

Press Release

Crisis Migration from Myanmar: Protect the Human Rights of Migrants and Refugees

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Mekong Migration Network

Press Release on International Migrants Day, December 18th 2021

Crisis Migration from Myanmar:

Protect the Human Rights of Migrants and Refugees

In a year when fewer people have travelled or migrated voluntarily than in any time in recent history, hundreds of thousands of people in Myanmar have been forced to flee for their own safety and survival. Since the coup of 1 February 2021 and the military's ensuing reign of terror, more than 380,000 women, men and children have been internally displaced, while tens of thousands have crossed international borders to flee fighting and persecution or to secure work to save themselves and their families from destitution and starvation.

Considering the arbitrary brutality of Myanmar's military regime, no-one's safety upon return can be assured at this time. The principle of non-refoulement, applicable under customary international law, should thus be applied to all those who have crossed the Myanmar border.

On International Migrants Day, the Mekong Migration Network calls on countries neighbouring Myanmar to:

- Accept and protect all migrants from Myanmar in line with humanitarian principles and human rights obligations;
- Halt all removals, deportations and expulsions to Myanmar;
- Allow the UNHCR, IOM and embassies to provide pathways to third country resettlement for those who apply and qualify.

We call on the international community to:

- Provide the necessary logistical and financial support to countries bordering Myanmar to receive, provide protection, emergency shelter, food, and medical care for those fleeing;

We call on regional and international bodies to:

- Provide immediate cross-border humanitarian aid to internally displaced people in Myanmar;

In particular, we call on ASEAN and the UN to:

- Take urgent steps to address the root cause of forced migration from Myanmar.

Members of the Mekong Migration Network also call on Thailand, the main destination country in the region for people fleeing Myanmar, to demonstrate compassion and pragmatism by providing protection according to the identified needs of those arriving.

All incoming migrants should be screened to determine their status as refugees or migrant workers and registered and documented at the border following COVID-19 testing, quarantine and medical treatment, and, where necessary, emergency support in the form of shelter, clothing, food and a safe place to rest.

For the most vulnerable, including those who are traumatised, disabled, and for women who are pregnant or with young children, specialised assistance should be arranged.

Women, men and children escaping the on-going armed conflict, must be able to use the closest escape route, and be received by Thailand at that point.

Considering Thailand's current labour shortages, which are likely to increase as the country re-opens for business, providing pathways to employment for refugees and migrants could address this shortage while providing people with incomes, independence and dignity. Paid employment would also reduce reliance on the Thai government and the international community for support. There are daily reports in the media of Myanmar nationals being arrested, detained and deported for entering Thailand without documents. The reality is that people from Myanmar currently have little alternative but to use the services of brokers and smugglers. Due to its clandestine nature, smuggling puts migrants' lives at risk. Allowing conditions which compel people to use smugglers moreover increases the likelihood of traffickers taking advantage of the situation.

MMN welcomes the Thai government's efforts to re-start the MOU process to allow the entry of new workers. However, the process is inaccessible to many of Myanmar's most needy and will not impact on the number of migrants seeking safety and a livelihood in Thailand. Facilitating those migrants who returned to Myanmar earlier in the COVID-19 pandemic to re-enter Thailand using their existing documentation would reach more of those in need.

We sincerely hope that in recognition of International Migrants' Day and the complicated situation facing the people of Myanmar, pragmatic solutions can be implemented to respond to the new realities regarding migration from Myanmar and uphold the human rights of all people crossing the border.

In the New Year, MMN will launch a paper detailing the migration situation from Myanmar since the coup. Please follow our webpage www.mekongmigration.org for updates.

ABOUT THE MEKONG MIGRATION NETWORK

Mekong Migration Network (MMN), founded in 2003, is a sub-regional network of migrant support NGOs, migrant grassroots groups and research institutes. The central goal of MMN is to promote the welfare, well-being, dignity and human rights of migrants in the Greater Mekong Subregion and to build mutual support and solidarity among migrants and advocates. To achieve this goal MMN jointly carries out research, advocacy, capacity building and networking.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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