise, the MOL noted that they used a standard [methodology, regularly used in the past, and drawn from other countries](#). On 20 December, the tripartite wage-setting committee confirmed the increase, and the Cabinet approved the proposed rates. The Minister of Labour, Mr Phiphat, announced the establishment of a sub-committee to look into minimum wage-setting approaches, which may lead to a new [proposal for minimum wage increases by March 2024](#).

On 24 November, Thailand and Japan signed a Memorandum of Cooperation [to send Thai workers with specified skills, including those required in care work, agriculture, manufacturing and services, to Japan](#).

On 30 November, the Labour Minister chaired a meeting of the Steering Committee for the Ratification of the International Labour Organization [Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 \(No. 87\)](#), and the [Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining, 1949 \(No. 98\)](#). [The meeting agreed to set up a working group](#) to study and analyze the possibility and to plan for the ratification of the two conventions.

Main programme activities



The MAP Foundation's Training of Trainers for migrant women's groups in Phang-nga to discuss the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) on 7-8 October 2023.

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On 7-8 October, TRIANGLE partner **MAP Foundation**, organized a Training of Trainers for **migrant women's groups in Phang-nga** to discuss the [Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 \(No. 190\)](#). Thirty-four women leaders participated in the event.

On 22 October, **HomeNet's Bang Bon Migrant Worker Resource Centre (MRC)** hosted a meeting for migrant workers living in the Bang Bon district of Bangkok, with TRIANGLE support. The meeting aimed for the MRC to increase understanding of the needs of migrant workers living in the area, and for the migrant workers to understand what services the

MRC offers. Twenty-five women, along with their children, and 10 men joined. Three migrant domestic worker leaders who were trained by TRIANGLE also led and joined session to raise awareness on organizing migrant women's groups.

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On 25-26 October, TRIANGLE, together with ILO's Safe and Fair programme, organized a **workshop on [International Labour Migration Statistics \(ILMS\)](#) and sex-disaggregated migration data** for focal points and representatives from the National Statistics Office, the Department of Employment (DOE), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Immigration Bureau, with 11 total participants (W:9; M:2). The workshop aimed to provide hands-on support in providing migration survey data to ILOSTAT and the global ILMS database. Data provided by the focal points is crucial to showing a full picture of migrant worker stocks and flows in the region and globally.

On 30 October, TRIANGLE co-convened the Mahidol University Social Lab **stakeholder meeting: Strengthening Policy Advocacy of Migrant Workers' Labour Rights in Thailand, focusing on Agriculture**. During the meeting, TRIANGLE presented proposed directions for employment, protection and social security for migrant workers in agriculture, building on the joint report [Working and employment conditions in the agriculture sector in Thailand](#). The meeting was attended by 96 participants (W:44; M:52) from relevant MOL departments, including the Department of Labour Protection and Welfare, the Social Security Office and the DOE.



TRIANGLE's Project Advisory Committee meeting on 9 November
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On 9 November, TRIANGLE partnered with the Ministry of Labour to hold the Annual Thailand Programme Advisory Committee (PAC) meeting with tripartite-plus implementing partners and stakeholders from national and local levels. Partners in Thailand had the opportunity to review activities and results from 2023 to provide inputs and validate the proposed workplan for 2024. The proposed workplan was endorsed in principle by the PAC and is now subject to final endorsement from the Ministry. Thirty-three

representatives (W:20; M:13) from MOL, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and social partners joined.

On 28 November, TRIANGLE and the ILO Senior Labour Migration Specialist held a meeting with seven (W:5; M:2) legal officers from the Department of Employment to discuss the [ILO Private Employment Agency Convention, 1997 \(No. 181\)](#) and [General principles and operational guidelines for fair recruitment and definition of recruitment fees and related costs](#) in detail. The meeting offered an opportunity to clarify the current regulations related to recruitment in Thailand.

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.

On 12 December, TRIANGLE joined a **meeting of the Good Labour Practices Committee, hosted by the Ministry of Labour**. Participants discussed the 2024 work plans, including setting up a committee to develop Good Labour Practices in seasonal agriculture, which will build on the Social Responsibility Guidelines previously developed by the Informal Labour Protection Division. TRIANGLE proposed that a representative of DOE should be on the committee to ensure that employment laws and requirements concerning migrant workers are taken into consideration.

On 13 December, TRIANGLE convened a meeting to review the methodology and draft findings of the forthcoming

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study to forecast labour demand for the elder care sector in Thailand conducted in partnership with Chulalongkorn University. 15 experts (W:10; M:5) on population and elderly care, academics from Chulalongkorn University, Mahidol University, ILO and UNESCAP, and an official from the Ministry of Health joined the meeting.

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

Date	Event	Location	Attendees	Purpose
11-13 March	Disability inclusion and gender equality training	Bangkok	TRIANGLE staff and partners, Organizations of Persons with Disabilities	To enhance understanding of disability inclusion and gender equality in migrant work-related settings.
March-December	Second assessment of the Migrant Worker Assistance Centres (MWACs)	Bangkok and selected MWAC offices	MWAC officials	To assess MWACs' strengths and weaknesses in order to inform future collaboration and provide recommendations.
March	Presentation of Policy Recommendations on recruitment of migrant workers for the agriculture sector	Bangkok	ECOT DOE	To engage policy makers on employers' recommendations on recruitment of migrant workers in agriculture sector.

► Media Coverage

Date	Title	Media Source
18 October	How Thai workers became integral to Israel's economy	Nikkei Asia
19 October	Myanmar Junta Demands Expats pay tax before renewing passports	Irrawaddy
21 October	Repatriated workers eye Israel return	Bangkok Post
23 October	Trapped by debt: migrant workers in Israel unable to escape conflict	The Guardian
26 October	Myanmar's military reaches into migrant pockets	East Asia Forum
29 October	20 Myanmar workers caught with fake entry stamps in passports	Bangkok Post
3 November	Thai workers face dilemma: stay and endure war, or flee but lose vital wages	Times of Israel
5 November	Labour Minister takes action over illegal workers in South Korea	Nation Thailand
6 November	Lower visa fees for migrant workers from 11 Nov	Bangkok Post
30 November	Myanmar exile government seeks foothold by supporting overseas workers	Radio Free Asia
8 December	Thailand, Myanmar to form aid task force as border unrest intensifies	Reuters
9 December	Srettha slams proposed daily wage hike, urges businesses to pay more	Nation Thailand
13 December	Is Thailand Changing Its Role in Myanmar	VOA
26 December	Labour Rights Advocates wins Thailand's first social security board	Prachatai

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Thailand at a glance

Population: 71.9 million

Labour Force: 40.7 million

Source: ILOSTAT, 2023

Migrants in Thailand

Total number of documented workers: 2,333,091

591,305 MoU migrant workers

(Women = 266,663/ Men = 324,642)

Myanmar = 291,404 (49%)

Cambodia = 149,271 (25.2%)

Lao PDR = 150,522 (25.5%)

Viet Nam = 108 (0.02%)

14,463 migrant workers under Section 64 (Border employment)

(Women = 6,922 / Men = 7,541)

Myanmar = 1,428 (9.9%)

Cambodia = 13,035 (90.1%)

1,727,323 migrant workers under the
7 February 2023 Cabinet Resolution

(Women = 773,120 / Men = 954,203)

Myanmar = 1,433,317 (83%)

Cambodia = 216,942 (12.6%)

Lao PDR = 75,762 (4.4%)

Viet Nam = 1,302 (0.06%)

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.

TRIANGLE in ASEAN delivers assistance directly to migrant workers and their communities through three Migrant Worker Resource Centres (MRCs) in Thailand. They are managed in partnership with civil society organizations and are based in Bangkok (with HomeNet), Chiang Mai (with MAP Foundation), and at Mae Sot (with Human Rights and Development Foundation). In addition, TRIANGLE provides MRC-like services with the CSO Migrant Working Group (MWG).

Since the start of the programme up until the end of 2022, TRIANGLE has reached 31,897 migrant workers (58 per cent women) through Thai MRCs.

Background information

Over the last three decades, Thailand has become a key destination for migrant workers from neighbouring countries and increasingly from further afield across ASEAN. Women and men migrant workers make a substantial contribution to Thailand's economic performance. According to a study by the ILO and OECD, migrants were responsible for 4.3 - 6.6 per cent of Thailand's GDP in 2010, while representing 4.7 per cent of the employed population (ILO/OECD 2017). Migrants are predominately employed in low-paid jobs, including fishing, agriculture, construction, manufacturing, domestic work and other services. Thailand is also a country of origin for migrant workers. From January to November 2023, according to DOE records, 63,038 documented Thai migrants went to work abroad (W:13,833; M:49,205).

Transitioning from a net-sending to a net-receiving country during the 1990s, Thailand's labour migration governance framework has continually relied on bilateral agreements or cooperation with neighbouring countries. In 2002 and 2003, the Royal Thai Government signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) on employment cooperation with the governments of Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) and Myanmar, which established a channel for regular labour migration to Thailand from neighbouring countries. However, up until recently, only a small proportion of migrants have entered Thailand under the MoUs due to the complicated, lengthy and expensive procedures involved. In 2015 and 2016 Thailand revised the MOUs to broaden cooperation on labour issues, including skills development and social protection and signed an agreement with Viet Nam.

During 2016–18, Thailand developed a more comprehensive legal framework on labour migration, including the adoption of the Royal Ordinance Concerning the Management of Employment of Migrants to manage labour migration in parallel with the implementation of the MoU processes. The Royal Ordinance sets out that the MoU process is the only official channel for migrant workers in 'elementary' occupations to enter Thailand. However, Section 64 of the Royal Ordinance offers one exception, known as the border employment regulation, which allows employers to hire migrants in border areas on three-month visas.

Yet, due to the porous borders of Thailand, the complicated, time-consuming and expensive MoU processes, and the limited functionality of the border employment scheme, many migrant workers enter Thailand irregularly.

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In response, and for the past two decades, the Royal Thai Government has been relying on periodic regularizations of migrants with irregular status. This is accomplished (in part) by declaring amnesties. Many migrants from Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar have used these ad-hoc amnesties and registration windows to obtain legal status, though many others have continued to work irregularly, some due to the short registration window or the high corresponding fees for this registration.

Key partners

- Ministry of Labour (MOL)
- Employers' Confederation of Thailand (ECOT)
- State Enterprise Workers' Relations Confederations (SERC)
- Human Rights and Development Foundation (HRDF)
- HomeNet Thailand
- MAP Foundation
- Migrant Working Group (MWG)

Target sites

- Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Mae Sot

Focal point

- Chonticha Tangworamongkon, National Project Coordinator, tangworamongkon@ilo.org

TRIANGLE in ASEAN extends the cooperation between the **International Labour Organization (ILO)**, the **Australian Government 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 realised 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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