



## ► Policy Brief

April 2020

# Protecting migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic Recommendations for Policy-makers and Constituents

This policy brief provides information and identifies a number of key recommendations to assist governments and other stakeholders in designing COVID-19 policy responses that can help to ensure the protection of migrant workers, as well as to inform responses for the protection of refugees and those displaced working in countries other than their own, differentiated by gender as appropriate and based upon relevant international labour standards,<sup>1</sup> and ILO guidance and good practices. This document will be updated regularly as the situation evolves.

## ► Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis is having an unprecedented impact on global economies, businesses and workers. ILO estimates that nearly 2.2 billion workers, representing 68 per cent of the global workforce, are living in countries with recommended or required workplace closures.<sup>2</sup> Migrant workers represent 4.7 per cent of this global labour pool comprising 164 million workers,<sup>3</sup> with nearly half being women. In many countries migrant workers represent a significantly larger share of the workforce making important contributions to societies and economies,<sup>4</sup> and serving on the front lines carrying out essential jobs in health care, transport, services, construction, and agriculture and agro-food processing.<sup>5</sup> Yet, most migrant workers are concentrated in sectors of the economy with

high levels of temporary, informal or unprotected work, characterized by low wages and lack of social protection, including in care work which in many countries is largely carried out by women migrant workers.<sup>6</sup>

### **Migrant workers are among the most vulnerable.**

Reports document rising levels of discrimination and xenophobia against migrants and in some cases food insecurity, layoffs, worsening working conditions including reduction or non-payment of wages, cramped or inadequate living conditions, and increased restrictions on movements or forced returns (where they may be stigmatized as carriers of the virus).<sup>7</sup>

Human rights groups fear rising levels of violence, particularly for those in domestic work where women workers predominate.<sup>8</sup>

1 ILO 2016 [General Survey on Promoting Fair Migration](#) para 113.

2 ILO Monitor: [COVID-19 and the world of work](#). Third edition

3 ILO [Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers](#)

4 OECD/ILO 2018, [How Immigrants Contribute to Developing Countries' Economies](#), OECD Publishing, Paris,

5 ILO estimates 11 million migrant women are in domestic work, many in home care jobs. Ibid. Increasing demand for health care workers may open future employment for medium to high-skilled migrants.

6 [Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work](#).

7 See, e.g., [www.nytimes.com](#); [www.irishtimes.com](#). See also [ILO guidance brief on COVID-19 in Lebanon](#) and [COVID-19: Impact on migrant workers and country response in Malaysia](#), 14 April 2020, which refers to the plight of freelance and day workers (who are mostly in irregular status).

8 See, [www.hrw.org](#); [www.diariolibre.com](#)

Migrant workers are often first to be laid-off but last to gain access to testing or treatment in line with nationals. They are often excluded from national COVID-19 policy responses, such as wage subsidies, unemployment benefits or social security and social protection measures. Where access to COVID-19 testing or medical treatment is available, they may not come forward due to fear of detention or deportation, especially those in an irregular status. In the case of domestic workers, home-based workers, agricultural workers and others in the informal economy, exclusion in many countries stems from the fact that labour law does not regard them as workers.

In some cases, travel restrictions have trapped migrants in countries of destination with few options to return home. Layoffs of migrant workers not only often lead to income losses but also the expiration of visa or work permits, putting migrants into undocumented or irregular status. Travel restrictions have also meant that many migrant workers have been prevented from taking up employment abroad for which they have contracts, and for which many may have paid high recruitment fees and costs. This, in turn, can lead to further irregular movements, potential debt bondage and human trafficking. Loss of income is also resulting in a collapse in money sent home by migrant workers, with remittances expected to decrease by almost USD \$110bn this year.<sup>9</sup>

## ► Key considerations to ensure rights-based, gender-sensitive policy responses

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The current COVID-19 economic impacts on migrant workers and government responses are dynamic and differ depending on country and region. As economic opportunities decrease, overall labour demand for migrant workers is contracting in some sectors while expanding in others such as health care and seasonal agriculture. As many of the jobs available in these sectors are in temporary, informal or unprotected work, monitoring the social and economic impacts to migrant workers will be ever more important in addressing their specific vulnerabilities, and protecting their rights. Monitoring will also help meet labour market needs in the short and longer term.

The impacts on women migrant workers appear to be compounded as they are over-represented in the informal economy and among undocumented workers in many countries. Women migrant workers employed as front-line health and care workers are in a particularly high-risk group for COVID-19. Further, those who experience increased levels of violence or harassment – in accommodation, at work, in quarantine facilities, or upon retrenchment and return home – now have fewer options for support services. Globally, many support services for migrant workers and particularly addressing violence against women have been forced to downscale, close, or are online/phone-only models.

Gender-sensitive, rights-based policies and measures can help to prevent human and labour rights abuses in the immediate term, reduce the recovery cost for businesses, when the economy will rebound, and preserve the livelihood and social benefits of migrant workers and their families in the medium-to-long term. Cooperation with Ministries of Labour and all relevant

ministries and stakeholders is key. Moreover, by including men and women migrant workers in national COVID-19 responses, countries can better protect the health and safety of all workers and prevent the spread of the pandemic. Inclusion of migrant workers will help reduce the risk that migrants will be left further behind once the pandemic subsides.

Three areas of action are key: migrant workers' inclusion in national COVID-19 responses; bilateral cooperation between countries of origin and destination; and social dialogue and full involvement of employers' and workers' organizations in the development of COVID-19 responses. These are also relevant to inform responses in the protection of refugees and other displaced persons.

### **Migrant workers' inclusion in national COVID-19 policy responses can help to ensure the realization of equality and social justice**

**Include migrant workers in national income and related policy responses:** Lack of income security creates an incentive to work while sick and increases public health risks of further spreads of COVID-19. Governments should include consistently and systematically migrant workers as a target population in their COVID-19 responses, with particular attention to the needs of women migrant workers, including increased risks of violence in lockdown and in quarantine.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)

<sup>10</sup> Rates of domestic violence are increasing during the pandemic as they tend to during emergencies: [www.channelnewsasia.com](http://www.channelnewsasia.com); [www.theglobeandmail.com](http://www.theglobeandmail.com); [www.themarshallproject.org](http://www.themarshallproject.org).

Policy responses based upon monitoring, sex-disaggregated data and impact assessment can support more evidence-based financial support and economic policy measures, including in considering cash transfers for migrant workers losing their livelihood as a result of COVID-19.<sup>11</sup>

A number of countries and local governments have begun to establish more comprehensive measures to support migrant workers who experience significant income losses during the pandemic, in line with national workers. For example, Brazil established a support programme for the unemployed to face the COVID-19 emergency where migrants and refugees, as well as informal workers, can also benefit. Chile established a programme on the COVID-19 Emergency Stipend (Bono de Emergencia COVID-19) for vulnerable families that targets migrants in regular status in the country. New Zealand has made its Wage Subsidy Scheme available to migrants, among other countries, such as Tunisia.<sup>12</sup>

In California, a new fund that may reach USD125 million is being established to provide income support to migrant workers irrespective of their status.<sup>13</sup>

**Extend access to health services and social protection coverage to migrant workers.** Migrant workers should be integrated into risk pooling mechanisms, in line with nationals, to ensure social insurance and universality of coverage and solidarity in financing.<sup>14</sup> Sickness-related benefits can help to protect both migrant workers and their host communities.

A number of countries have taken measures to ensure migrant workers are included in national social protection schemes, and have free access to testing and screening irrespective of their status. Portugal, for example, has adopted provisions to treat migrants as permanent residents during the pandemic to ensure they have access to public services, including National Health Services.<sup>15</sup> Among others, Qatar, Saudi Arabia<sup>16</sup> and Malaysia<sup>17</sup> provide free screening and testing for migrant workers.<sup>18</sup>

### International labour standards provide a foundation for policy responses that are inclusive, sustainable and equitable

International labour standards and fundamental rights are the foundation for fair and effective policy responses, providing “a decent work compass for COVID-19 responses that can help government agencies and other stakeholders ensure rights-based approaches are utilized in the protection of men and women migrant workers. Migrants and refugees face similar obstacles to the realization of their rights in the workplace, and both are covered by international labour standards.” (ILO Standards and COVID 19)

Refugees, such as camp settings, may face more acute risks of health and livelihood impacts from the pandemic, and special considerations should be given to their situation. As a member of the Executive Committee of the UN Network on Migration, ILO contributed to global guidance issued by the World Health Organization on Preparedness, prevention and control of Coronavirus disease for refugees and migrants in noncamp setting. It complements further guidance by UNHCR on key protection messages, and the IASC, Interim Guidance on Scaling-up COVID-19 Outbreak in Readiness and Response Operations in Camps and Camp-like Settings.

11 ILO member States adopted useful guidance in this respect, see Medical Care and Sickness Benefits Convention, 1969 (No. 130), and Medical Care and Sickness Benefits Recommendation, 1969 (No. 134)

12 New Zealand: [www.employment.govt.nz](http://www.employment.govt.nz); Qatar Development Bank (QDB) launched the National Guarantee Programme of QAR 3bn (USD825m) that provides guarantees to local banks to grant interest-free loans to private companies to support wage payments and rents which could benefit migrant workers. [www.thepeninsulaqatar.com](http://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com). The Tunisian Ministry of Social Affairs issued recommendations to employers and government institutions, and landlords, for fair and humane treatment of sub-Saharan migrants and confirmed the availing of In-kind and financial grants to vulnerable migrants; support to CSOs; and waivers for expiry of work and immigration permits, Ministry of Social Affairs, Note on the situation of migrants in Tunisia, 7 April 2020.

13 [www.gov.ca.gov](http://www.gov.ca.gov)

14 The costs of access to affordable health care should be borne collectively through broad risk pooling mechanisms and should be financed “by regular periodical payments which may take the form of social insurance contributions or of taxes, or of both”.

15 [www.schengenvisainfo.com](http://www.schengenvisainfo.com). Poland and Belgium also extended visas for migrants in limited duration.

16 [www.al-monitor.com](http://www.al-monitor.com)

17 [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)

18 [www.al-monitor.com](http://www.al-monitor.com)

### Provide adequate and accessible information.

Effectiveness of communication should be improved regarding health and safety in the community and within the workplace, including between employers' and workers' organizations. In some countries, ILO is supporting Migrant Worker Resource Centres and partners to provide relevant information to migrant workers and their communities on a range of issues, including assistance on COVID-19 related issues, legal assistance to migrant workers suffering labour rights violations, trainings and materials on health and safety, including masks and hand sanitizers.<sup>19</sup>

**Ensure migrant workers have regular status or do not fall into irregular status:** Special measures to facilitate extension of visas, amnesties, work or residence permit renewals can contribute to ensuring both access to essential services for migrant workers and continuity in their contributions to the workforce in regular status, avoiding an increase in irregularity. The Government of Italy is considering regularizing the status of about 200,000 migrants because of the shortage of labour as a result of the closure of its borders.<sup>20</sup> Some countries have already extended migrant working visas, or amnesties and taken other steps to alleviate constraints faced by migrant workers and their families living in countries of destination (e.g., Bahrain,<sup>21</sup> Kenya,<sup>22</sup>

Kuwait,<sup>23</sup> Lebanon,<sup>24</sup> Morocco, South Africa,<sup>25</sup> Thailand,<sup>26</sup> United Arab Emirates (UAE)<sup>27</sup>).

### Address the special hazards of migrant workers living in communal or worksite housing

In some cases, migrant workers reside in dedicated dormitories and temporary migrant reception or training centres, immigration detention centres, makeshift camps or communal living conditions. In addition to longer-term housing of migrant workers in dormitories, for example in Singapore,<sup>28</sup> migrant workers stay in such facilities temporarily. These include migrants who may have just arrived before COVID-19, refugees who applied for asylum or migrants who are awaiting issue of residence/work permits, those seeking family reunification, those in transit and others. The living conditions in residences are more often cramped, require sharing of washrooms, cooking and dining facilities, and are otherwise inadequate to limit the spread of COVID-19, a potential hazard for those in such facilities or nearby. Governments and employers should ensure that in dormitory or communal accommodations basic utilities are functional and available during factory shut-downs (water, sanitation, food, storage, heat). Migrant workers should also have access to adequate quarantine areas with sufficient health, sanitation and logistics personnel.<sup>29</sup>

19 For example, in Thailand, ILO supports MAP Foundation, HomeNet and the Human Right and Development Foundation (HRDF) in their running MRCs in Chiang Mai, Bangkok and Mae Sot respectively, which provide information to migrant workers and their communities on a range of issues, including COVID-19, and legal assistance to migrant workers suffering labour rights violations. In partnership with the Raks Thai Foundation, ILO is conducting trainings and disseminating COVID-19 information and PPE among Cambodian migrant workers, particularly women, in Rayong and Chonburi. Provision has been made for masks, hand sanitizer and health communications materials. Through these and other community-based partners, ILO is collecting information to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on migrant workers. In Malaysia, MRCs run by Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC), Tenaganita, and Persatuan Sahabat Wanita Selangor (PSWS) are distributing food and providing legal assistance and shelter to migrant workers affected by COVID-19. In Singapore, ILO will collaborate with the NGO HOME to provide case management, psychosocial counselling and shelter to women migrant workers.

20 [www.middleeastmonitor.com](http://www.middleeastmonitor.com)

21 Bahrain indicated termination of monthly work fees and for issue or renewal of work permits for 3 months starting on 1 April, and lowered fees for flexi work permits, [www.gulf-insider.com](http://www.gulf-insider.com) and <https://lmra.bh>. It also provided amnesty for migrants in an irregular situation until 31 December 2020, so migrants will not be fined to regularize their residency status or leave the country: [www.migrant-rights.org](http://www.migrant-rights.org).

22 In line with Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143), draft Guidelines on COVID-19 Pandemic at the Workplace, Kenya Ministry of Labour and Social Protection indicated that regular migrant workers who lose their job as a result of COVID-19, shall not be regarded as irregular migrants. Their residence or work permit shall remain valid for the time period stipulated previously.

23 Kuwait - extension of visas if workers fall into irregular status during the shutdown, [www.arabnews.com](http://www.arabnews.com).

24 See, [www.ilo.ch/beirut](http://www.ilo.ch/beirut)

25 In South Africa, because of the closure of Refugee Reception Centers during the lockdown, the Department of Home Affairs announced that clients of these centers whose visas expired would not be penalized provided they legalize their visas once the lockdown has been lifted.

26 On 8 April, the Government of Thailand announced that MOU migrant workers and migrant workers holding valid border passes, whose documents were to expire on 31 March, are allowed to continue working until 30 April 2020. On 15 April, the Government of Thailand extended the deadline of the renewal of the work permits for the remaining 555,993 migrant workers registered under the national verification process (from 1,266,351 eligible migrant workers) who have not completed the process from 30 June to 30 November 2020. These provisions may extend to 1,000,000 migrant workers in the country.

27 [www.khaleejtimes.com](http://www.khaleejtimes.com)

28 [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com)

29 See, e.g., Measures to Mitigate COVID-19 related challenges in qualified industrial zones (QIZ), These are a series of suggested measures prepared by the ILO's Al-Hassan Worker Center, Jordan.

Countries, such as Bahrain, have established specific responsibilities of employers (and workers) in the private sector to ensure appropriate accommodations and facilities protective of migrant workers during the pandemic.<sup>30</sup>

**Provide all migrant workers with access to legal remedies for unfair treatment.** All migrant workers, including those who may have become undocumented or in irregular status, should have access to legal remedies for unfair treatment, including related to reduced or non-payment of wages, denial of other entitlements and workplace discrimination, and have access to legal advice and language interpretation services where necessary.

## **Bilateral and multilateral cooperation to migrant workers and their families can ensure their protection, safe return and effective reintegration into labour markets**

For migrant workers who are in irregular status or returning home, strong collaboration with the country of origin on amnesties, regularization, information exchange and processes of return can ensure protections and smoother repatriation (including processing documents), and support for skills recognition and other measures to facilitate effective reintegration into labour markets. For example, bilateral (and subregional) cooperation can facilitate economic

support to migrants who have lost their jobs or help prepare them for re-entry and reintegration into home labour markets. The Philippines is extending financial stipends to migrant workers abroad and, together with Hong Kong (China), helping ensure that Filipino migrant workers are still able to travel when they have valid employment contracts and are supported by recruitment agencies and fair recruitment processes on both ends of the migration corridor, including for migrant domestic workers.<sup>31</sup> Other countries have also called for solidarity with migrants.<sup>32</sup>

Skills recognition for migrant workers to take up employment opportunities arising in health care and other sectors can also help meet labour market needs and foster workers' reintegration into jobs in home countries. Peru and Argentina, for example, are developing expedited procedures for the recognition of the professional qualifications of Venezuelan migrants in the country of destination, at least for the duration of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>33</sup> Trade unions are also cooperating across borders, for example between Malaysia and Bangladesh, on various migrant worker supports, including food distribution.<sup>34</sup> India has sent a medical team to support Kuwait, which hosts about one million Indian migrant workers.<sup>35</sup>

Some countries of origin are enhancing unilateral measures or consular services in countries of destination. They are establishing dedicated helplines, website, focal points in line ministries and information exchange that target the specific needs of their nationals working broad, including information services, legal assistance and humanitarian support to stranded workers (e.g., India,<sup>36</sup> Sri Lanka,<sup>37</sup> Pakistan,<sup>38 39</sup>

30 Bahrain Ministry of Labour and Social Development administrative circular sets out the responsibilities of employers (and workers) in the private sector (including employers with workers in labour camps) to ensure that (1) labour accommodations house a reduced number of workers in a room; (2) that workers must be at least three metres away from each other in a room; (3) that toilet and sanitation facilities in the labour camp are increased; and (4) that employers provide an isolation facility to treat any worker if tested positive for COVID-19. Labour inspectors are also to continue their checks at the labour camps.

31 A particular case of support to Filipino migrant workers is being facilitated by the Fair Employment Agency (FEA), which ensures a transparent flow of information to employers and workers through its website and distribution of leaflets. Information to employers includes advice on processing documentation, travel restrictions, statutory home leave and how to defer it, and discussions with domestic workers on salary payments, among others. Advice to domestic workers includes information on COVID-19, how to seek medical help, salary negotiation, contract termination, avenues for support, quarantine measures, and a recommendation that employers should additional expenses that may be incurred, such as for the visa extension fees, additional transportation expenses or termination settlements.

32 The Prime Ministers of India and Nepal emphasized taking good care of the citizens who are stuck in each others' countries due to lockdown in accordance with the Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950 between the two countries.

33 See, e.g., [www.lanacion.com](http://www.lanacion.com); [www.telemetro.com](http://www.telemetro.com).

34 [www.ilo.org/asia](http://www.ilo.org/asia).

35 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com>

36 [www.indiatoday.in](http://www.indiatoday.in)

37 Sri Lanka has established an online information portal, "Contact Sri Lanka", for overseas Sri Lankans, including migrant workers, to provide immediate support.

38 Pakistan missions abroad have established 24/7 hotlines to assist "diaspora communities with designated focal persons.

39 [www.ophrd.gov.pk](http://www.ophrd.gov.pk)



## Policies based upon social dialogue and full involvement of employers' and workers' organizations can foster inclusion of migrant workers in national responses

The concerted action of governments, employers' and workers' organizations in developing COVID-19 policy responses can help to address many labour market issues, including health and safety and adequate working conditions, support to businesses and small enterprises, extension of social protection, and the consideration of employment opportunities for migrant workers. The International Organisation of Employers (IOE) and International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) issued a joint statement on COVID-19 calling for enhanced coordination of all actors and for international financial institutions to support socio-economic measures and policies. It further called "in the strongest terms" for social dialogue and on the important role of the social partners.<sup>40</sup>

During the initial phase of the COVID-19 outbreak, a number of countries and their social partners have implemented decisive measures to combat the spread of the disease, while mitigating its pernicious effect on the economy and labour market.<sup>41</sup> For example, social dialogue in the Philippines helped to foster measures on financial assistance to displaced overseas Filipino workers due to COVID-19.<sup>42</sup>

Employers' and workers' organizations can also take useful steps in their individual capacity. The IOE, for instance, has published a Guide for surviving COVID-19<sup>43</sup> with practical recommendations and strategies for

business, including in communicating with employees and taking safety and health measures in the workplace. The ILO Employers Guide recognizes that migrant workers are one of the groups vulnerable to COVID-19 and provides detailed guidance on how to create a working environment that does not discriminate or stigmatize those who have contracted the virus.<sup>44</sup> Practical suggestions are provided on a range of issues for employers to consider, such as establishing gender-sensitive policies inclusive of migrant workers, persons with disabilities and minority groups, encouraging workers to proactively report abusive incidents, and establishing complaints mechanisms, to avoid and prevent unlawful discrimination, harassment or violence against workers or their family members who have contracted COVID-19.<sup>45</sup>

Workers' organizations are also actively helping to support the promotion and protection of the rights of workers, including migrant workers, during the pandemic in affected communities. International trade union organizations, such as the ITUC,<sup>46</sup> ETUC,<sup>47</sup> TUCA<sup>48</sup> have created specific spaces on their websites to collect information of their affiliates or to showcase the actions for the defence of workers' rights during the pandemic which includes migrant workers' rights. The ILO collects and updates information on public responses to the COVID-19 crisis and implications for workers.<sup>49</sup>

In a number of regions and countries, Global Union Federations and local trade unions have focused their efforts on migrant workers' rights protection<sup>50</sup> by: advocating their rights<sup>51</sup> (e.g., the Southern African Trade Union Coordination Council (SATUCC) calls for special attention to the situation of migrant workers)<sup>52</sup>;

40 Joint IOE and ITUC statement, [www.ioe-emp.org](http://www.ioe-emp.org).

41 The site allows to search a country or territory to find out the measures implemented by governments, employers' and workers' organizations, and those efforts relying on social dialogue. See ILO [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)

42 On 14 April, for example, the National Tri-partite Industrial Peace Council (NTIPC) of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) convened a meeting where trade union representatives presented their position paper regarding the implementation of the recently issued DOLE Department Order (DO) 212 on the financial assistance to be provided to displaced Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) due to COVID-19.

43 See, [www.ioe-emp.org](http://www.ioe-emp.org)

44 See, ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities (ILO-ACT/EMP), [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org).

45 Ibid., p. 28.

46 [www.ituc-csi.org](http://www.ituc-csi.org)

47 [www.etuc.org](http://www.etuc.org)

48 <http://csa-csi.org>

49 The ILO Bureau for Workers Activities (ACTRAV), [www.ilo.org/actrav](http://www.ilo.org/actrav); see also ACTRAV analysis of government responses, [www.ilo.org/actrav](http://www.ilo.org/actrav)

50 See, e.g., International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF): [www.itfglobal.org](http://www.itfglobal.org); Public Services International (PSI): <https://publicservices.international>; Blog: Beyond health workers, millions more need better conditions to beat Covid-19; European Public Services Union (EPSU): [www.epsu.org](http://www.epsu.org); Education International (EI): Tracker of newest developments + statement; IndustriAll: [www.industrial-union.org](http://www.industrial-union.org); UNI Global Union: <https://uniglobalunion.org>; IUF (Food, Farm and Hotel Workers): [www.iuf.org](http://www.iuf.org); International Federation of Musicians (FIM): [www.fim-musicians.org](http://www.fim-musicians.org); BWI: [www.bwint.org](http://www.bwint.org); International Federation of Journalists (IFJ): Covid-19: Report Safely; International Federation of Musicians (FIM): Covid-19

51 [www.ituc-csi.org](http://www.ituc-csi.org)

52 [www.ituc-csi.org](http://www.ituc-csi.org)

Réseau Syndical Migrations Méditerranéennes Subsahariennes – RSMMS, in the name of its 30 member organizations from North and West Africa and Southern Europe called for a range of protection measures for migrant workers<sup>53</sup>, including access to health services (e.g., Tunisia,<sup>54</sup> Bahrain and Kuwait<sup>55</sup>)

and through counselling and information on income and social benefits they are entitled to during the COVID-19 outbreak (e.g., Italy)<sup>56</sup> and on pay protection and insurance eligibility during the COVID-19 crisis (e.g., Canada).<sup>57</sup>

## ► How the ILO assists

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As the world steps up the fight to prevent the spread of the pandemic, it is essential to ensure that migrant workers are not unduly disadvantaged. The implementation of migrant workers' human rights and international labour standards is even more critical during the pandemic with rising levels of xenophobia, violence and harassment, and social tensions. Ensuring equal working conditions and access to workplace safety and health and to social protection, in line with nationals, is fundamental.

The ILO is taking concrete measures in this direction. It is helping to support: evidence-based policy-making through the creation of monitoring and rapid assessment tools, and trade unions and Migrant Worker Resource Centers to circulate questionnaires to assess the impact of COVID-19 on migrant workers' health and livelihoods, while also providing assistance for recovery of migration expenses and unpaid wages and, where needed, health kits for returning migrants.<sup>58</sup> At the regional level in Asia and the Middle East, a number of

country specific efforts are ongoing. For example, ILO is offering support to the Government of Qatar in the development of guidelines on health and employment for all workers<sup>59</sup> and to the National Commission for Women in India in issuing guidelines for the protection of internal women migrant workers.

Together with its partners, ILO is reorienting development cooperation activities to assist governments in Africa, Asia and Latin America to ensure national health and safety, social protection and economic policies are inclusive of all migrant workers. To help address the challenges of labour market reintegration of returning migrant workers, ILO is updating technical guidance and tools, including on skills recognition, for targeted delivery in various countries and regions. The challenge is to scale up these efforts quickly to support national efforts to ensure migrant workers are not left behind in national COVID-19 responses as countries move beyond the pandemic.

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53 <https://publicservices.international>

54 [www.tap.info.tn](http://www.tap.info.tn)

55 The General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions (GFBTU) Central Council has allocated BD 15,000 (USD 40,000) to support migrant workers in Bahrain with humanitarian assistance. With GFBTU Migrant Workers' Committee, it is surveying COVID-19 impacts on migrant workers and how best to assist. The Kuwait Trade Union Federation has advocated a number of measures for migrant workers protection, [www.solidaritycenter.org](http://www.solidaritycenter.org)

56 FILLEA-CGIL advocates a number of measures protecting migrant workers, [www.bwint.org](http://www.bwint.org)

57 Canada's UFCW, and the Agriculture Workers Alliance (AWA), and their community allies have achieved pay protection and Employment Insurance eligibility for migrant and temporary foreign workers who are laid off, have become ill, or have to quarantine due to COVID-19. In addition, the federal government has agreed to remove its prohibition – instituted in response to the coronavirus pandemic – on temporary foreign and migrant farm workers attempting to enter Canada for work. [www.ufcw.ca](http://www.ufcw.ca). See e.g., [www.ilo.org/beirut](http://www.ilo.org/beirut)

58 Support is under ILO's TRIANGLE, Safe and Fair, DIILM and MWEA projects in Asian countries. ILO support to the Confederation of Trade Unions of Myanmar (CTUM) Migrant Resource Centre in Yangon assists migrants reclaiming migration expenses from COVID-19 restrictions, and for returning migrant workers to recover unpaid salaries or entitlements. In Bago, with 6,000 returnees in one week, CTUM provides care packages and PPE support.

59 See e.g., [www.ilo.org/beirut](http://www.ilo.org/beirut).

## ► Further guidance documents and other resources

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[Migration for Employment Convention \(Revised\), 1949 \(No. 97\), and Migration for Employment Recommendation \(No. 86\)](#)

[Migrant Workers \(Supplementary Provisions\) Convention, 1975 \(No. 143\) and Migrant Workers Recommendation 151](#)

[General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment](#)

[Guiding Principles on access of refugees to the labour market](#)

[ILO Standards and COVID 19](#)

[ILO and UN Network on Migration statement on impacts of COVID-19 to migrant workers](#)

[Interim Guidance on Scaling-up COVID-19 Outbreak Readiness and Response Operations in Humanitarian, Camps and Camp-like Situations'](#)

[Interim Guidance on Preparedness, prevention and control of coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) for refugees and migrants in non-camp settings \(17 April 2020\)](#)

[Covid-19 and the Human Rights of Migrants, 7 April 2020, OHCHR](#)

[Migrant workers and the COVID-19 pandemic, 7 April 2020, FAO](#)

[El impacto del COVID-19 en el mercado de trabajo y en las personas trabajadoras refugiadas y migrantes / Studies on the Venezuelan migrants situation co-led by ILO](#)

[Impact of COVID-19 on migrant workers in Lebanon and what employers can do about it](#)

[COVID-19: Impact on migrant workers and country response in Thailand, Update: 17 April 2020](#)

[COVID-19: Impact on migrant workers and country response in Malaysia, 14 April 2020](#)

[Thematic brief: Recommendations for Asian garment manufacturers on how to address the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

[Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 \(No. 189\), and Domestic Workers Recommendation, 2011 \(No. 202\).](#)

[ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers](#)

[ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration](#)

[Managing Conflicts and Disasters: Exploring Collaboration between Employers' and Workers' Organizations](#)

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