

Global Humanities Institutes (GHI) 2019-2022:  
"Migration, Logistics and Unequal Citizens in Contemporary Global Context"

E-Pamphlet III :

## **New Migrant Worker Precarity under COVID-19, Repatriation**



# INTRODUCTION

“Migration, Logistics and Unequal Citizens in Contemporary Global Context” is the Global Humanities Institutes (GHI) 2019-2022 supported by the Consortium of Humanities Centre and Institutes (CHCI) and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Rapidly increasing international migrations have radically changed the outlook of contemporary 21st century societies, producing cases of massive displaced and precarious lives, and bringing various impacts upon local communities. These emerging phenomena have attracted critical scholarship both in the humanities and social sciences in recent years.

The CHCI-Mellon Global Humanities Institutes (GHI) on “Migration, Logistics and Unequal Citizens in Contemporary Global Context” invites applications from early career researchers and advanced graduate students from the interdisciplinary humanities and social science studies, including but not limited to literature, history, philosophy, film, audio-visual arts, performing arts, law, anthropology, sociology, journalism, social media, digital platform, and other forms of practitioners.

Through the analysis of documentaries, films, literature, interviews, archives, governmental policies, and cooperation with NGOs/CBOs and artist groups, this intensive program foregrounds the subjective experiences and perspectives of migrants, the violation of the migrants’ fundamental human rights, the citizen’s attitude against them, as well as the government malfunctioning in dealing with these migrants.

The issues of migration and unequal citizens highlight the logistical continuum of biopolitics and governmentality from the colonial to the post-colonial state, from the Cold War Era to the post-Cold War Era, as well as the operation of geo-political and geo-economic apparatus and zoning politics. Critical logistics can orient the inquiry by emphasizing how the governance of populations reaches beyond statistical measure to make new connections between life and work, technology and mobility, and politics and economy in and beyond any region. Logistics organises the movement of people and goods and asserts its logic across the entire circuit of production, distribution, and consumption. Logistics has also remade the domain of global space and territory, through the operation of zoning politics, such as corridors, digital networks, extraction enclaves, financial districts, and other areas of transfer and exchange. Examining the nexus of migration and logistics offers ways of rethinking the politics of human mobility and the question of unequal citizens that not only reach beyond the logic of integration and identity but also question the standard analysis of post-war area studies.

# LINES OF RESEARCH

## **Conditions of Migration and Precarious Lives**

Our GHI encourages researchers to study and analyse the reality of the forms of life of the international migrants, refugees, and stateless people in contemporary societies. We welcome analytic inquiries and theoretical engagements of cases of documentaries, films, literature, interviews, archives, governmental policies, NGOs/CBOs, and artist groups, in but not limited to Asia, on the following issues:

The experience and the emotions of migrant workers, refugees or stateless people in their working and living environments in the receiving societies;

The role of social identities such as gender, sexuality, religion, nationality, legal status in conditioning migrant workers' precarious lives;

How states manage labour migration imports and repatriation/deportation as part of the development projects of the state, requiring explicit legal exclusion from residency and citizenship and migrant labour exploitation in the context of different countries, including the national evolution of legal framework concerning this issue:

- The operations of the broker agency, the development of workforce agencies, regimes of brokerage that commodifies migrants into healthy bodies that are labour ready to be supplied abroad;
- The support system offered by trade unions, local NGOs/CBOs, shelters, migrant centres, or resettlement plans at host societies; alliance-making among different groups (e.g. different migrant groups from different countries, women's groups, labour unions, etc.) as well as the internal support system within the migrant communities;
- How the increase in the numbers, relative visibility, and designation as an abject foreigner of migrant workers has led to new forms of Asian racism and xenophobia;
- Ambiguities of migrant entrepreneurship: self-employment as a low-paid activity, forced self-employment ("quasi-self-employment"), and self-employment as an opportunity for professional advancement;
- International student mobility/unpaid labour and its regulation through visa regimes, market mechanisms, university rankings, and labour statuses;
- Transnational human trafficking of women and children for prostitution and forced marriage and labour.

## **Logistics, Geo-economics, Zoning Politics, and Local Infrastructure Initiatives**

Our GHI encourages research projects on politico-economic logistics and the logic of migration. We welcome analytic inquiries and theoretical engagements on the following issues:

- Whether and how the colonial past and the Cold War regime still leave their traces on the countries in and beyond Asia in the 21st century, such as the ASEAN regional policies of trade agreements and economic security control, the US-China trade war, and so on?
- How can we use critical thought on logistics to rethink issues of labour and migration particularly in the Asian region (or in what ways is migration increasingly functioning logistically)?
- How do foreign direct investment, labour, and migration in the Asian region link to logistical initiatives such as zoning, China's Belt and Road Initiative, etc.?
- How do global and local logistical initiatives impact directly or indirectly on local societies, such as governmental corruptions, public xenophobic reactions, extraction by dispossession, and so on?
- How is digitalisation transforming labour and mobility, including questions of virtual migration, platform labour, and the use of digital technologies for migration control and freedom of movement?
- How do logistics and migration in and beyond Asia reorganise relations of reproduction of labour power and society?
- The transformation of the land question, the military-industrial complex, and mobility regime.

Regarding the historical processes, ruptures and continuities in the organisation and practice of migration in and beyond Asia, do logistics offer a means of understanding historical migration, or is it specific to the present moment? How do layered histories of migration continue to shape present movements?

The nexus of logistics, displacement, and violence. The discourse of who is "native" and who is "migrant" is prevalent in many countries; at the extreme, this discourse can lead to communal fissures and even violence. Can a logistical approach help us productively think through ideas of "indigeneity/native" VS "migrants/foreigner" and unpack this socially constructed dichotomy?

## Questions of Unequal Citizens

The upsurge of migrant workers, refugees, and human trafficking have changed the composition of the social space and worsen the inequality among the people who live and work in the same social space but do not share equal access to the cities nor exercise political subjectivities they spent in their daily life. While Giorgio Agamben's concept of the 'bare life' has been much cited in Refugee Studies in recent years, there has also been a call by scholars to focus on the agency and political life of the refugees grounded in their lived realities. Our GHI also wants to draw researchers' attention to the newly emerging forms of neo-racism, neo-slavery, and new colonialism. We welcome analytic inquiries and theoretical engagements on the following issues:

- How do new forms of exclusion through citizenship and residency rights facilitate in today's formation of uneven late capitalism?
- How do traditional colonialism and ongoing forms of new colonialism or internal colonialism shape citizenship regimes in diverse local contexts in Asia and beyond? How did the colonial histories, the process of the post-colonial independent nation through Citizenship Acts, and the current immigrant/migrant worker regulations co-figure the politics of inclusive exclusion and trigger the reality of unequal citizens in contemporary societies?
- How do we analyse the structural violence of the statist division between citizen and non-citizen, or differentiated citizens, that causes the violation of fundamental human rights against a particular population?
- How do we problematise the concept of the "illegal migrant workers"? How is the illegal social space of the precarious bodies produced legally by governmental sectors and other transnational agencies?
- How do we further understand the fear of the transient—the homeless, migrants, refugees? What is the nature of the local xenophobic reactions toward the migrant labour and refugees?
- How do theoretical and empirical investigations of citizenship influence understandings of migration in ways different to analytical approaches that stress other kinds of political subjectivity—e.g. social class, the lived experiences or agency of the refugees and stateless people?
- To what extent do patterns of migration in the Asian region disarticulate the figure of the citizen from the figure of the worker? What are new and emerging ways of theorising citizenship and migration that are relevant in various contexts?

In what ways can we theorise the ‘indentured’ as a poetics of relation, for example, through Mauritian poet Khal Torabully’s notion of the ‘coolitude,’ or Martinique philosopher Edouard Glissant’s concept of opacity, or alliance-building against what Laura Ann Stoler characterises as the persisting imperial durabilities of our time?

What forms of agency and belonging do migrant possess despite legal exclusions, including political participation, economic belonging, trade unionism and migrant/refugee organisations? What forms of differentiated citizenship, exclusion, and belonging shape contemporary migration experiences e.g. indenture, statelessness, residential registration, denizenship, plural citizenships, war and violence?

How do migrants resist exclusionary citizenship regimes and enact new claims—locally and nationally, and transnationally?

### **New Forms of Knowledge Production**

Our GHI encourages colleagues and students to conduct various forms of knowledge production to explore the issues of migration, logistics, and unequal citizens through academic papers, artistic works, and digital approaches, to bridge universities and societies, and to link scholars with migrant workers, refugee communities, trans-local NGOs/CBOs, artist groups, filmmakers and journalists. We will create occasions for trans-local advocates and artists groups working for migrants, refugees, and stateless communities to meet and exchange ideas on common concerns and share the tactics from different groups. We will create space to reflect on the various strategies and create new conversations. We hope to facilitate productive discussions and foster knowledge sharing across disciplines and modalities. Also, we will establish a shared transnational online resource documenting innovative approaches in addressing migrant and refugee issues. Some suggested area of focus, but not limited to, are as the following:

- Storytelling can be a powerful tool humanising “the other.” What are the existing innovative projects working with migrants and refugees, using storytelling in different forms—such as theatre, poetry recitals, music festival, writing workshops, photography, and film making? What is the impact of these initiatives for the migrant communities and the audience/readers?
- Artists have pushed the envelope of artistic forms that paralleled their commitment to discussing the experiences of this global movement of people and the power dynamics engendered by this large-scale mobility. In what ways were modern and contemporary arts a vital avenue for new forms of knowledge production to address issues of unequal citizens and cross-boundary imaginations?

- What are new institutional forms created by the interface of migration knowledge practices with formal gallery spaces and museums?
- What is the role of digitalisation in generating knowledge and strategies to address issues of migration and unequal citizenship?
- How are civil conversations and alliance building facilitated across communities? What are some new conversations and narratives that are being shaped in these processes?

# New Migrant Worker Precarity under COVID-19, Repatriation

The main objective of these talks is to link up workers, researchers, activists, policymakers, civil society organisations, journalists and GHI participants to highlight and address the urgency for migrant worker justice in Asia, especially ASEAN regions under the Covid-19 crisis.

The conversation between these NGO representatives will be on facilitating a network of translocalised connection and a platform for research and action on new migrant worker precarity in Asia and South Asia, participants from other regions are welcome.

## About the Speakers

**Iweng Karsiwen:** Karsiwen is the founder and Chairperson for Kabar Bumi (the Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers Families). She had worked in Hong Kong for over ten years, served as the Vice Chair of ATKI-HK (the Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong), and later served as the coordinator for ATKI-Indonesia. As an organiser for over twenty years she has worked with migrant workers abroad as well as returnee migrant workers and their families through legal workshops and leadership training for migrant worker rights and anti-trafficking.

**Joanna Concepcion:** Joanna Concepcion is the chairperson of Migrante International based in the Philippines. Concepcion has been active in local and international grassroots movements to advance the rights of migrant and immigrant workers and advocate for human rights, genuine development, justice and peace in the Philippines and abroad. She previously served as the Executive director of Filipino Migrant Center in the US, where low-income Filipino Families are provided resources and support in their pursuit of rights and justice to uplift their families and communities.

**Adisorn Kerdmongkol:** Adisorn Kerdmongkol is founder and coordinator of Migrant Working Group, a consortium of migrant worker organizations that work in legal reform, labor organizing and migrant radio, community based and civil society organizations advocating for migrant worker rights through research, policy advocacy, and organizing for self-empowerment. Having over thirty years experience, he has worked with a network of advocates to change Thailand's migrant worker policy towards inclusion, justice, and health access.



# Impact Covid-19 to Indonesian Migrant Worker

**Iweng Karsiwen**

Listen to a podcast of Iweng Karsiwen's talk here.



## Current situation

Estimated 10 million international (Asia Pacific, Middle East, Europe, US, Africa)

Mostly women (70%), 70% in Domestic Traders

Coming from rural area

Low education level: high school

Young age: 18 - 21 years old

Pass Passport easily

Estimated: 2017-2018

FLY 15  
15% OFF  
or office



## Common Problems

- Confiscate the Document
- Overcharging of recruitment agency fees
- Denial of contractual benefits such as rest days and statutory holidays
- Vulnerable due to mandatory live-in (improper accommodation, insufficient food, rest time, sexual/physical/verbal abuses, illegal works, etc)
- Trapped in Human Trafficking
- Etc

- The number of covid increasing everyday including the IMW's Per 28 September 2020 total 1708 infected
- The issues confronted by IMW & families:
  - Quarantine only in Jakarta (Wisma Atlet and Trauma centre, total 3060 IMW's)
  - No covid-19 financial assistance for IMW & Families
  - Limited assistance repatriation IMW's
  - Force to stay in agency during lost job/transition employer
  - High expenses during pandemic IMW & Families
  - Pay more placement fee (carantina and PCR Test)
  - Working Condition : more vulnerable and discrimination (over work, no rest day, lost job, health)
  - More stress due to to online school
  - Many families IMW lost job



## Advocacy

- closely coordinated to discuss and unite the urgent issues of IMWs and our families.
- dialogues with Indonesian government bodies including Consulate
- social media campaign
- , joint advocacy and sharing of strategies in coping with the pandemic with other alliance
- Gather donation



## Recomendation

- Provide quarantine in all departure
- Provide free PCR test to the IMW's and Families
- Provide financial assistance to all IMW's
- Provide Safe and fast repatriation
- MoA with host country to protect IMW's Hygiene and temporary accommodation
- Provide mask, hand sanitizer and food
- Free IMW's from any fees including agency fees



# COVID19 Impact on Filipino Migrant Workers

**Joanna Concepcion**

Listen to a podcast of Joanna Concepcion's talk here



## General Situation

### *By the numbers*



- **6,000+** Filipino Migrant Workers leave the country everyday or 2.3+ M a year
  - **400,000** sea-based migrants
- **10%-12%** of Philippine population living and working outside the country
- Estimate **1-2 Million** Filipino migrant workers displaced by COVID19 pandemic
- **400,000+** migrant workers (land & sea-based) have been repatriated back to the Philippines
- **100,000+** displaced migrant workers have been stranded overseas awaiting repatriation assistance from the Philippine government
- **11,000+** migrant Filipinos have been infected with COVID19 overseas



## Economic & Health Impacts

- Lack of income and livelihood affects migrant workers and families' survival
- Labor violations caused by imposition of lockdown policies and restrictions
- Little to no financial assistance given for those displaced by host and PH government
- Migrant families are disqualified from receiving aid from social welfare department
- Lack of access to language accessible information on COVID19, health supplies testing, medical attention and services



## Economic & Health Impacts

- Repatriated migrant workers are placed in inadequate and substandard quarantine facilities with no health services (e.g. psychosocial services)
- Delayed release of PCR test results, resulting in long quarantine time
- Lack of systematic and coordinated transportation assistance
- Lack of national and local government coordination

FACED POOR WORKING AND LIVING CONDITIONS, WAGE THEFT, LACK OF DECENT FOOD, CLEAN WATER, HEALTH SUPPLIES AND MEDICAL ATTENTION

3-6+ months stranded at sea; vessels not allowed to dock on nearby ports



**Case #1: stranded Filipino seafarers in China (Taiwanese-owned fishing vessels)**

SLOW REPATRIATION AND WELFARE ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT AND GOVERNMENT OF CHINA



## Campaign Demands

1. Develop comprehensive plan for immediate repatriation of displaced and distressed migrant workers
2. Provide educational information on COVID19, free food assistance, health supplies especially vulnerable migrant workers (undocumented, at-risk, frontliner migrant workers)
3. Provide free mass testing and access to health services, adequate temporary shelters and quarantine facilities
4. Immediately release financial assistance to all OFWs affected by the COVID19 pandemic and provide alternative livelihood
5. Assist all displaced migrant workers who were not paid their remaining wages, overtime pay and other benefits
6. Implement a moratorium on mandatory collection of government fees
7. Provide education support for the children of migrant workers



# Introduction to the Talks

## COVID-19 Impacts on Migrant Workers in Philippines and Indonesia

Chan Man Ching, Nenki (IACS-UST, NCU)

In these talks, Ms. Iweng Karsiwen, chairperson of the Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers Families in Indonesia and Ms. Joanna Concepcion, chairperson of Migrante International from Philippines joined together to discuss the grim situation experienced by overseas migrant workers and shared their experiences of helping the workers who are in need during this pandemic. They also raised their concerns on the government responsibilities to take care of the displaced and repatriated migrant workers.

### **Labour export in Philippines and Indonesia**

Ms. Concepcion first gave a brief introduction about the development of labour export in the Philippines. According to Philippines government's data presented in 2019, more than 6000 Filipino migrant workers left the country every day to work overseas and about 2.3 million a year. There are 400,000 sea-based migrants while the rest are land-based migrants, which is 10 to 12% of the Filipino population. It is significant that the remittances sent by the migrant workers to their families are one of the most important financial sources to the Philippines government. Therefore, Dr. Rodriguez (2010) argued that it is a legal way of "human trafficking," allowing the government to keep promoting their labour markets to the overseas investors to increase the income of the country. On the other hand, for the situation in Indonesia, Ms. Karsiwen mentioned that there are 10 million migrant workers who work overseas in the Asia Pacific, Middle East, the US, Africa and Europe. Most of them are women and 70% of them are domestic workers. They usually come from poor peasant families with low educational levels and young ages between 18-25 years old. According to Ms. Karsiwen's data analysis, the remittances sent by the foreign workers reached 218 trillion US dollars in 2019. It proves that labour export is also the main financial income to the Indonesian family, similar to the situation in the Philippines.

Ms. Karsiwen further argued on the collusion between the agencies,

Indonesian government and the host government(s). Before working overseas, all Indonesian migrant workers are required to go through training centres and agencies. Otherwise, they could not get the approval to work in the host countries. This policy allows the agencies to regulate the recruitment and deployment among the migrant workers. Furthermore, it becomes rational for them to charge high agency fees, which become heavy debts for some of the migrant workers. Their important documents are also confiscated when they start working overseas. For the cases of “two-weeks policy” in Hong Kong, migrant workers are required to go back to their home country within 14 days after being deployed by their employees. It becomes a great weapon for the employees and agencies to threaten the migrant workers for being silent, even when they faced sexual, physical and verbal abuses within the host families. The workers who are fearful of being disqualified would accept to finish additional works and sometimes, illegal works. According to Ms. Karsiwen, there are 15% cases of drug trafficking, and the majority of them are women. These cases clearly present that the government policies become a secret agreement between employees, agencies and governments for mistreating the migrant workers, but at the same time ironically, rely on them for increasing economic incomes of the country.

### **Endless time of darkness during the pandemic**

During COVID-19, both Filipino and Indonesian migrant workers suffered from poverty and an unforeseeable future, as most of them were displaced. Ms. Concepcion draws her discussion on the economic and health impacts among Filipino Migrant Workers. Under the observation of her organisation, namely the Migrante International, they estimated that there are more than 2 million foreign workers who are displaced, ironically more than the number mentioned in the Philippines government records will be displaced and afterwards, lose their livelihood because of poverty in the pandemic. Around 400,000+ foreign sea-based and land-based workers have already been repatriated back to the Philippines since February 2020 and 100,000+ of them are waiting for the repatriation assistance provided by the Philippines government. However, while they spend months waiting for the rescue, more than 11,000 of them are infected with the virus in the host country, and the majority of them are working in the healthcare field. How could they take care of their family if they are waiting for repatriation with no job opportunities outside?

She moved further to discuss her observation of the economic impacts among Filipino families. Most of the Filipino migrant workers were forced to terminate their contracts and suffered from the “no work no pay” policies. The lockdown policies and travel restrictions announced by the host government have strongly forced the companies to stop their business and lay off migrant

workers. As a result, the workers could neither take care of their own basic needs, nor send the remittances to their families back in the Philippines. On the other hand, the policies are used by the employees to mistreat the migrant workers. Filipino migrant workers are required to do additional works with little rest to catch up with the production timeline. It is irrational and illegal. Nonetheless, the foreign workers can only stay silent because of the poor living environment of their families. Some of them are even afraid of losing their job during the pandemic.

### **Government's liability during the pandemic**

What did the government do to help the migrant workers who are suffering from losing their jobs in the host country? Both Ms. Karsiwen and Ms. Concepcion argued that the financial and reparation assistances provided by their governments are unreasonably low, and many migrant workers have not received any responses from the governments since the beginning of the pandemic. According to Ms. Karsiwen, on 28 Sep 2020, more than 1,700 Indonesian migrant workers are infected. Nonetheless, the government only provided the quarantine centre in Jakarta (Wisma Atlet and Trauma Centre) with 3,060 migrant workers staying in there. Furthermore, financial assistance is not provided by the government. For workers who have lost their jobs, they are unable to fulfil their responsibilities or even buy an air ticket to return to Indonesia. Ironically, the government financial support is only provided for their training before work, but not addressing the immediate problem of returning migrants and their families who are suffering from poverty. Similar to the cases in Indonesia, Ms. Concepcion argued that the quarantine facilities are inadequate and of substandard, without any health care services. "Migrant workers who are pregnant reported that they were experiencing cramped conditions, leading to violations in observing physical distancing measure." It shows that the quarantine shelter's environment was horrible and lack of support provided to the migrant workers. Furthermore, Ms. Concepcion criticised that the progress of getting a health certificate is extremely slow and the workers are forced to stay in the quarantine facilities for more days than expected, even their COVID test results are negative. Foreign workers were stuck inside the facilities and unable to return home. It is also argued that there was lack of systematic and organised plans by the government to help migrant workers who have finished their quarantine and some of them even had to be stranded at the airports due to the lack of domestic flights. Many migrant workers were forced to stay outside the airport in Manila, with limited food, water and hygiene supplies. Last but not least, there was lack of communication between national governments and local governments for providing the shuttle buses from airport to the migrant workers home in the rural area. As a result, many of their entries were refused by the national governments. Ms. Concepcion highlights the case of stranded Filipino

seafarers in China showing that these seafarers who worked for Taiwanese companies have been suffering since the beginning of the pandemic. They have been stuck on the sea inside the fishing vessels because the Chinese government did not allow them to dock on the nearby ports. Although some of their contracts ended, they were forced to work for the company in exchange for limited supplies. They have been experiencing poor working and living conditions. Long term stranding on the sea has caused severe health problems on these Filipino seafarers. The irregular eating habits and dirty water have caused stomach problems. The workers who got sick were not provided with suitable medical support on board. Nonetheless, after they appeal these situations to the Philippines government, the process of providing supplies and financial support between Philippines government and Chinese government has been extremely slow to ensure their safety back to the Philippines. For Ms. Concepcion and her organisation, it is obviously a dereliction of duty of the government, “posing a very dangerous threat to the health and safety of many sea-based migrants.”

### **The missions of the NGOs**

Without the support of the government, both NGOs in the Philippines and Indonesia aimed to help the migrant workers go through this difficult time during the pandemic. According to Ms. Kariswen, the migrant organisation in Indonesia coordinated with other organisations in cross countries, like Hong Kong, Macau, Malaysia, Singapore and Middle East to discuss and solve the problems experienced by the migrant workers and their families. Her organisation, Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers Families has initiated several dialogues with stakeholders in the Indonesian government, including the consulates to raise their concerns. They also engaged in society and social media as a company platform to address their opinions. Furthermore, they worked with other NGOs in Indonesia and raised donations from public to help migrant workers and their families. Nonetheless, it is not enough for them to help all migrant workers who are in need. Thus, Ms. Kariswen reminds us that it is the responsibility of the government to provide help and support to these families. First, they have to provide quarantine places for all the departure and free PCR tests should be provided to all Indonesian migrant workers and their families. Second, they should provide financial assistance to the workers and their families and assist them for safe and fast repatriation, for instance, air tickers, temporary accommodations and transports to their original flats in Indonesia regardless of their immigration practice. More importantly, measures must be taken against any companies charging any fees, especially agency fees from the workers who need money to take care of their families during the pandemic.

Ms. Concepcion also raised her organisation’s concerns regarding to

government duties during the pandemic. To solve the problem of workers' repatriation, they suggested that government has to develop a comprehensive plan for the immediate perpetuation of distressed migrant workers. They also have to provide free food assistance, health supplies, especially to those who are vulnerable migrant workers, undocumented address and front-liner migrant workers. Free mass testing and access to health services, adequate temporary shelters and quarantine facilities are also needed. Immediate financial assistance is important for all Filipino migrant workers and their families who are suffering from hunger and poverty. Last but not least, the government should aid with all displaced migrant workers who are low paid, overworked and mistreated. It is also essential to implement a moratorium on the mandatory collection of government fees charged to migrant workers and paid for the children of the migrant workers.

According to the sharing of Ms. Kariswen and Ms. Concepcion, it is noticed that the situation of both Indonesian and Filipino migrant workers is severe. The dereliction of duty of the government has deeply influenced their daily life with their families. They are not allowed to work, forced to come home, however, without any support and financial assistance to their families. As the organisations argued, they are all vulnerable workers who sent remittances home and be one of the important financial incomes to their government, which means they should be well-treated. Thus, it is essential for the public to understand that government has to provide funding and proper assistance for the workers and their families who are in need during the pandemic.

# Thailand's Management of migrant workers during the COVID-19 epidemic: Management and policies

**Adisorn Kerdmongkol**

Listen to a podcast of Adisorn Kerdmongkol's speech here (*in Thai only*)



Thailand's Management of  
migrant workers during the  
COVID-19 epidemic

**Management  
and policies**

**Adisorn Kerdmongkol**

**Migrant Working Group, Thailand**



# Impact of Covid-19 on Migrant Workers

We cannot stay, but cannot go back home...

states and employers lose workplaces/ border closures

**Projected more than 700,000 unemployed**



### Business closures

Business was laid off without compensation. Temporary closure, lack of income, and social security



### Subcontracting workers

employers lack income lead to repatriated workers without work or keeping workers, but not providing work



### Reduce work time

reduce working hours, reduce working days, reduce wages

**No income**  
**No help from the state governments**  
**No future.**

### A Life at Risk, Faced with Precarity

1. Risk of life, lack of income, no employment, no money for accommodation.
2. Risk of legality, legal conditions not allow for changing employers, incorrect documentation
3. Health risk Lack of health insurance unable to access services

## Delay Entry for MOU Workers

- \* Due to COVID, Burma stopped sending workers abroad
- \* With Thai border checkpoints closed, mobility and travel is prohibited.
- \* Transnational low wage work labeled unnecessary.
- \* The Department of Employment ordered provinces. All job centers to delay processing of MOU worker entry approval.
- \* Thai Embassy in Laos and Cambodia Immigration Suspend Non-LA visas for MOU workers



## Impacts of Border Closure and Waiver Measures

01

### Workers in-Country

There was no clear direction for the workers who became undocumented outside of the system.

Four years contract workers are still waiting for clarity about their departure home.

Pink card workers are still stuck in limbo regarding guidelines.

03

### Impact on migration

Some workers began to return through natural crossings. No disease screening available.

More and more undocumented workers are arrested.

There is an increased risk of being trafficked or brought in illegally.

02

### Workers outside the Country

Workers waiting to enter are unable to travel. Expenses already incurred. The in-bound workers have no clear direction, rumors have emerged.

04

### Government actions

There is no clear management. Except for groups that already have a continual flow...

No strategy about the return of migrant workers

The nationalist Ministry of Labor focuses on Thai people first  
Nativism and Labor econometrics focus on "Thai workers instead of migrant workers"

## Relief & Monetary Aid

### State aid measures and the impact on migrant workers

#### Relief Measures

- Social Security provides unemployment benefits by receiving 62% compensation for 3 months.
- Contribution must have been paid for at least 6 months by employers and the business must be temporarily closed in whole or in part, according to a government order or due to the force majeure for public health epidemic control.

#### Impact on Migrant Workers

- The employer did not file a notice of business closure
- Migrant workers insured for less than 6 months through social security
- Online claimant system is not conducive for migrant workers, language, ect.
- Many employers not providing Social Security led to disqualifications
- Employers do not terminate their employment, and they do not close their business, but reduce working hours, Disqualifying many from the unemployment requirement.
- Migrants who filed already, Social Security deemed businesses not temporarily shut down because of COVID demanded return of relief money, hence failed to proceed under Section 75 of the Labor Protection Act
- There is still a continuous layoff of migrant workers.



# Risks and challenges

Vulnerable groups impacted



## Assistance & Protection for Migrant Workers' Rights Under COVID-19

### Systemic Problems Found

- Migrant workers were laid off without compensation.
- Temporarily closed Causing labor lack of income
- Labor contractors (subcontract) returned to the contractor without receiving compensation. No reallocated to different locations for work.
- Labor has been reduced. Causing not enough income
- Employers choose to use remedies not to renew their work permit, so that there is no further migrant employment

### Assistance vs Denial of Rights

- The Ministry of Labor accepts online applications. But inconsistent with labor, such as no language capacity. All submissions are individual and must use personal E-mail of migrant workers.
- Processing claims for travel to the government agencies is delayed because of compliance with disease prevention.
- The aid and relief mechanism from the country of origin (labor attaches' embassies) still are inefficient

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