

IOM THAILAND  
COVID-19 RESPONSE  
AND RECOVERY PLAN 2021



# IOM THAILAND COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY PLAN

---

## SITUATION OVERVIEW

---

### Context – one year on since the beginning of the pandemic

2020 is often referred to as the year without precedent. In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Novel Corona Virus (COVID-19) outbreak a global pandemic. Starting as a health crisis, the situation quickly evolved into a complex humanitarian and socio-economic crisis. By the first quarter of 2021 there have been over 100 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, including more than 3 million deaths, reported to WHO world-wide<sup>1</sup>. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimated a global economic contraction of -3.5 per cent in 2020<sup>2</sup>. The International Labour Organization (ILO) reported that in 2020, 8.8 per cent of global working hours were lost relative to the fourth quarter of 2019, equivalent to 255 million full-time jobs. The impact of COVID-19 on global working hours is unsurpassed, approximately four times greater than that of the global financial crisis in 2009<sup>3</sup>. While vaccine approvals have raised hopes for a change in the pandemic later this year, renewed waves of transmission and new variants of the virus continue to pose significant threats.

In January 2020, Thailand became the second country to confirm a COVID-19 case. Since then, the country's overall response and ability to mitigate risks of infection has led WHO to consider Thailand as a success story in pandemic response. This success remains deeply contingent on Thailand's ability to remain vigilant in its whole-of-society approach to maintain effective public health response and mitigation, manage cross-border movements and resume economic activities.

The impact of the pandemic on the country's economy has been severe, with an estimated 6.1 per cent contraction in gross domestic product in 2020<sup>4</sup>. Prior to the pandemic, Thailand's poverty rates grew from 7.21 per cent to 9.85 percent between 2015 and 2018. This was further exacerbated by the loss of jobs or reduction in working hours in 2020. According to the World Bank, around 1.5 million people were estimated to enter into poverty in 2020 due to the pandemic. Thailand's poor totaled 3.7 million in 2019 and the tally was expected to rise to 5.2 million in 2020, mainly due to adverse effects from the pandemic<sup>5</sup>. Migration is integral to the Thai economy, with the country hosting an estimated 3.9 million migrant workers from Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, and Viet Nam as of 2018<sup>6</sup>. Migrant workers constitute between 7 to 12 per cent of the country's labour force and make a vital economic contribution to several key export sectors in Thailand which are largely reliant on migrant labour. The closure of borders has significantly affected migrants who may be able to leave the country but will not be able to return to resume work. As of December 2020, the Department of Employment estimated that 400,000 migrant workers' permits had expired since January 2020<sup>5</sup>. This estimate

---

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization (12 April 2021). WHO Corona virus (COVID-19) Dashboard. [WHO Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Dashboard | WHO Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Dashboard With Vaccination Data.](#)

<sup>2</sup> International Monetary Fund (2021). World Economic Update. [World Economic Outlook Update, January 2021: Policy Support and Vaccines Expected to Lift Activity \(imf.org\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> International Labour Organization. (2021). ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Seventh edition. [wcms\\_767028.pdf \(ilo.org\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> Economic Intelligence Center (EIC) (12 April 2020). [EIC-Outlook-Q12021 EN 20210409.pdf \(scbeic.com\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> Bangkok Post (20 April 2020). World Bank: 1.5m fell into poverty <https://www.bangkokpost.com/business/2054387/world-bank-1-5m-fell-into-poverty>

<sup>6</sup> Thailand Migration Report 2019, United Nations Thematic Working Group on Migration in Thailand.

excludes irregular migrant workers facing precarious employment conditions in many instances. Unemployed migrant workers remaining in Thailand have little or no means of income and only 30 days to find new employment. Only regular migrant workers in formal employment are eligible to access the Royal Thai Government's (RTG) social protection measures. In addition, misconceptions about migrants, COVID-19 and xenophobia have further exacerbated the situation.

In 2021, IOM Thailand is appealing for USD 4,000,700 to implement its COVID-19 Strategic Response and Recovery Plan that aims to contribute to the country's whole-of-society approach to the pandemic by ensuring that the migrant population in Thailand are included in the overall efforts to respond to and recover from COVID-19.

## Risks and Needs Overview

### Economy

Economic forecasting indicates that Thailand's GDP will return to its pre-pandemic level by the end of 2022 or early 2023. This rate is relatively slower compared to many other countries. With the economy operating considerably below its potential for a protracted period, its domestic wage income, employment, and purchasing power is likely to experience a slow recovery. Similarly, the financial status of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and households will also recover gradually. These demand-side factors will likely result in increased long-term unemployment and underemployment and, at the same time, a decrease in business sector investment<sup>7</sup>.

### COVID-19

At the end of the first quarter of 2021, Thailand recorded a cumulative total of 32,625 cases, with 97 deaths<sup>8</sup>. The country has witnessed clustered transmission of COVID-19 with the most recent wave of infections occurring in April 2021.

As of April 2021, the RTG has the capacity to cover vaccination for about 31 million of the population, and an additional 4 million for urgent use during new outbreaks. At present there are no restrictions for private sector companies to import vaccines that are registered and approved for use in the country by Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Thailand. The Government plans to acquire vaccines at a pace that is equal to their ability to administer. The RTG is planning to immunize between 50-80% of persons living in Thailand against COVID-19 in 2021. This will occur in phases as doses of vaccine will initially be limited. Health care workers, other essential workers, the elderly, and those with chronic medical conditions have been prioritized for vaccination. Clear and accurate communication around the benefits and safety of the vaccine will be critical as immunization is extended to the general population including vulnerable communities such as migrant workers- who may not be aware of the relevant policies and procedures.

### Migration

Thailand is a country of origin, transit and destination for large numbers of migrants from across the region and the country's migration flows are complex and dynamic. In 2019 there were nearly 4 million registered migrant workers in Thailand, plus an additional unknown number of undocumented migrant workers, mostly from neighbouring countries (Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos PDR). Many do not have social security rights to healthcare and paid sick leave, particularly if they work in the informal sector and/or are undocumented<sup>9</sup>. Migrant workers are among the first to lose their jobs as employers downsize their workforces. These workers find it

---

<sup>7</sup> Economic Intelligence Center (EIC) (12 April 2020. [EIC-Outlook-Q12021 EN 20210409.pdf \(scbeic.com\)](#))

<sup>8</sup> World Health Organization (12 April 2021). WHO Corona virus (COVID-19) Dashboard. [WHO Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Dashboard | WHO Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Dashboard With Vaccination Data](#)

<sup>9</sup> Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in Thailand, October 2020.

difficult to find new jobs, have limited options to return home and inadequate access to government aid in Thailand<sup>10</sup>.

The RTG also has limited capacity for COVID-19 testing and treatment in migrant communities, particularly in border areas. As vaccine roll out strategies are being prepared, IOM continues to advocate that migrants be included in vaccination priority groups regardless of their legal status.

Migrant and mobile populations in many contexts have a high risk of infection and are disproportionately impacted by the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 due to several factors and barriers such as: lack or inadequate access to proper information on prevention, limitations in or exclusions from accessing diagnostic and treatment services, cramped and crowded living and working conditions, stigma and discrimination, and other factors. This has been evident in Thailand where, in December 2020, there was a concentrated outbreak of COVID-19 among migrant workers in Samut Sakhon province accounting for thousands of new cases and requiring additional public health and social measures to be implemented across the country. This outbreak is estimated to have reduced a full percentage point off the country's projected GDP for 2021. As the outbreaks in Thailand are often associated with migrants, the risk of xenophobia during the pandemic remains high.

#### Mixed Flow Migration from Myanmar<sup>11</sup>

On 1 February 2021, a state of emergency was imposed in Myanmar by the military (Tatmadaw) following claims of fraud as the governing National League for Democracy beat pro-military candidates in the November parliamentary elections. Protests broke out in Myanmar denouncing the military coup, with increasing unrest erupting across the country. As tensions continue to escalate, there are reports of population movement towards the Thai-Myanmar border. Small groups of individuals fleeing violence are reported in different locations near the Thai border. Small groups have already been observed crossing the border.

Movement between Myanmar and Thailand has been integral to the economic and social development of both countries and has continued through the pandemic and the ongoing State of Emergency in Myanmar. Since the onset of the pandemic, increased border control and official closure of Points of Entry (POEs) have led to increased detection of irregular crossings along the border. Nevertheless, migrants continue to cross between the two countries for social and economic reasons. Given the closure of the official border points, recent movements have been mostly irregular. With the evolving situation in Myanmar, it is likely that complex migratory movements to Thailand will increase as Myanmar nationals, third country nationals and other migrant groups leave Myanmar for varying reasons.

IOM believes that the pandemic response and recovery plans must be adaptive to population mobility and cross-border dynamics, and that inclusive approaches, which take into account migrants, and counter misinformation are essential for an equitable recovery.

---

<sup>10</sup> COVID-19: Impact on migrant workers and Country Response in Thailand, 3 July 2020.

<sup>11</sup> IOM has developed a separate but complementary contingency plan to mitigate risks and protect migrants arriving in Thailand as the situation in Myanmar continues to deteriorate amidst the ongoing pandemic.

---

## FROM RESPONSE TO RECOVERY – IOM THAILAND’S PLAN

---

IOM Thailand’s strategic interventions are categorized into four broad areas and are in line with IOM’s global COVID-19 Strategic Response and Recovery Plan as well as the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) COVID-19 Response Plan in Thailand. IOM Thailand’s COVID-19 Response and Recovery Strategy also focuses on longer-term interventions to promote socio-economic recovery and conserve development gains towards the 2030 Agenda.

Moreover, it is of importance to also highlight that IOM's approach for preparing and responding to disease outbreaks and future health threats is anchored in IOM's Health, Border and Mobility Management (HBMM) Framework. The framework brings together population mobility and disease surveillance thereby providing a platform to develop country-specific and multi-country interventions emphasizing health system strengthening along mobility corridors in line with the 2005 International Health Regulations (IHR).

---

## IOM THAILAND’S RESPONSE

---

### Strategic Objective 1 - Ensure continuation of essential services, mitigate risks and protect displaced persons, mobile populations and host communities

IOM’s interventions in this area will focus on reducing protection related risks and vulnerabilities of migrant populations and combatting xenophobia.

Towards this end IOM will:

- a. Increase access to counselling and assisted voluntary return options for stranded migrants affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, including migrants in immigration detention settings.
- b. Assist Rohingya refugees and other vulnerable migrants, by improving awareness of protection risks of Rohingya refugees and migrants stranded in Thailand during the pandemic and by increasing coordination, advocacy, and delivery of humanitarian assistance, including the provision of food and nutrition and hygiene and sanitation kits, to this vulnerable group in Immigration Detention Centers (IDCs), Welfare Protection Centers for Victims of Trafficking (WPCVOTs) and Shelters for Children and Families.
- c. Conduct a widescale communications campaign to combat xenophobia and promote social cohesion. Beginning with research on the target audience and establishing a baseline to assess behavioral change, a communications strategy will be developed to guide the effective implementation of digital campaigns, print materials, videos and events that aim to promote tolerance and encourage constructive public discourse about migrants.

Targets:

- 50 vulnerable stranded migrants assisted to voluntarily return to their country of origin.
- 500 Rohingya Refugees and other vulnerable migrants in Immigration Detention Centers (IDCs), Welfare Protection Centers for Victims of Trafficking (WPCVOTs) and Shelters for Children and Families.

**Total Funding Requirement: USD 262,994**

## Strategic Objective 2 - Scale-Up Essential Public Health Measures and Promote Mobility Sensitive Health Systems

Under this area, IOM's programmes will work to i) prevent, detect, and respond to COVID-19 and other public health threats in communities and at borders and ii) promote equitable access to vaccines for vulnerable populations.

Specifically, interventions under this area will:

- a. Strengthen the RTG's health response to COVID-19-related risks at PoEs as well as facilitate the Ministry of Public Health's active case finding measures in high migration areas including Chiang Mai, Mae Sot, Ranong, Songkhla, Bangkok and its vicinity.
- b. Support the RTG in ensuring the inclusion of migrants in vaccine delivery programmes. Clear and accurate communication regarding the benefits, safety and process for vaccination will be critical amongst migrant populations who may not be aware of vaccination policies or express vaccine hesitancy. IOM aims to support the government by strengthening communications including via community outreach, translation and dissemination of IEC materials, social media campaigns etc. IOM will also support mechanisms to monitor real world access to vaccination by migrant groups, to inform evidence-based advocacy to reduce barriers to mass immunization campaigns against COVID-19. As needed, IOM's existing refugee health services can also support the provision of vaccinations for refugee populations in coordination with the RTG and other relevant stakeholders.

Targets:

- 400 officials trained on health compliant border procedures.
- 1,200 migrants tested for COVID-19 in 9 provinces.
- 45,000 migrants attend health education sessions on COVID-19.
- 6 Points of Entry (POE) are strengthened to manage COVID-19-related risks.
- 20,000 migrants reached with vaccine education sessions and provided IEC materials on vaccination in migrant-specific languages.
- 12,000 refugees in established camps vaccinated.

**Total Funding Requirement: USD 1,594,442**

## Strategic Objective 3 - Mitigate the longer-term socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, contribute to restarting human mobility and empower societies for self-reliance

IOM will focus on strengthening international cooperation, public and private COVID-19 response, immigration systems and border crossing mechanisms to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on human mobility while also empowering migrants to support socio-economic recovery.

Programmes in this area will:

- a. Support RTG authorities in strengthening COVID-19 response at POEs. This intervention will expand existing on-the-job awareness sessions and risk assessments for additional PoE's engaging immigration as well as other authorities present at PoE. The focus would be capacity building of border management officials to effectively operate border controls during and after COVID-19.

- b. Facilitate socio-economic inclusion of migrant workers in the ongoing COVID-19 response, and empower them to contribute to the overall COVID-19 socio-economic recovery efforts by i) ensuring migrant workers' access to reliable and verified information and advice regarding COVID-19 measures ii) ensuring social protection of most vulnerable migrant workers to decrease their susceptibility to exploitation and trafficking; iii) facilitating access to decent work and livelihood opportunities for migrant workers who suffered job loss, both those residing in Thailand and those who returned to their countries of origin.
- c. Strengthen public and private sector response to COVID-19 pandemic by i) providing Thailand and neighboring countries with analysis of key risks facing migrant workers during recruitment and employment during and post COVID-19, and recommendations on the way forward to enhance migration management, and ii) providing guidance to private sector on safeguarding migrant workers' rights throughout the labour migration cycle.

Targets:

- 200 border officials at POEs capacitated to prevent and respond to COVID-19.
- Operation of 1 hotline for migrant workers to access reliable information on COVID-19.
- 15,000 migrant workers supported to obtain COVID-19 health insurance coverage.
- 2,000 migrants, not enrolled in the social security fund, provided cash assistance.
- Industry guidelines on the management of migrant workers recruitment, employment and return during COVID-19 (political, pandemic, etc.) developed and disseminated to the top 3 industries with the highest identified risk for migrant workers.
- Policy paper disseminated on ethical recruitment in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) in preparation for re-migration post-crisis phase, and Government Dialogues on Ethical Recruitment post COVID-19.

**Total Funding Requirement: USD 1,998,264**

#### Strategic Objective 4 - Inform response and recovery efforts by tracking the impact of COVID-19 on mobility and people on the move and strengthen evidence-based decision-making through data

Recognizing that data and evidence are critical to informing effective response and recovery, IOM will focus on enhancing understanding of the global and regional impact of the pandemic on human mobility and inform short, medium, and long-term efforts to address the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 through data provision and analysis.

Specifically, this area will:

- a. Utilize the recommendations from a recently completed regional assessment of cross-mobility and trade in the Mekong region to develop specific tools, such as standard operating procedures, facilitate joint training of stakeholders on awareness raising of specific groups including, but not limited to, migrants and especially cross-border traders<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Cross-border traders often visit markets near POEs also visited by people from multiple provinces and therefore increases risk of rapid transmission.

- b. Continue the implementation of IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) to gather, analyze and disseminate data on the COVID-19 related challenges and needs of migrant populations in Thailand. This data will be shared with key stakeholders to inform overall response and advocate for the inclusion of migrants in respective recovery plans.

Targets:

- Information on the needs and challenges faced by migrant populations regularly gathered, analyzed and shared, with at least 50 partners, to inform policy and delivery services of government, private sector, civil society and UN actors.
- At least 4 Government Departments involved in border management provided with tools to improve the movement of people and goods across the Mekong Region.

**Total Funding Requirement: USD 145,000**

---

## IOM THAILAND'S CAPACITY TO RESPOND TO COVID-19

---

The IOM Mission in Thailand operates with over 271 staff working on more than 36 active projects in nine locations across the country. IOM Thailand has a main office in central Bangkok and eight project offices in the Bangkok Metropolitan Area, Chiang Mai, Mae Hong Son, Mae Sariang and Mae Sot. This presence, along with its vast network of partners, has enabled the Mission to support vulnerable migrants across the country.

IOM is currently chair of the Thailand UN Migration Network. Through the Network, IOM, UN agencies and other stakeholders working on migration share information and coordinate programming to maximize their impact through collaboration. In 2021, ensuring inclusion of migrants in COVID-19 Response and Recovery efforts is a thematic priority for the Network.

IOM's longstanding relationship with government authorities in Thailand, and with bordering countries, ensures that IOM's strategies and operations are in line with broader national, regional, and sub-regional frameworks and that interventions take into consideration all stakeholders in the migration process, including origin and destination countries. IOM's engagement with private sector employers and migrant workers along with its continued presence in migrant communities gives IOM a comparative advantage, as the Mission is uniquely placed to identify needs and challenges related to migration and provide targeted advice and assistance.

Drawing on its institutional capacity and extensive expertise and presence in Thailand, IOM has developed this 2021 Strategic Response and Recovery Plan (SRRP) to respond to the ongoing threat of COVID-19 with a continued focus on addressing the needs of vulnerable migrant populations and with a longer-term view for socio-economic recovery.



---

## IOM THAILAND'S FUNDING REQUIREMENT

---

IOM Thailand is appealing for USD 4,000,700 to contribute to the country's whole-of-society approach in response to COVID-19. IOM's interventions will ensure that migrant population are included in overall efforts to respond to and recover from COVID-19. Mindful of the evolving nature of the pandemic, the funding requirements may change throughout the course of the year.

### BREAKDOWN OF FUNDING REQUIREMENT

AREAS OF INTERVENTION	TOTAL AMOUNT REQUESTED (USD)
<b>Strategic Objective 1:</b> Ensure continuation of essential services, mitigate risks and protect displaced persons, mobile populations and host communities	262,994
<b>Strategic Objective 2:</b> Scale-Up Essential Public Health Measures and Promote Mobility Sensitive Health Systems	1,594,442
<b>Strategic Objective 3:</b> Mitigate the longer-term socio-economic impacts of COVID 19, contribute to restarting human mobility and empower societies for self-reliance	1,998,264
<b>Strategic Objective 4:</b> Inform response and recovery efforts by tracking the impact of COVID-19 on mobility and people on the move and strengthen evidence-based decision-making through data	145,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4,000,700</b>

### CONTACTS

IOM Thailand Program Support Unit: [thbkkpsu@iom.int](mailto:thbkkpsu@iom.int)

Géraldine ANSART, Chief of Mission: [gansart@iom.int](mailto:gansart@iom.int)