SITUATION OVERVIEW

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused more than 25 million confirmed cases, and over 845,000 deaths around the globe since 16 January 2020. The outbreak has caused unprecedented impacts on human mobility and leave migrants and mobile populations among the most vulnerable as they often lack access to social security.

Lao People’s Democratic Republic confirmed case 21 and 22 in August, both of which being imported cases. The country has had no new local infections since 12 April 2020. International travel remains suspended and Lao migrant workers are allowed to return via land-border crossings. The Ministry of Public Security (MoPS) are working with the COVID-19 Taskforce in each province to strengthen border management. All returning migrants, both regular and irregular, must be tested for COVID-19 and undergo 14-days quarantine in a Government quarantine facility, subject to compliance with physical distancing and COVID-19 prevention measures.

The Royal Thai Government further extended the State of Emergency until the end of September, and more businesses in Thailand have resumed operations under the new normal. There has been no further announcement from the Centre for COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA)’s plans to permit six new groups to enter Thailand, including migrant workers. A follow-up announcement on applicable procedures for migrant workers to enter Thailand was expected to be issued by the Thai Ministry of Labour, there has been no further update to date.

A RETURNING MIGRANT STORY

Tum (alias) was working in a durian farm in Thailand before he returned to Lao People’s Democratic Republic. He was a regular migrant worker who went through the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) procedure to work abroad. The business closures in Thailand affected his employer’s profit. With less customers the company earned less and he decided to come back before the work permit expired. He received his full salary prior to departure, and spent 1,500 THB on visa documents. Tum initially left his homeland for a better salary, but now wishes to spend more time at home with his family and friends. “I’m interested in learning about animal raising, it’d be good to get a certificate to prove my qualification. I don’t really want to leave the country again if I can earn enough income.”
PROPOSED RESPONSE AND ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED DURING AUGUST, 2020

COORDINATION AND PARTNERSHIP

− Liaised and coordinated with relevant stakeholders to develop recommendations for the inclusion of migrants into national preparedness plans.
− Ongoing monitoring and sharing on the situation of migrant workers returning from neighbouring countries.
− Coordinated with the Lao Anti-Trafficking Department (ATD) and IOM Thailand on supporting the return of 19 Laotians (19M) who fell victim to human-trafficking.
− IOM met with WHO to discuss how to provide better psycho-social support to returned migrants at POEs, Quarantine Centres and Communities Level, and protection issues.

RISK COMMUNICATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

− Distributed a total of 14,438 copies of Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials on employment information, relieving mental stress during pandemic, dengue/ malaria prevention, avian flu, HIV/AIDS prevention, reproductive health, and COVID-19 precautions to local communities, quarantine centres, PoEs, and provincial government.
− Handed over 24 loudspeakers with audio of safe migration and HIV/AIDS prevention to 24 village chiefs in two provinces (Savannakhet and Khammouan).
− Distributed 350 direct assistance packs to returned migrants in two provincial quarantine centres to support their everyday needs and onward journeys.
− Conducted safe migration community campaign in four villages with high migration flow in Savannakhet, reaching 304 beneficiaries.

− Interviewed 207 returned migrants at quarantine centres to better assess their needs.
− Provided safe migration training to 92 provincial, district, and village level officials.
− 48 Village chiefs who received safe migration training completed the delivery of safe migration community campaigns in 48 villages across four provinces (Champasak, Salavan, Luang Prabang, Sayabouly), reaching 4,179 (2,263/1,916M) villagers.
− Officially launched the Bus Campaign on safe migration and COVID-19 prevention. Seven posters developed by IOM were installed in 120 slots in five identified bus routes with high usage by migrants in Vientiane Capital.
− The NO stigma radio script continues to be broadcast through UNDP’s community radio and Lao National Radio, reaching approximately 300,000 people weekly across five provinces including Oudomxay, Sekong, Salavan, Xayabouly, and Xieng Khouang.
− Handing over 43 direct assistance packs and 300pcs IEC materials to Lao Women’s Union shelter in Vientiane Capital, which is housing Laotians victims of trafficking.
− Produced a 3-minute video on IOM’s COVID-19 Response in Lao PDR - https://youtu.be/Yu0ZCPfmn9Y, reaching over 4,800 people on Facebook.

SURVEILLANCE

− Using the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) flow monitoring tool, IOM surveys mobility flows of Lao migrants at frequently used internal transit points and bus routes.

POINTS OF ENTRY (POEs)

− Conducted a rapid assessment at Wattay International Airport (VTE) and Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge I and met with POE authorities to collect first-hand information on inbound and outbound processes and identify gaps.

IOM’S COVID-19 RESPONSE IS SUPPORTED BY...