



▶ ILO Brief

3 June 2020¹

Experiences of ASEAN migrant workers during COVID-19:

Rights at work, migration and quarantine during the pandemic, and re-migration plans

Context and introduction

In 2019 there were an estimated 10 million international migrants in ASEAN, of whom nearly 50 per cent were women.² The COVID-19 pandemic is disrupting labour migration throughout the region and globally.³ Women and men migrant workers in the region are striving to protect their livelihoods and their health through the crisis, yet many are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and its economic and health impacts. The ILO undertook a rapid assessment survey, interviewing ASEAN migrant workers about how COVID-19 has impacted them. This brief summarizes the responses of the 309 women and men migrant workers who participated in the survey.

Key findings

Among all migrant workers:

- ▶ Overall, 98 per cent of migrant workers reported having received information about COVID-19,⁴ 93 per cent of whom said it was useful.
- ▶ Fewer respondents were certain about what to do in case they - or someone they know - suspect that they have COVID-19, with women more certain (74 per cent) than men (67 per cent).⁵

In destination countries:

- ▶ In destination countries, 89 per cent of respondents were still employed,⁶ with no major differences between women and men respondents.

- ▶ The majority unemployed in destination (97 per cent) had not accessed any social security support.
- ▶ Of migrant workers with current jobs in destination countries, 33 per cent were not provided personal protective equipment (PPE) by their employers. This differed by country, and in Thailand 57 per cent did not have basic PPE of masks and hand sanitizer.
- ▶ In countries of destination, 32 per cent of currently employed respondents said they faced employment challenges and abuses related to COVID-19.⁷ These include cases of violence or harassment and also abuses which are indicators of

forced labour. Migrant workers reported the following specific problems:

- Contract termination, or threats thereof
- Being compelled to work against their will
- Being required to take unpaid leave/sick leave
- Inability to refuse work during lockdown
- Reduced working days and pay, or uncertainty of next pay check
- Threats, harassment, or violence from an employer
- Passports or other legal documents are held by an employer

In origin countries:

- ▶ Among returnees, 47 per cent reported that they left jobs because they chose to and wanted to return home, and 24 per cent had a contract that was due to end. However, 16 per cent reported that employers prematurely ended their contract – whether permanently or temporarily.⁸
- ▶ Migrant workers cite transportation costs, as well as waiting times at border points, that are higher than usual. Some have been stranded in countries of destination.
- ▶ Among returnee migrants, 93 per cent reported that they quarantined at home or in a state-mandated institution upon return.⁹

▶ Among those who were quarantined, 23 per cent reported problems¹⁰ including shortages of food and high temperatures due to lack of fans or air conditioning. In some quarantine centres, problems included unsafe practices of shared drinking glasses and crowded shared sleeping areas. Some migrant workers struggled with exclusion, isolation, depression, sleep difficulties, and other mental health related issues.

▶ In the short term, returnee migrant workers to Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Viet Nam primarily want to stay home and rest (52 per cent). Some aim to find a job at home, open their own business, or work on the family farm (20 per cent). Others reported not having plans yet (16 per cent).¹¹

▶ The ILO in Myanmar specifically asked further questions about long-term plans, finding that 58 per cent of returnees are planning to migrate again. Most anticipate being able to go back to their former jobs. A further 28 per cent do not plan to re-migrate, and 13 per cent are undecided. When sex-disaggregated, a gendered dimension emerges from the data, showing that more Myanmar men than women are planning to re-migrate (67 per cent vs. 50 per cent respectively).¹²

This survey was implemented primarily by ILO Migrant Worker Resource Centres (MRCs) and elsewhere CSO partners. MRCs, supported by the ILO, deliver services directly to migrant workers and their communities in countries of origin and destination through partnerships with government institutions, trade unions and civil society organizations.¹³ MRCs provide information on migrating to work and provide a space to ask questions and to lodge complaints and get legal aid. Counselling is provided at the MRCs and in communities through outreach activities and meetings, in addition to online and over the phone. The ILO currently supports more than 40 MRCs in seven ASEAN countries.

Methodology note

From late March to end April 2020 the ILO with MRC and CSO partners¹⁴ in ASEAN administered surveys to migrant workers. The assessment captured varied experiences, including of: migrant workers who had begun recruitment processes that are now stalled, those who migrated after the pandemic began, migrants in destinations with and without work, and returnees.

Surveys were translated to migrant languages, and in some countries where migrant workers have internet access the survey was also put online. In one country, the Philippines, migrant networks sent the survey to migrant workers in countries of destination beyond ASEAN, giving a wider insight into current migrant experiences. MRCs and CSOs administered the survey to migrant worker respondents both who came to their centres, as well as others in communities nearby using purposive sampling. The benefit of this in a rapid survey is that migrant workers may trust the organizations, having used their services before. The survey was undertaken with care to best practices of informed consent, confidentiality, and follow up care or referrals if wanted by the migrant worker. In some cases survey participants did not want to answer questions, and not all questions were relevant to every person's

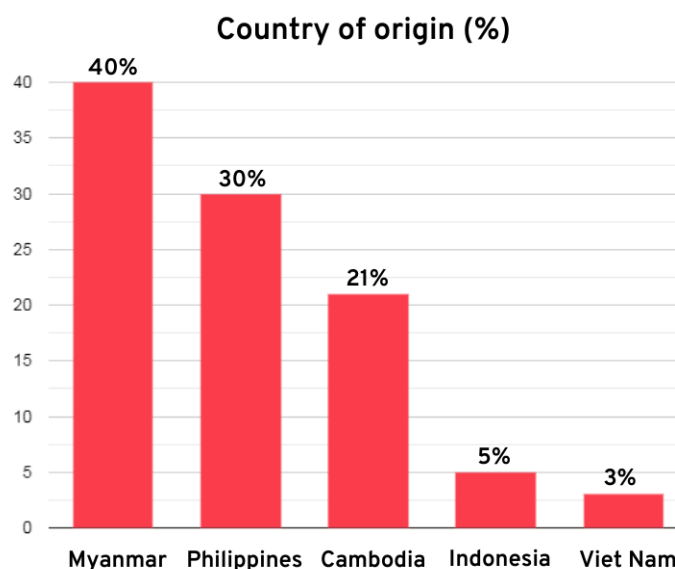
situation. Therefore, response numbers vary for each question, and the total number of respondents for a given question is indicated in graphs and endnotes. Due to limitations given the locations of ILO MRCs and CSO partners, as well as restrictions of movement hampering survey administration, varying numbers of migrant workers answered the survey in the countries where it was administered. Therefore, aggregates can only give an indicative estimate of the situation regionally. While not generalizable, data and quotes do accurately reflect the response of the migrant workers surveyed for this rapid assessment.

Who was surveyed? Research participants

Of the 309 ASEAN migrant workers surveyed, 178 were in countries of origin (Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Viet Nam¹⁵) and 131 in countries of destination (Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand in ASEAN, and also Hong Kong (China), Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates, among others¹⁶).

Of migrants interviewed in origin countries, 15 per cent were potential migrants who had started recruitment processes and the rest were returnees (85 per cent).¹⁷ See figure 1 for details of all respondents' countries of origin.

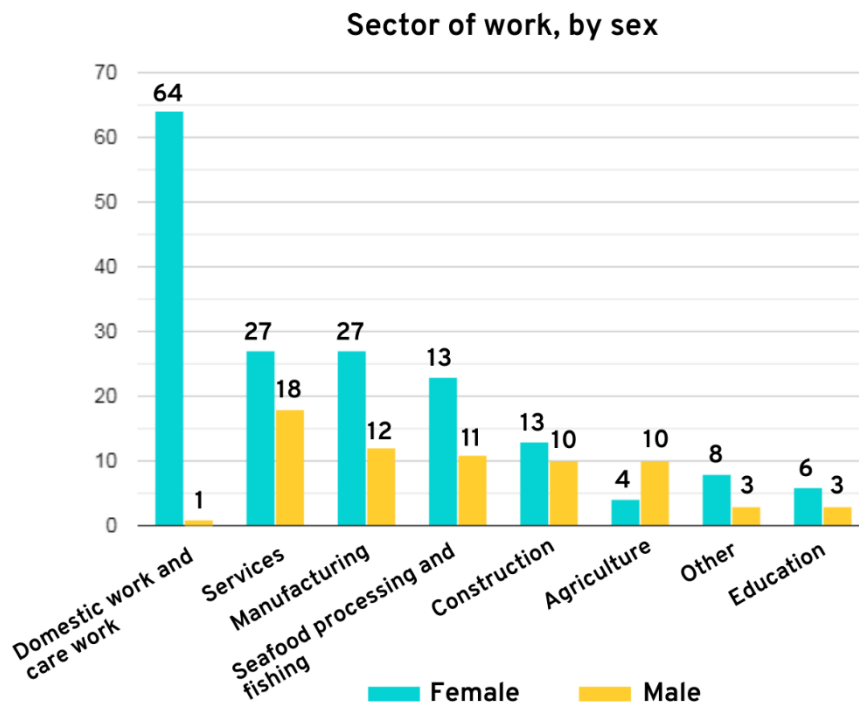
► Figure 1: Respondents' country of origin, n=309



As noted above, due to restrictions on and locations of ILO survey partners, the survey included a majority of respondents who had returned from or were in Thailand (178 respondents). This should be taken into consideration when reading the results in this brief. Other respondent countries of destination were Malaysia (21), Singapore (19), Hong Kong (China) (14), the United Arab Emirates (13), Japan (9), Saudi Arabia (9), and Kuwait (5), with an additional people (24) going to other countries of destination in Asia, Europe, the Arab States, and North America.¹⁸ An additional four were seafarers who did not list a country of destination.

As many surveys were carried out by women-focused service providers,¹⁹ women made up 70 per cent of interviewees. Men comprised 29 per cent, and 1 per cent preferred not to say or gave no information about their gender.²⁰ However, this varied in countries of origin (with 60 per cent women respondents) and destination (with 85 per cent women respondents). Sectors in which respondents were employed included: domestic and care work (27 per cent), followed by the service sector (19 per cent), manufacturing (16 per cent), and seafood processing and fishing (14 per cent).²¹ See figure 2 for sex-disaggregation of sectors (totals).

► Figure 2: Respondents' sector of work, by sex n=240

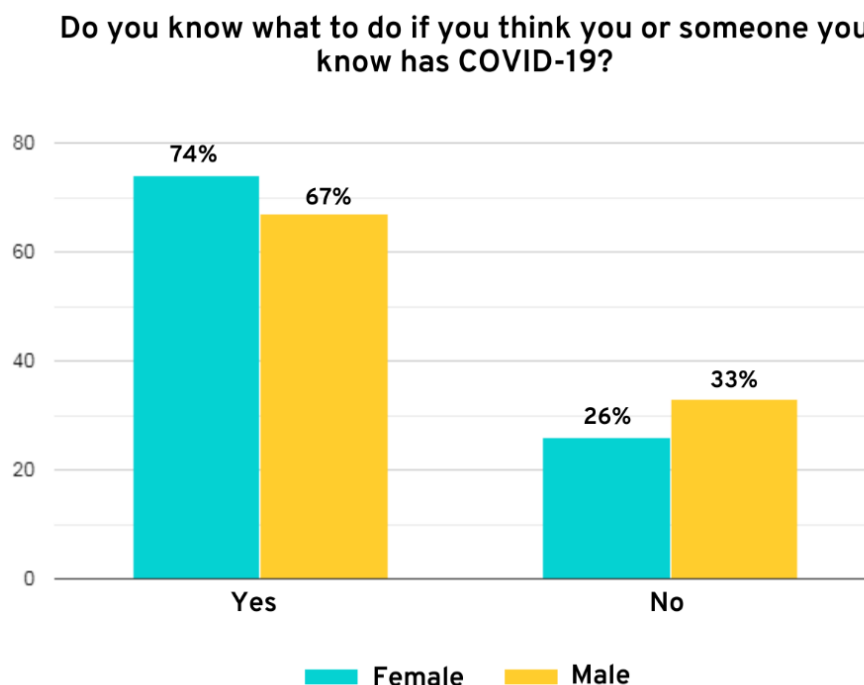


1. Information and knowledge about COVID-19: How much do migrant workers know?

Overall, 98 per cent of migrant workers reported having received information about COVID-19,²² 93 of whom said it was useful. They received information mostly from friends, social media and messaging tools (such as Facebook, Whatsapp, and Line), local news, and brochures.²³

In interviews, 88 per cent of respondents (90 per cent of women and 83 per cent of men) said they knew the symptoms of COVID-19 and could usually recall the two to three most common symptoms.²⁴ Respondents were less certain about what to do in case they or someone they know thought they might have COVID-19, with women more certain (74 per cent) than men (67 per cent, see figure 3).²⁵ Most respondents said they would report to a doctor/health clinic or inform local authorities. Most also would self-isolate and/or keep distance from others.

► Figure 3: Knowledge of action to take if suspect COVID-19 infection, self-reported n=244



Respondents were, by contrast, better informed about prevention. Overall 91 per cent of respondents said they know how to take measures that can reduce the chance of COVID-19 transmission.²⁶ Among those, respondents were usually able to detail two to three preventive measures, such as hygiene and physical distancing.

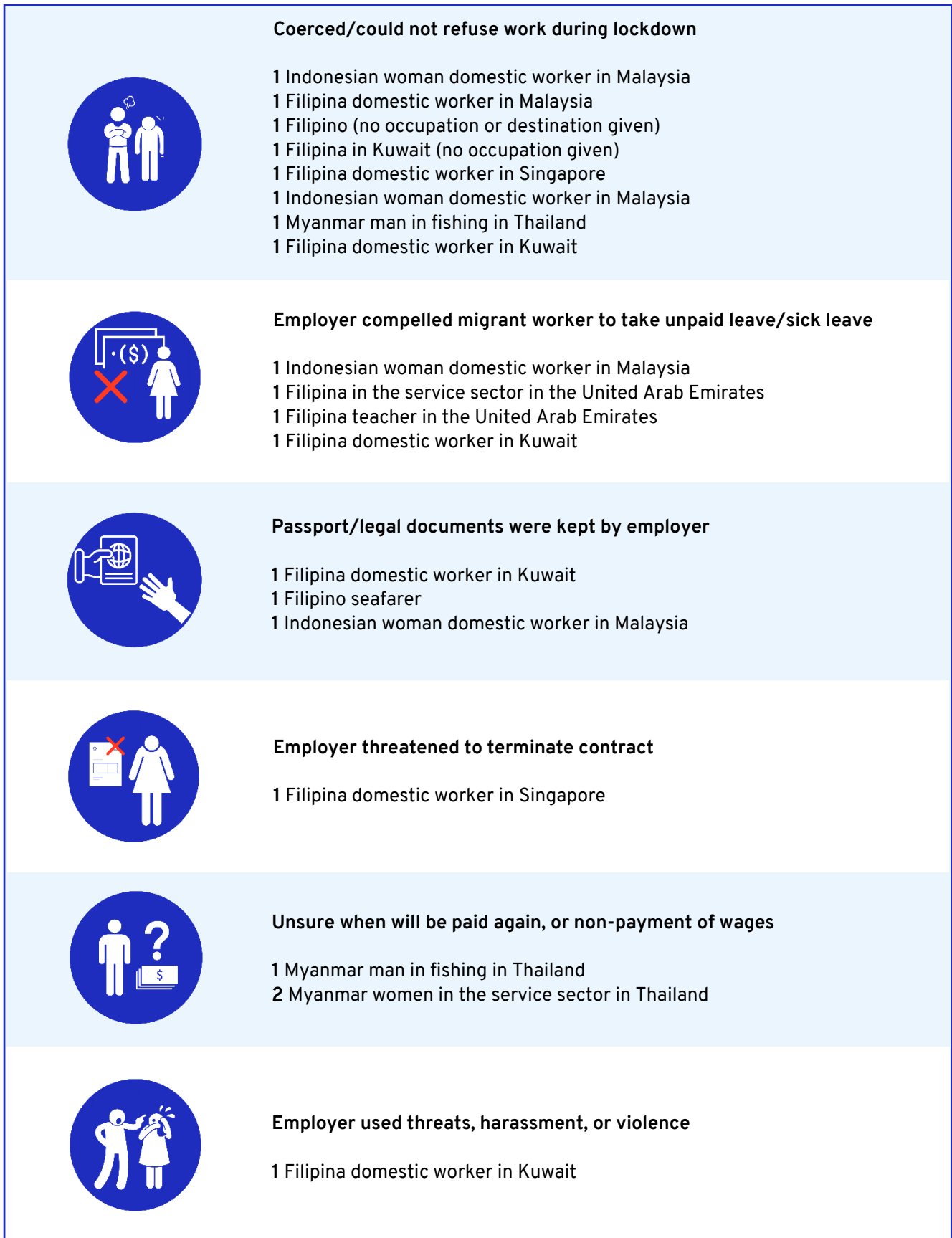
“[We should] wash hands, wear a mask, and avoid crowds.” – Vietnamese woman returned from garment sector work in Japan

2. Job related impacts of COVID-19

In countries of destination, 32 per cent of currently employed respondents said they faced employment challenges or abuses related to COVID-19.²⁷ Accordingly, 68 per cent reported that they did not think they had employment problems. Among destination respondents who are no longer working, expectedly the amount reporting problems increased, and 43 per cent said they faced employment challenges and abuses related to COVID-19.²⁸

A minority of respondents gave further detail about what those problems were. The reported problems are shown in the below figure:

► **Figure 4: Snapshot of employment abuses related to COVID-19, reported by ASEAN**

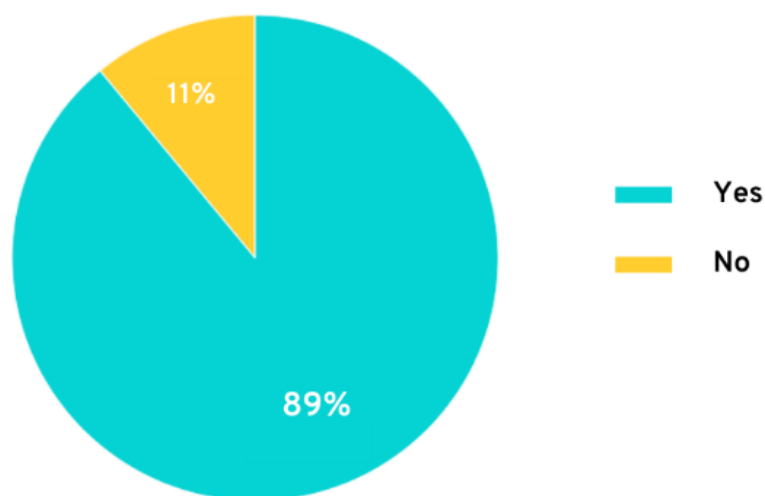


Job retention and job loss

Job losses and labour market contraction have occurred on a large scale globally, with about 10 per cent drop in working hours in Asia and the Pacific estimated for the second quarter of 2020.²⁹ Money sent home as remittances to countries in East Asia and the Pacific is expected to fall by 13 per cent due to the pandemic.³⁰ In destination countries, 89 per cent of respondents were still employed at the time of interview (see figure 5),³¹ with no major differences between women and men respondents. However, increased unemployment is not fully captured in this number, as many migrant workers who lost their jobs have now returned to their countries of origin.

► **Figure 5: Employment status among respondents in countries of destination, n=126**

Currently employed in destination (%)



Among returnees, 47 per cent left jobs because they chose to, and 24 per cent had a contract that was due to end. However, 16 per cent had employers who permanently or temporarily ended the contract prematurely (see figure 6).³² Further, as below, some employers laid off undocumented workers first.

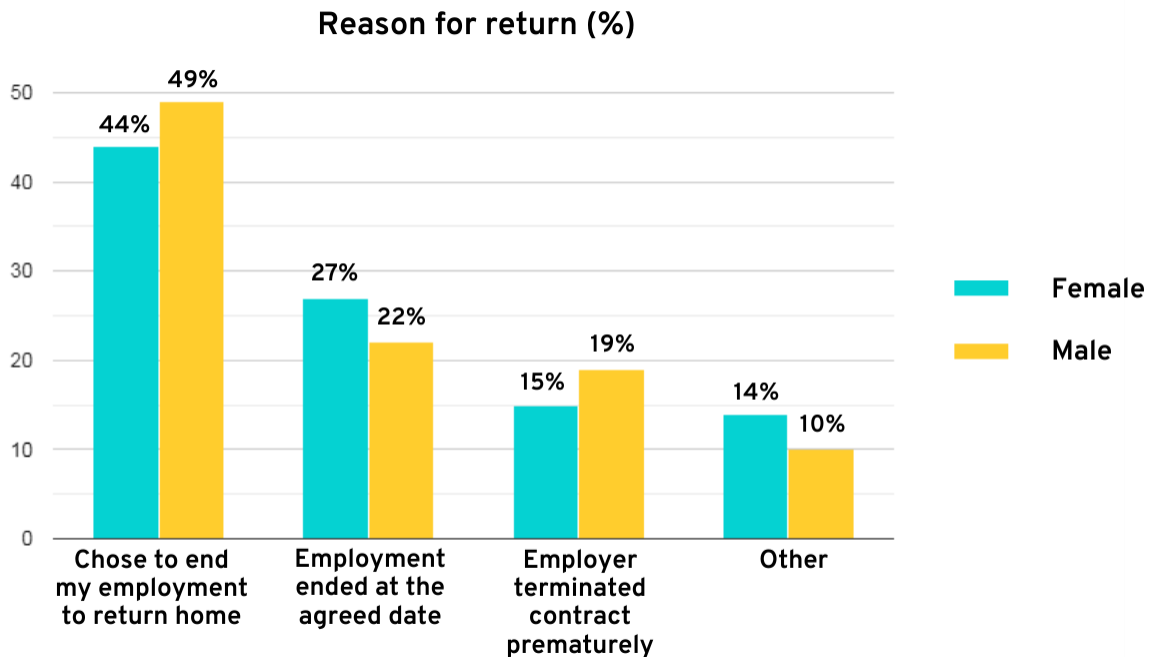
“My employer ended my contract. There is no work for me.” - Indonesian woman domestic worker in Malaysia

“My employer asked me to return when the situation is back to normal. [For now] my employer asked me to return home because he is worried about police arrest as I didn’t have any documents.” – Myanmar man returned from service sector work in Japan

Among returnees who said they chose to end their employment to return home, their detailed reasons included worry about family or uncertainties related to documentation renewals or border closures. Regardless of which party (employer or worker) initiated the employment termination, many migrant workers across the region are now jobless and in need of a new way to maintain their livelihood:

“My employer extended the contract, but I did not accept it due to being so worried of the virus being in Thailand and my family members at home in Cambodia. I also anticipated I would not be able to renew my documents. I was concerned about my family because the outbreak is spreading quickly and causing deaths.” – Cambodian man returned from Thailand

► Figure 6: Job-related reasons for return to Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Viet Nam, n=132



Payment of wages

Although there is not enough survey data to report fully, some returnee migrants said that they were paid in full before leaving countries of destination. This is seen in the qualitative data in quotes below:

“My full salary was paid the day before I left.” – Myanmar man returned from service sector work in Thailand

“I got paid in full, but did not receive social security.” – Myanmar woman returned from construction sector work in Thailand

When asked about COVID-19 related problems, respondents primarily described deferred, reduced or non-payment of wages, and, as mentioned above, employment termination:

“I didn’t receive my full wage from my employer. When I asked about it, no explanation was given. [I didn’t receive] social security benefits. I had migrated with an agency, but they never contacted me. I didn’t contact the labour attaché.” – Myanmar woman returned from work in the service sector in Thailand

“I returned home because my employer had to close the restaurant due to COVID. My employer allowed me to stay without a salary. They also [said they] cannot guarantee [safety from] police arrest. Therefore I returned from Thailand. I do not have an agreement with my employer to return to work after COVID.” – Myanmar woman returned from work in the service sector in Thailand

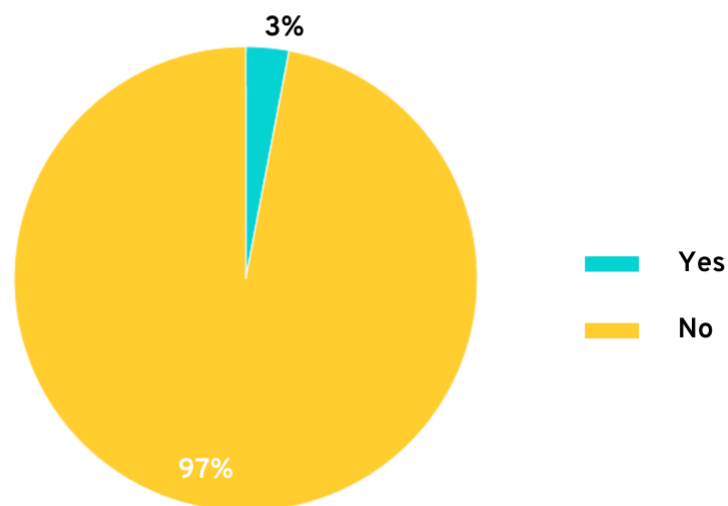
“In March 2020, the manufacturing [company] had reduced our working days. We are now working two days and taking leave two days repeatedly. In April, the factory was also temporarily closed for ten days from 10 - 20 April. Our wage also is reduced from around 7,500 baht (US\$234) for 13 days’ work, to around 3,500 baht (US\$109) [for 13 days’ work].”
– Myanmar man working in the manufacturing sector in Thailand

Social security

Access to social security is a problem for migrant workers even in non-crisis times.³³ The majority in destination (97 per cent) had not accessed any social security support. Some in the Philippines were able to access social security support on return through Overseas Worker Welfare Administration calamity assistance or business loans. Only two survey respondents in destination (Malaysia and Hong Kong (China)) reported accessing social security benefits upon retrenchment (see figure 7). A survey conducted by the Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics (HOME) in Singapore showed that not only is access to social security a problem, but so too is access to knowledge about the support that is available. Only 37 per cent of those surveyed by HOME had some awareness of the government's COVID-19 related support payments for migrant workers.³⁴

► **Figure 7: Migrant workers in destination who received social security compensation for unemployment/retrenchment, n=59**

Received social security compensation in destination for unemployment/retrenchment (%)



From the below quotes as well as reports by CSOs and media across the region, it is clear that livelihoods are untenable in destinations if migrant workers do not have an income or if they are not included in social security or government relief packages for informal sector workers.³⁵ One stranded migrant worker reported lack of food, consistent with media and other reports from ASEAN destination countries.³⁶

“The store had to close for two months, [so I had] no job. [It is] impossible to stay without a job. Also my family in Myanmar are worried.” – Myanmar woman returned from service sector work in Thailand

“I need help for food assistance in Dubai.” – Filipina domestic worker in the United Arab Emirates

Safety and health

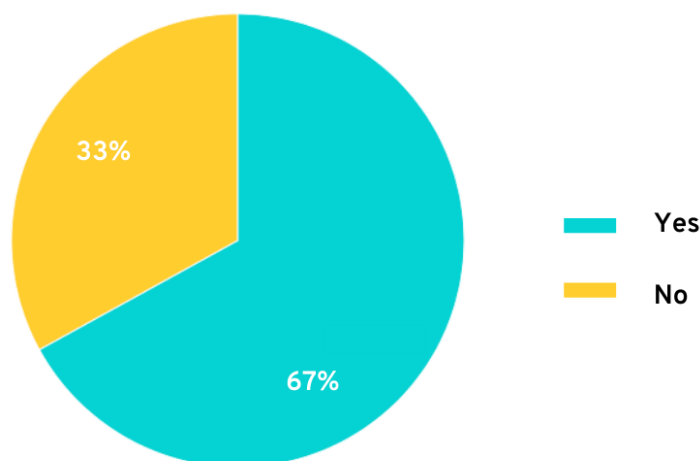
In industries on the frontline or providing essential services, migrant workers may have their jobs but not have adequate protection from COVID-19.

A recent media investigation into medical glove manufacturing in Malaysia for instance revealed that workers work, travel to work, and are housed in crowded conditions where physical distancing is not possible or not enforced. Workers reported that surfaces (like thumb print scanners to clock in) are commonly touched by workers, which could lead to a spread of the virus.³⁷ Among the 101 migrant workers surveyed in Singapore by HOME, a majority reported that it was unlikely they could maintain one metre distance in employer-provided dormitories.³⁸ Further, 57 per cent reported some level of an inadequate supply of soap or hand sanitizer to clean their hands.³⁹

This ILO survey shows that, of respondents currently working in destination, 33 per cent were not provided personal protective equipment (PPE) of masks and hand sanitizer by their employers (see figure 8), with minor differences among women and men migrant workers. Among respondents in Thailand, this number is far higher with a majority (57 per cent) not receiving this basic PPE.⁴⁰ Majorities surveyed in other countries of destination did receive masks and hand sanitizer at work.⁴¹

► **Figure 8: Migrant workers provided with PPE in destination, n=123**

Provided with masks and hand sanitizer to protect against COVID-19 (%)



Violence and harassment: Case study

One survey respondent, a Filipina domestic worker in Kuwait, reported experiencing threats of harassment and violence. She chose to end her employment in order to return home. One rights violation can be experienced together with many others, and in this case the Filipina domestic worker had also experienced violations indicative of forced labour,⁴² including being compelled to work against her will, being threatened with contract termination, having her passport and other documents withheld, and not being able to refuse work during lockdown.

Media and partners report that increased stress and violence may acutely affect domestic workers who are confined with employers.⁴³ A recent ILO-UN Women study

found that over 50 per cent of employers in key destinations for ASEAN migrant workers do not allow domestic workers access to their mobile phones even out of work hours, making it hard to access family, trade unions, or CSOs and other service providers when they face violence or other abuses and need help.⁴⁴

There is evidence that domestic violence against women has increased during the pandemic.⁴⁵ Because of ethical concerns in using a rapid assessment to ask extensive questions on violence,⁴⁶ this survey only listed violence and harassment as one type of problem, among others, which respondents could select when answering. Follow up support and referral was available for respondents.

Coercion, withheld documents, and other labour rights violations

Respondents in destination who have been, or still are, working during the pandemic described coercion, employers withholding passports, being unable to refuse to work, and threats of retrenchment or violence. Some of the described abuses are indicative of forced labour,⁴⁷ though more detailed qualitative data is needed to conclude classification as such (see figure 4).

“I can’t refuse work, and my documents are held by my employer.” – Filipino seafarer

“I could not refuse to work during lockdown because my passport and other legal documents were kept by my employer” - Indonesian woman migrant domestic worker in Malaysia

“The employer has cut our wage when [we are] on leave, but will provide us 100 baht (US\$ 3) a day. While we normally get paid every three months, the employer won’t tell us the exact date [now for our payments]. All our ID and personal documents are with the employer. [We] have only the copies. No one dares to tell the officials.” – Myanmar man working in fishing in Thailand

In destination countries, 56 percent of migrant workers interviewed said they would like to avail of follow-up legal support facilitated by the MRC or CSO staff who administered the survey. This follow up support was given and may lead to legal actions and potentially compensation awarded to migrant workers.

3. Return to countries of origin during the pandemic

The journey and crossing borders

At the start of the crisis, some migrant workers rushed to land and sea borders to be able to return home before lockdowns. Many of the returnees surveyed expressed that they were worried about their families. Due to subsequent border closures many have not been able to leave destination countries through regular border checkpoints, though some of these restrictions are easing (in May at the time of writing). Most land borders within ASEAN fully or partially closed at the end of March or early April, with limited re-opening measures to let in small numbers of returnees who are subject to health checks and/or quarantine.⁴⁸ Country of destination COVID-related labour migration policy responses have been shifting in the region and sometimes have been inconsistent as the situation evolves. Policy response have included, for instance, facilitating visa extensions⁴⁹ and – in one case - immigration raids, detention, and deportations.⁵⁰ Malaysia and Thailand have implemented intra-provincial restrictions on movement, meaning migrants have not been able to travel from their city of work to the border.⁵¹ In interviews migrant workers cite transportation costs, as well as waiting times at border points that are higher than usual.

“At Myawaddy gate 2 there were many people. I arrived at night and had to sleep there to wait for the bridge to open. I rented a car to cross with many people as usual, but this time had to pay a lot of money - 1,300 baht (US\$ 41) per person.” - Myanmar man returnee from service sector work in Thailand

“I had lined-up for two hours to get a test for fever. It was a long queue with no drinking water there. I was so hungry and thirsty. I felt so exhausted.” – Myanmar woman returned from service sector work in China

“[Once in Myanmar] I came back to Keng Tung by bus and my brother picked me up at the bus terminal. There were many people in the bus, so I was worried about getting infected. I had my

temperature tested at three checkpoints on the way back. As I didn't have a fever, they allowed me to go home. I was so afraid of the authorities at the checkpoints. I also worried that I wouldn't be able to go home if I had a fever.” - Myanmar woman returnee from service sector work in Thailand

Given the closures and some slow admittance of nationals back into countries of origin, some migrant workers have been stranded at borders waiting to get across.⁵² As of 7 May 2020, 27,000 had officially registered with the Myanmar labour attaché in Thailand to return home.⁵³ Due to stricter border procedures or closed borders, some people have been returning home irregularly.⁵⁴

“I was stranded at the Ranong border. I snuck out to Kawthaung by boat which cost 1,500 baht (US\$ 47).” – Myanmar woman returnee from fishery sector work in Thailand

“I returned because my wife had given birth... I stayed at a guest house in Ranong for about a week. [Then] I came through informal channel. I paid 2,000 baht (US\$ 62) for boat fares and struggled to pass some places. On my way, I was seen in Myoma and kept at the quarantine centre [for 21 days]. As I had used an [irregular] channel, I was stigmatized.” – Myanmar man returnee from service sector work in Thailand

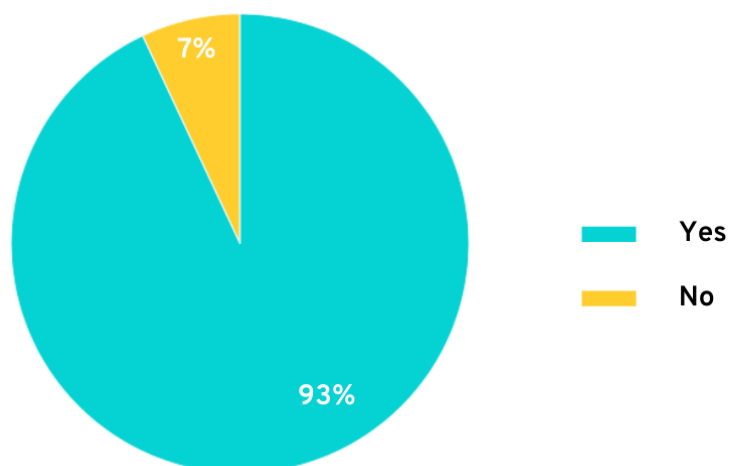
Quarantine

All countries of origin in the region have set up quarantine centres for returnees. The Philippines, for instance, had almost 24,000 returnees in quarantine centres as of early May, and Lao People's Democratic Republic government reports that 27,000 returnees have undergone quarantine since April.⁵⁵ The Myanmar Health Ministry reports having 10,122 centres for quarantine across the country,⁵⁶ though as many are housed in schools, they will have to close when schools re-open to students.

Of 122 returnee migrants surveyed, 93 per cent reported that they quarantined at home or in a state-mandated institution upon return (see figure 9).

► **Figure 9: Returnee migrant workers quarantined (self-quarantine or institution), n=122**

Quarantined upon return (self-quarantine or institution) (%)



Respondents reported that mandated quarantine times ranged from seven to 21 days. For instance in Myanmar as of mid-May quarantine time for returnees was 21 days in a quarantine facility followed by seven days of home quarantine.⁵⁷

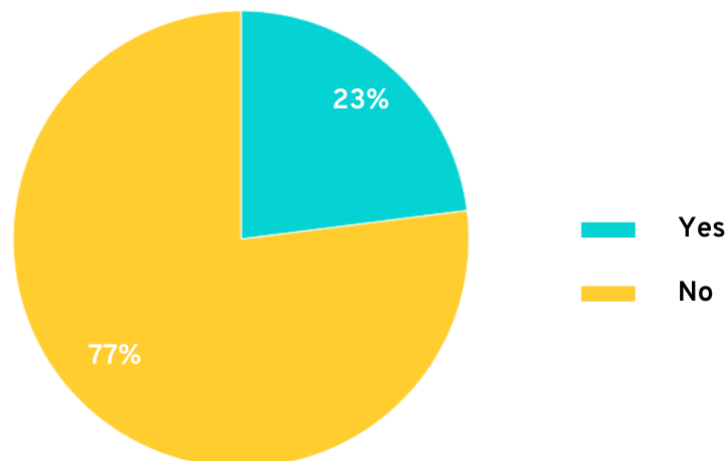
While quarantine experiences were problem-free for some, others described problems (see figure 10). For some, quarantine was welcome as migrant workers could provide assurances of health to families and communities upon return. And some appreciated that they were not completely isolated in quarantine centres.

“I was pleased to stay at the quarantine centre because that made it feel safe for the other people in the neighbourhood.” – Myanmar woman returned from service sector work in China, in village quarantine centre for 14 days

“I didn’t have problems, but my family had to bring me food. I felt a bit down, but I was not alone, so it was not bad.” – Myanmar man returned from construction work in Thailand, quarantined in a home area school

► Figure 10: Migrant returnees reporting problems in quarantine, n=91

Any problems in quarantine? (%)



Reported problems include shortages of food, high temperatures (with no fan or air conditioning), and, in quarantine centres, practices of shared drinking glasses and crowded shared sleeping areas. Some struggled with exclusion, isolation, depression, sleep difficulties, and other mental health related issues.

“I have some sleep problems and a shortage of food. The weather is hot during the day. It’s difficult for me to stay separate [from other people], but I have no choice.” – Cambodian woman returned from Thailand, self-quarantined for 14 days

“The township quarantine centre provided 20 litres of purified water. But there was a common water cup, so I used my own. If possible, we would like to receive small water bottles for each person.” – Myanmar man returned from manufacturing work in Thailand, quarantined for 14 days

“It was a very difficult time during quarantine for having food. I couldn’t go out, and there were many people in a small room, which I think can spread disease easily.” – Myanmar man returned from service sector work in Thailand, quarantined in village monastery for 14 days

As with migrants globally,⁵⁸ a few returnees specifically talked about the fear that home communities experienced around their return.

“I was sad because many villagers were afraid of returnees from Thailand.” – Myanmar woman returned from service sector work in Thailand, self-quarantined for 14 days

“While staying at quarantine place, [villagers] saw us as virus carriers. We felt very sad and often very angry for their behaviours.” – Myanmar man returned from agriculture work in China, quarantined 14 days at a centre and self-quarantined for seven additional days

4. Out migration during the pandemic and future migration plans

Potential migrants who have not been able to migrate as planned

For some migrant workers, migration plans are stalled. Large scale estimates are not available for how many are affected through the region, but of 17 interviews with potential migrants in Indonesia, Myanmar, and the Philippines, there was a mixed but not too uneven split of answers among those who said they were still going to be able to migrate, those who were not, and those did not know or could not answer.

“I expected to depart [from the Philippines] on 1 April. Now I will go home to our province because I’m currently here staying in Manila. I’ll wait [at home] for the call from the manning [recruitment] agency for the possible date of joining the vessel.” – Filipino waiting to migrate (destination not detailed)

“There is a temporary moratorium⁵⁹ [on migration out of Indonesia] because of the disease. [I don’t have any plans now.] I’m just waiting for the agency.” - Indonesian man planning to migrate through a licensed agency to agriculture work in Malaysia

“I paid 1 million kyats [US\$ 704] to the exam centre and for the passport and visa fee, [as well as] travelling costs to Yangon. I expected to leave [Myanmar] in April, [and now] I have been informed to go after COVID.” - Myanmar woman who is part of a care work trainee programme for migration to Japan

Migrants who travelled during the outbreak

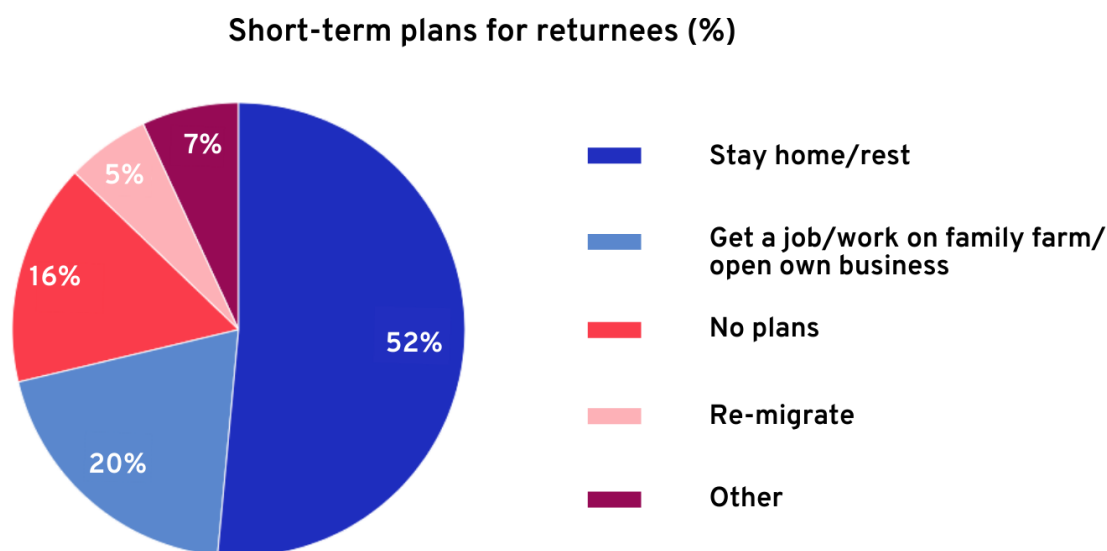
A few Indonesian and Myanmar migrant workers surveyed had travelled to countries of destination in March or April during the COVID-19 outbreak.⁶⁰ Those who entered Thailand spoke about self-quarantine and having stored food on arrival. One found that even after quarantine, the job she had hoped for on arrival did not materialize:

“I just arrived in Thailand [April 2020] and have not yet gotten a job. Initially my plan was to get a job at the same construction site where my husband is working, but there is no position vacant at the moment.” – Myanmar woman migrant worker in Thailand

Returnees' short- and long-term plans

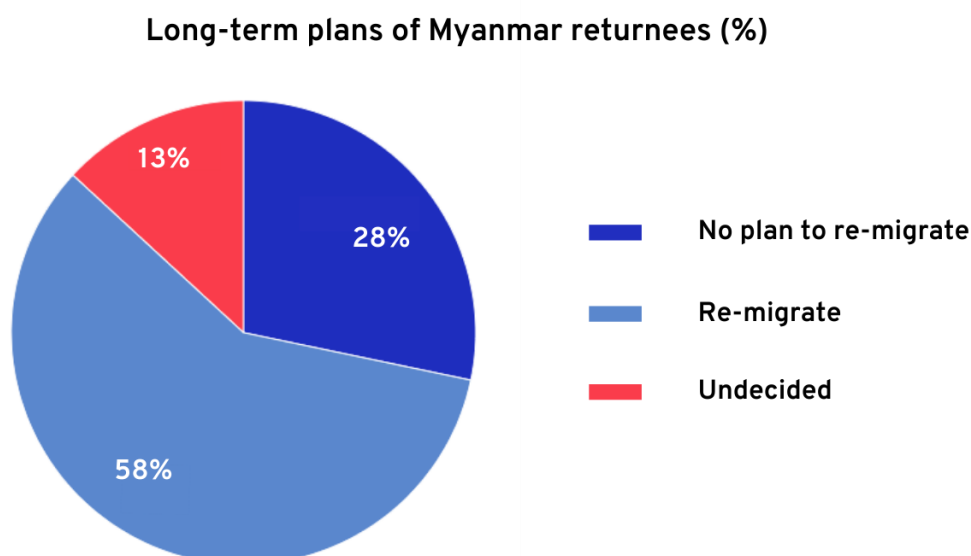
In the short term, returnee migrant workers to Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Viet Nam primarily want to stay home and rest (52 per cent). Some aim to find a job at home, open their own business, or work on the family farm (20 per cent). Others report not having made plans yet (16 per cent, see figure 11).

► **Figure 11: Short-term plans of returnee migrant workers to Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Viet Nam, n=128**



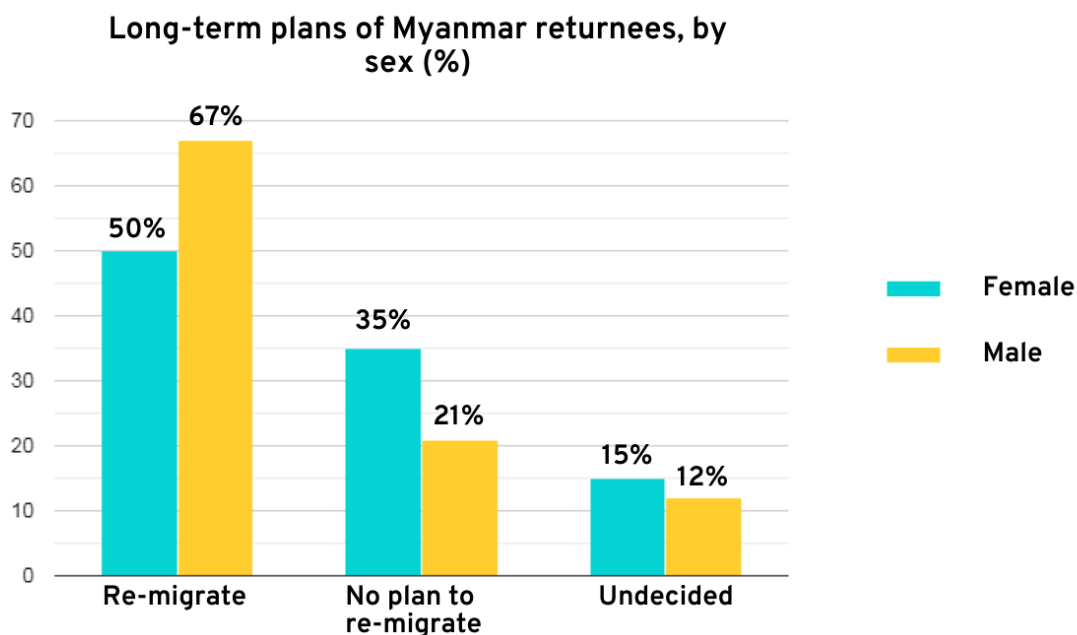
The ILO and partners in Myanmar specifically asked further questions about long-term plans, finding that 58 per cent of returnees are planning to migrate again, 28 per cent do not plan to re-migrate, and 13 per cent are undecided (see figure 12). When sex-disaggregated, a gendered dimension emerges from the data, showing that more Myanmar men than women are planning to re-migrate (67 per cent vs. 50 per cent respectively, see figure 13).

► **Figure 12: Long-term plans of Myanmar returnee migrant workers, n=89**



Note: Due to rounding of each figure, the figures in this table do not add up to 100 per cent.

► Figure 13: Long-term plans of Myanmar returnee migrant workers, by sex n=89



Importantly, workers who re-migrate need to know whether they have guarantees of getting their previous jobs back, and they need accurate information about whether and for how long previous labour migration documents are valid.

Migrants who have stayed in destination may have taken any spare jobs available while their compatriots returned home. Those who re-migrate or who migrate for the first time in the future may need to undergo quarantine in countries of destination, prolonging entry to the job market and resulting in a half month or more of no pay, and consequently no remittances to family or debt repayments at this time.

Concluding recommendations

For governments and stakeholders in countries of origin

1. Develop, or expand existing, mechanisms to support women and men migrant workers who have lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 crisis, including assistance in finding new employment, skills recognition or reskilling/upskilling, livelihood support, and reintegration programmes.
2. Ensure that returnee migrants, and families of migrants, are included in social protection, stimulus measures, and any emergency relief. Promote enrolment in national reintegration programmes, where they are available.
3. Ensure quarantine facilities for returnees have adequate measures for physical distancing, masks, and access to soap, water, and clean sanitation facilities. Provide care related to mental health issues that may arise, and ensure that all in quarantine are safe from violence and harassment.⁶¹
4. Support citizens abroad who are stranded, have lost jobs, or are facing rights violations, including non- or underpayment of wages, lack of social security, lack of workplace safety, forced labour, violence, and harassment.
5. Ensure returnees as well as citizens stranded abroad can access reliable information, social security benefits, legal

remedies, and compensation for unfair treatment, forced labour, violence, and harassment. Ensure that, when abroad, they have interpretive services available and that women migrant workers can speak to women service providers to assist in their access to justice.

6. Potential migrant workers who had begun recruitment processes before the crisis, are now waiting for movement restrictions to be lifted. Before they migrate, support them to ensure that they can travel and that their jobs remain available. Measures must be taken to ensure potential migrant workers are provided correct information. Governments should put in place cost structures responding to emerging needs around COVID-19 and ensure COVID-19 related recruitment costs are not passed onto migrant workers.
7. Any recruitment-related costs and fees paid by migrant workers who have not been able to deploy should be returned to them. Ensure migrant workers are able to liquidate any contracts and receive any payments due to them under their recruitment agreements.
8. Support returnees who expect to re-migrate to their former jobs. Because their migration status may be unclear, support them to ensure their documents are in order before re-migration.

For governments and stakeholders in countries of destination

1. In case of retrenchment or temporary work stoppage, ensure all migrant workers including irregular migrant workers, receive due wages, social security, and other benefits arising from past employment.
2. Recruitment agencies in countries of origin should coordinate with counterparts and/or employers in destination to ensure that contracts of

workers are fulfilled and workers are safe, especially related PPE, wages, social security, rest periods, and grievance redress.

3. Dismissals should only be made in cases when the need is genuine and other alternatives have been exhausted such as reducing work hours, limiting or restricting the hiring of new employees, limiting overtime, limiting weekly or general work holidays, reducing workforce wages, implementing temporary lay-offs.
4. Occupational safety and health (OSH) is urgently needed at migrant work places during the pandemic with regards to COVID-19 related personal protective equipment (PPE), sanitation facilities, and physical distancing at workplaces, in transportation, and in migrant accommodation.
5. OSH measures are needed to prevent gender-based violence and harassment at work, especially in cases where migrant workers are living with employers during COVID-19 movement restrictions.
6. Extend social protection and stimulus measures adopted to counter economic impacts of COVID-19 to cover all migrant workers, including women.
7. Develop mechanisms to support migrant workers who have lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 crisis to find new employment. Allow changing of employers, ease visa extensions, and consider extending grace periods allowed to find new employment before work permits and visas expire.
8. Ensure that all migrant workers, including irregular migrant workers, have access to legal remedies and compensation for unfair treatment, forced labour, and violence and harassment, and interpretive services to assist in their access to justice

in these cases. Ensure women service providers are available to assist women migrant workers in access to justice.

9. Ensure in cases of violence that women migrant workers' specific needs are respected, including support from women first responder officials. Shelters for survivors of violence should be kept operational. Existing hotlines should be enhanced to provide counselling on violence against women, including women migrant workers, and referrals.
10. Ensure that all migrant workers, including those who do not have regular immigration status, who face loss of work and income have access to humanitarian assistance and emergency relief, including food, shelter and provision of personal protective equipment such as masks and hand sanitisers. The specific needs of women in these circumstances should be considered and responded to.
11. For new or returning migrants entering countries of destination, employers or governments should cover costs of quarantine. This should not be a cost for migrant workers to pay upfront or as deductions from future pay. Attention should be paid to women's specific needs in quarantine shelters.
12. Create administrative separation between immigration enforcement activities and public service provision, to allow migrant workers to seek immediate healthcare, including testing and treatment for COVID-19. Fear of arrest and detention may particularly push undocumented migrant workers further into hiding and prevent them from seeking treatment, with negative consequences for their own health and increased risk of COVID-19 spreading to others.

ILO labour migration projects in ASEAN

Bridge project (From Protocol to Practice: A Bridge to Global Action on Forced Labour) is a global project funded by USDOL that aims to support global and national efforts to combat forced labour under the 2014 ILO Protocol and Recommendation on Forced Labour.

Developing International and Internal Labour Migration Governance in Myanmar (DIILM) is funded by the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT) and works with tripartite constituents in Myanmar to strengthen the legislative and policy framework governing labour migration.

Law 72 project supports the Vietnamese Government in the revision of the Law on Contract-based Vietnamese Overseas Workers (Law 72) through coordinated consultation, technical and advocacy input to the revision of the Law, and awareness-building activities.

Migrant Workers Empowerment and Advocacy project (MWEA), funded by US Department of Labour (USDOL), empowers Malaysian civil society to better support migrant workers; empowers women and men migrant workers to realize their rights; and inspires Malaysian youth to demonstrate increased support for the rights and welfare of migrant workers.

REFRAME project is an EU funded global action aiming at preventing and reducing abusive and fraudulent recruitment practices, and maximizing the protection of migrant workers in the recruitment process and their contribution to development.

Safe and Fair: Realizing women migrant workers' rights and opportunities in the ASEAN region is part of the multi-year EU-UN Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate Violence against Women and Girls. Safe and Fair is implemented by the ILO and UN Women in collaboration with UNODC, led by the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

TRIANGLE in ASEAN is a partnership between the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the Global Affairs Canada (GAC), and the ILO. TRIANGLE in ASEAN delivers technical assistance and support with the overall goal of maximizing the contribution of labour migration to equitable, inclusive and stable growth in ASEAN.

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² Total migrant stock in ASEAN was 10.1 million in 2019, of which 47 percent women. UN DESA: International migrant stock 2019, 2019, <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp> [accessed 8 May 2020].

³ ILO: *Policy brief: Protecting migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic recommendations for policy-makers and constituents*, 2020, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms_743268.pdf [accessed 8 May 2020].

⁴ Of 249 respondents who answered this question.

⁵ Of 244 respondents who answered this question.

⁶ Of 126 country of destination respondents.

⁷ Of 79 respondents who answered this question.

⁸ Of 135 country of origin respondents who answered this question.

⁹ Of 122 country of origin respondents who answered this question.

¹⁰ Of 91 country of origin respondents who answered this question.

¹¹ Of 128 respondents who answered this question.

¹² Of 89 Myanmar returnees who answered this question.

¹³ See note 1.

¹⁴ See note 1.

¹⁵ Lao People's Democratic Republic was also included, however, it was not possible to undertake the survey of returnees there in practice during March and April 2020.

¹⁶ Of the countries in which the survey took place, destinations with less than five respondents included Bahrain, Germany, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, and Viet Nam.

¹⁷ Of 71 respondents who answered this question. Note that respondents from Cambodia and Viet Nam were all returnees.

¹⁸ Of the total 292 respondents who listed their country of destination. Destinations with less than five respondents included Bahrain, China, Germany, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Jordan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Qatar, South Korea, Switzerland, the United States, and Viet Nam.

¹⁹ Given the remit of the Spotlight Initiative Safe and Fair programme on women migrant workers.

²⁰ Of 307 respondents who answered this question.

²¹ Of 240 respondents who answered this question.

²² Of 249 respondents who answered this question.

²³ Myanmar migrants received the information mostly through one or two channels each. The channels vary, including through employers. Cambodian and Filipina/o migrant workers were also informed through various channels, while Indonesian and Vietnamese migrant workers primarily reported accessing only one source of information: friends or social media.

²⁴ Of 252 respondents who answered this question.

²⁵ Of 244 respondents who answered this question.

²⁶ Of 248 respondents who answered this question.

²⁷ Of 79 respondents who answered this question.

²⁸ Of 28 respondents who answered this question.

²⁹ ILO: *ILO monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Third edition*, 29 Apr. 2020, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_743146.pdf [accessed 15 May 2020].

³⁰ World Bank: *World Bank Predicts Sharpest Decline of Remittances in Recent History*, 22 Apr. 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/04/22/world-bank-predicts-sharpest-decline-of-remittances-in-recent-history> [accessed 8 May 2020].

³¹ Of 126 country of destination respondents.

³² Of 135 country of origin respondents who answered this question.

³³ ILO: *Social protection for migrant workers in ASEAN: Developments, challenges, and prospects*, 2018, https://www.ilo.org/asia/publications/WCMS_655176/lang--en/index.htm [accessed 21 May 2020].

³⁴ 12% “somewhat agreed,” 22% “agreed,” and 3% “strongly agreed” that they were aware of the payment. Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics: *Covid-19: Study shows workers worried about accommodation, access to sanitation, and wages*, 24 Apr. 2020, <https://www.home.org.sg/statements/2020/4/24/covid-19-study-shows-workers-worried-about-accommodation-access-to-sanitation-and-wages> [accessed 21 May 2020].

³⁵ ILO: *COVID-19: Impact on migrant workers and country response in Malaysia, Update: 8 May 2020*, 2020, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/briefingnote/wcms_741512.pdf [accessed 14 May 2020].

³⁶ S. Sri Priya: “Migrant workers and refugees cry for help, in *The Star*, 9 Apr. 2020, <https://www.thestar.com/my/metro/metro-news/2020/04/09/migrant-workers-and-refugees-cry-for-help> [accessed 12 Apr. 2020]. *Myanmar Now*: “‘I guess we are just supposed to starve – laid-off Myanmar migrants denied wages and trapped by Thailand lockdown’, in *Myanmar Now*, 14 May 2020, <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/i-guess-were-just-supposed-to-starve-laid-off-myanmar-migrants-denied-wages-and-trapped-by> [accessed 15 May 2020]. ILO: *COVID-19: Impact on migrant workers and country response in Malaysia, Update: 8 May 2020*, 2020, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/briefingnote/wcms_741512.pdf [accessed 14 May 2020].

³⁷ *The Guardian*: “NHS urged to avoid PPE gloves made in ‘slave-like’ conditions” in *The Guardian*, 23 Apr. 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/23/nhs-urged-to-avoid-ppe-gloves-made-in-slave-like-conditions-coronavirus> [accessed 21 May 2020].

³⁸ Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics: *Covid-19: Study shows workers worried about accommodation, access to sanitation, and wages*, 24 Apr. 2020, <https://www.home.org.sg/statements/2020/4/24/covid-19-study-shows-workers-worried-about-accommodation-access-to-sanitation-and-wages> [accessed 21 May 2020].

³⁹ “18% of the participants indicated that they ‘strongly disagreed’ with the statement, ‘I have adequate supply of soap and hand sanitizer to wash my hands.’ Moreover, 23% stated that they ‘disagreed,’ 16% ‘somewhat disagreed.’” *ibid*.

⁴⁰ Of 49 respondents working in Thailand.

⁴¹ Numbers of respondents are too small to give a reliable percentage disaggregated per country.

⁴² See ILO: *ILO indicators of forced labour*, 2012, https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/publications/WCMS_203832/lang-en/index.htm [accessed 19 May 2020].

⁴³ International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF): *The impacts of COVID-19 on domestic workers and policy responses*, 1 May 2020, https://idwfd.org/en/covid-19/the-idwf/advocacy/idwf-policy-brief_final-eng.pdf [accessed 8 May 2020]. *TRT World*: “Singapore domestic workers suffer abuse during coronavirus lockdown”, in *TRT World*, <https://www.trtworld.com/video/money-talks/singapore-domestic-workers-suffer-abuse-during-coronavirus-lockdown-money-talks/5eb09574738e33001a67f7cd> [accessed 18 May 2020]. Also see ILO: *Beyond contagion or starvation: Giving domestic workers another way forward*, 7 May 2020, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/publication/wcms_743542.pdf [accessed 8 May 2020].

⁴⁴ Over 1000 members of the public were surveyed in Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. Among employers of domestic workers, allowance of access to mobile phones out of work hours ranges from 94 per cent in Japan to 53 per cent in Singapore with 63 per cent in Thailand and 69 per cent in Malaysia ILO and UN Women: *Public attitudes towards migrant workers in Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand* (Bangkok), 2019, https://www.ilo.org/asia/publications/WCMS_732443/lang-en/index.htm [accessed 8 May 2020].

⁴⁵ See also ILO and UN Women: *COVID-19 and women migrant workers in ASEAN*, 2020. UN Women: *Addressing the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on women migrant workers*, 2020, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/guidance-note-addressing-the-impacts-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-women-migrant-workers> [accessed 8 May 2020]. WHO: *COVID-19 and violence against women*, 2020, <https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/vaw-covid-19/en/> [accessed 8 May 2020]. Spotlight Initiative: *COVID-19 lockdown doubles demand for women’s shelters in Viet Nam*, 2020, <http://spotlightinitiative.org/news/covid-19-lockdown-doubles-demand-womens-shelters-viet-nam> [accessed 15 May 2020].

⁴⁶ WHO: *WHO ethical and safety recommendations for researching, documenting and monitoring sexual violence in emergencies*, 2007, https://www.who.int/gender/documents/OMS_Ethics&Safety10Aug07.pdf [accessed 21 May 2020].

⁴⁷ See ILO: *ILO indicators of forced labour*, 2012, https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/publications/WCMS_203832/lang-en/index.htm [accessed 19 May 2020].

⁴⁸ *Irrawaddy*: “Myanmar migrants’ return from Thailand delayed over travel hassles”, in *Irrawaddy*, 30 Apr. 2020, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/specials/myanmar-covid-19/myanmar-migrants-return-thailand-delayed-travel-hassles.html> [accessed 15 May 2020]. *The Star*: “Laos migrant workers clear quarantine, return home, after crossing back from Thailand”, in *The Star*, 11 May 2020, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/regional/2020/05/11/laos-migrant-workers-clear-quarantine-return-home-after-crossing-back-from-thailand> [accessed 15 May 2020].

⁴⁹ *Bangkok Post*: “Visas extended, relief measures approved”, in *Bangkok Post*, 21 Apr. 2020, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/1904435/visas-extended-relief-measures-approved> [accessed 8 May 2020].

⁵⁰ *BBC*: “Malaysia migrant raids ‘to reduce Covid-19 spread’”, in *BBC*, 2 May 2020: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-52515000> [accessed 8 May 2020].

⁵¹ See *Myanmar Now*: “‘I guess we are just supposed to starve – laid-off Myanmar migrants denied wages and trapped by Thailand lockdown’, in *Myanmar Now*, 14 May 2020, <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/i-guess-were-just-supposed-to-starve-laid-off-myanmar-migrants-denied-wages-and-trapped-by> [accessed 15 May 2020]. *The Edge Markets*: “Interstate travel for those stranded due to MCO begins today”, in *The Edge Markets*, 7 May 2020, <https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/interstate-travel-those-stranded-due-mco-begins-today> [accessed 15 May 2020].

⁵² IOM reports 660 stranded migrants in five Ranong, Thailand border locations between 26 March and 22 April. See IOM: *Ranong Province, Thailand, Stranded migrants update*, 23 Apr. 2020, <https://thailand.iom.int/sites/default/files/Infosheets/DTM%20Ranong%20-%20COVID-19%20-%20Policy%20Update%20%2823%20April%29.pdf> [accessed 15 May 2020].

⁵³ See *Myanmar Now*: “‘I guess we are just supposed to starve – laid-off Myanmar migrants denied wages and trapped by Thailand lockdown’, in *Myanmar Now*, 14 May 2020, <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/i-guess-were-just-supposed-to-starve-laid-off-myanmar-migrants-denied-wages-and-trapped-by> [accessed 15 May 2020].

⁵⁴ See ILO: *COVID-19: Impact on migrant workers and country response in Thailand: Update: 17 April 2020*, 2020, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sro-bangkok/documents/briefingnote/wcms_741920.pdf [accessed 8 May 2020]. *The Jakarta Post*: “Indonesian Navy intercepts more migrant workers returning from Malaysia through illegal routes”, in *The Jakarta Post*, 27 Apr. 2020, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/04/27/indonesian-navy-intercepts-more-migrant-workers-returning-from-malaysia-through-illegal-routes.html> [accessed 19 May 2020]. *The Jakarta Post*: “Dozens of Indonesian migrant workers caught returning from Malaysia via illegal routes”, in *The Jakarta Post*, 21 Apr. 2020, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/04/21/dozens-of-indonesian-migrant-workers-caught-returning-from-malaysia-via-illegal-routes.html> [accessed 19 May 2020].

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⁵⁶ Myanmar Ministry of Health and Sports: *Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) situation report-38*, 15 May 2020, <http://mohs.gov.mm/su/istt4067IS> [accessed 19 May 2020].

⁵⁷ At the time of the initial COVID-19 related returns, the Myanmar quarantine rules were that returnees had to stay 14 days in quarantine (community-based or home).

⁵⁸ International Organization for Migration: *COVID-19 Analytical Snapshot #6: Stigmatization & Discrimination*, 2020, https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/ICP/MPR/covid-19_analytical_snapshot_6_-_stigmatization_and_discrimination.pdf [accessed 8 May 2020].

⁵⁹ The term “moratorium” used in this context refers to a ban or restriction on outward migration.

⁶⁰ Numbers of interviewed migrants who travelled to countries of destination are too small to give statistical percentages of trends.

⁶¹ For regionally relevant guidance that takes into account women’s needs, children’s needs, and safety from violence, see: Viet Nam Ministry of Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs, UNICEF, and UN Women: *Safety instructions for children and women in quarantine centres to prevent the spread of COVID-19*, 2020, <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2020/04/vn-guideline-for-safety-of-women-and-children-en.pdf?la=en&vs=2825>

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