

▶ TRIANGLE in ASEAN Quarterly Briefing Note Myanmar



April – June 2023

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 situation in Myanmar continues to deteriorate following the coup. According to the monitoring group “Assistance Association for Political Prisoners,” more than 3,500 people have been killed during the ensuing crackdown on dissent, 1.5 million people have been displaced, 70,000 homes have been burned down, eight million children are no longer in school, 15 million people are judged by the UN to be dangerously short of food and much of the country is caught up in a brutal civil war (Sources: [BBC](#) and [Mizzima](#)). It is forecasted that the situation is unlikely to improve in 2023. The military regime has announced plans for an election at a future unspecified date and enacted a law that required political parties to re-register if they want to contend in the elections, which [led to the dissolution of 40 political parties](#), including the National League for Democracy.

On 14 May, [cyclone Mocha](#) hit Rakhine, Chin, Magway, Sagaing and Kachin. These regions already face challenges due to civil unrest, armed clashes, the effects of climate change and a fragile economy. Approximately 5.4 million people have been impacted, with 3.2 million potentially requiring humanitarian assistance, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Western Rakhine was the worst-affected area. The cyclone extensively damaged numerous camps for internally displaced Rohingya. Additionally, severe flooding affected more than 100,000 people in Magway and Sagaing.

In the third week of June, the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) [imposed sanctions on the Ministry of Defense and two state-owned banks](#) in Myanmar, as these banks were used to purchase arms and other commodities from foreign sources. Shortly after the announcement of US sanctions, the Myanmar Kyat depreciated sharply against the US\$ on the unofficial open market, while the official reference exchange rate remained unchanged.

The military regime is using air strikes to target civilians in [Sagaing](#) and Bago Regions, as well as Chin, Kayah, Kayin and Kachin States, which are strongholds of the opposition. These airstrikes have resulted in the tragic loss of dozens of lives, including children. The military launched an [airstrike on Pa Zi Gyi village](#) on 11 April. The brutality of these attacks is underscored by the fact that they not only target villages but also extend to hospitals, schools, and religious buildings. According to an [analysis of the BBC](#) with data from the conflict-monitoring group Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, the Myanmar military has conducted more than 600 airstrikes since February 2021.

A Thai cabinet resolution from 5 July 2022 offered several opportunities to regularize the status of migrant workers who either entered Thailand without documents or lost their documentation status. The latest deadline was subsequently extended on 7 February, allowing until 15 May 2023, and extended again to 31 July 2023 by another subsequent cabinet resolution dated 30 May 2023 as migrant workers were facing issues complying with the required procedures to regularize their status before the deadline.

In addition to the procedures, one key challenge faced by large numbers of migrant workers was the requirement to obtain or [renew their passports or temporary ID documents](#). 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 Myanmar nationals are deciding to migrate to Thailand, many with an irregular status as official channels remain limited.

Myanmar [remained on Tier 3 in the 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report](#). According to the report, 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

TRIANGLE organized **three regular monthly online meetings with civil society and labour organization partners** during this quarter. The meetings covered various issues related to migration, including the new directive on how to renew passports overseas and the challenges migrant workers are experiencing when applying for passports, and the partners shared some key project activities. The ILO also shared the international legal framework on migration on 26

April; The Fifth Pillar presented on “Legal and Court Procedures and Informal Justice Mechanisms” on 19 May; and the Myanmar Book Aid and Preservation Foundation (MBAPF) shared on digital literacy and online security awareness on 23 June. Each meeting included 22 to 28 participants, with 75 per cent women.

On 1 May, the Confederation of Trade Unions Myanmar (CTUM) organized a [May Day Event](#) in Kayin State with over 400 workers (about 50 per cent women), including potential and returned migrant workers. The theme of the event was “[The main right for workers is Freedom of Association](#)” and TRIANGLE’s information leaflet and poster with safe migration tips was displayed and disseminated to the participants during the event.



May Day event on 1 May, organized by Confederation of Trade Unions Myanmar © ILO



Pre-departure training of trainers on 10 May © ILO

The Mawk Kon MRC in Keng Tung organized a **three-day pre-departure training of trainers for 15 community leaders** (W:9; M:6) from villages in Keng Tung on 10-12 May. The training covered a range of topics, including preparation for migration, documentation processes, laws and regulations for migrant workers, labour rights, complaints mechanisms and support services in Myanmar and in major destination countries. The TRIANGLE pre-departure training curriculum was used as the basis for the training.

On 24 May, the Keng Tung MRC conducted a **cross-border networking meeting** jointly with the FOCUS Foundation in Chiang Rai, Thailand to increase the cross-border coordination between civil society and to promote migrants' labour rights. Another goal was to strengthen the referral system for trafficking in persons and migrant workers for return and reintegration. Lessons learned from the project activities, particularly in the protection of vulnerable workers in border areas, were shared, and an action plan for further coordination among organizations was developed. Fifty-four representatives from local civil society participated (W:34; M:20).

On 24 and 29 May, the Women Organization Network (WON) and the Yangon Kayin Baptist Women Association (YKBWA) jointly organized two May Day events in Hlaing Thar Yar, Yangon. As part of the event, TRIANGLE conducted a migration training session for a total of 140 potential migrant workers and their families, with 80 per cent women participants. The session focused on providing information about migration, including reliable sources to obtain information, the procedures in migration, and the necessary documents to prepare.

On 2 June, TRIANGLE participated in a video interview conducted by the Yay Kyi Yar Programme of BBC Media Action in honour of **Domestic Workers Day**. During the interview, TRIANGLE raised awareness about the provisions outlined in the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), which protects the fundamental rights of domestic workers. The interview was released on 18 June, following the International Domestic Workers Day event, on the Yay Kyi Yar social media Page.

On 18 June, TRIANGLE organized a **Domestic Workers Day event** in Yangon with domestic workers, migrant returnees and representatives of civil society and trade unions. Mr Donglin Li, Liaison Officer and Country Representative of ILO Myanmar, delivered the opening remarks. Three Good Spoons provided background information about domestic work, introduced the recently established domestic workers association, and promoted their services for domestic workers. The programme included a performance by domestic workers together with the Ethnic Band and a panel discussion on legal protection, challenges and recommendations to recognize domestic workers' rights. Panelists included representatives from the Fifth Pillar, the Women's Department of the Karen Baptist Convention, the domestic workers' association and the MyanAnts recruitment company. In total, 118 participants joined the event (W:85; M:33). Yay Kyi Yar Social Media Program of BBC Media Action also supported the event by promoting it on their [Facebook page](#).

ILO Myanmar also shared the TRIANGLE Op-Ed [Skilled, essential but undervalued. It's time to solve the domestic work paradox](#) on its social media [page](#) and various media outlets in Myanmar on 15 June. The Op-Ed has also been posted on the [website](#) of the United National in Myanmar. From June 18-22, TRIANGLE shared five stories of domestic workers and their employers through the ILO Myanmar Facebook page to amplify their voices and promote decent work for domestic workers. Each story in was shared in English and Myanmar language as follows:

- [Ma Su Su, an internal domestic worker in Tanintharyi Region, Myanmar](#)
- [Naw Shee, a migrant domestic worker in Singapore](#)
- [Thiri, a migrant domestic worker in Singapore](#)
- [Mary, a migrant domestic worker in Singapore](#)
- [Noe Noe Kyaw, an employer in Yangon, Myanmar](#)

Myanmar

During this quarter, the Tanintharyi Karen Peace Support Initiative (TKPSI) provided community-based migration training, information and emergency assistance to 781 outgoing migrant workers (W:463; M: 318) in Tanintharyi region from April to May. In addition, **TKPSI also conducted a monitoring visit to the beneficiaries of the vocational skills training** provided during the previous quarter. 85 per cent of the trainees applied the skills they had learned, and 75 per cent are earning their daily income through small self-owned businesses in their villages, utilizing the skills they gained.

In April-June, ILO's ARISE Project conducted the second and third online training for the Child Labour Trainer Network. TRIANGLE facilitated the session on "Finding Information and documentation for migration and Thai Labour Laws for migrant workers" on 6 April and "International Legal Frameworks and best practices concerning migrant workers" on 14 June. The trainings were joined by 15 community trainers across Myanmar.

► Upcoming activities and key dates (July - September 2023)

Date	Event	Location	Attendees	Purpose
July - September	Monthly civil society and labour organizations networking meetings	Online	Representatives of project implementing partners, the network of civil society and labour organizations	To update and coordinate on the migration situation and on policies of countries of destination.
July - September	Capacity building on migration knowledge for community leaders' network	Online	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.
September (TBC)	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.

Myanmar

► Media Coverage

Date	Title	Media Source
10 April	Sacked Myanmar migrants in Thailand to get compensation, help to return home	Mizzima
24 May	Dozens of Myanmar migrant workers in Mae Sot detained by Thai police	The Irrawaddy
27 May	Remittance by Myanmar migrant workers reaches over US\$1.5 billion in six months	Mizzima
2 June	Thai victim rescued after being trafficked in Myanmar's Shan State	The Irrawaddy
12 June	Prospective Myanmar migrant workers accuse employment agency of stealing nearly US\$1m	Myanmar Now
12 June	Myanmar workers sent back home 24 years after being sold to a fishery	Eleven Myanmar
18 June	Myanmar: Young Burmese confront dashed dreams in exile	BBC
24 June	Authorities take action on 50 people and a company for providing illegal remittance services and manipulating exchange rate in Yangon and Mandalay	Eleven Myanmar
27 June	Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand struggle to get work permits, ID cards	DVB English
27 June	Myanmar economy stymied by Forex, Import Curbs, World Bank says	Bloomberg

Myanmar

Myanmar at a glance

Population: 55.2 million

Labour Force: 23.4 million

Source: ILOSTAT, 2022

Migrant workers in Thailand

332,444 MOU migrant workers
(Women = 138,029 Men= 194,415)

Section 64 migrant workers = 5,776
(Women= 3,940 Men= 1,836)

1,543,355 migrant workers under the Cabinet
Resolution on 7 February 2023 (amnesty programme)
(Women= 675,691 Men= 867,664)

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

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 up until the end of 2022, TRIANGLE in ASEAN reached 44,219 migrant workers (46 per cent women) through the Myanmar MRCs.

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 renewing their visa. The new deadline was 15 May 2023.

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\$1.9 billion was remitted by migrants in 2022, approximately 3.2 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.

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.

Myanmar

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. From May to December 2022, 92,816 migrant workers (W:35,012; M:57,804) migrated to Thailand under the MoU system through two border crossings at Myawaddy in Kayin State and Kaw Thaug in the Tanintharyi region, according to the [Migrant Monitoring Group Myawaddy](#).

On 11 May, the State owned media [Global News Light of Myanmar](#) stated that Myanmar had sent more than 210,000 workers to foreign countries with an Overseas Worker Identity Card (OWIC) within two years.

- 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

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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